

Professional development: A module for peer partnerships to embed sustainable learning about teaching

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- transforming the student experience

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1 Executive Summary

RMIT Peer Partnerships is sustainable, school-based professional development involving peer observation of teaching. The RMIT Peer Partnerships model encourages teaching staff to voluntarily take a critically reflective approach to their teaching practice for developmental purposes. Through a process of confidential peer exchange, staff can learn about teaching and/or work toward enhancing the quality of their teaching practice.

This project refined the RMIT Peer Partnerships model and developed a set of online resources and a training package to support its implementation. The embedded leadership approach was piloted and evaluated in six schools across all three Colleges. Participating schools were:

- Business - Business IT and Logistics
- DSC - Architecture and Design
- DSC - Education
- DSC - Fashion and Textiles
- SEH - Aerospace, Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering
- SEH - Life and Physical Sciences

The RMIT Peer Partnership program was strongly endorsed by participants, with benefits including the enhancement of teaching confidence, development of reflective practice and strengthening of collegial relationships. Results suggest that developing leadership within schools is a complex process, with the success of the model dependent on integration of training for participants, strong leadership within the School, and Head of School support.

Resources developed to support RMIT Peer Partnerships include:

- The seven underlying principles of Peer Partnerships
- A four-stage cycle underpinning the partnership process
- Criteria to guide participation for schools, leaders and individual staff
- A toolkit, including templates for participants to guide each stage of the partnership process
- Guidelines to help participants determine the focus of their observation
- Training resources (training workshop outlines, Powerpoint slides, and participant handbook)
- Sample Head of School invitations inviting staff participation in the program
- Handouts on aspects identified by staff as critical to good partnerships, including giving and receiving feedback, providing sensitive feedback, and principles of good teaching
- Timelines for leaders to ensure timely completion of the partnership cycle in a semester
- Videos of staff sharing their experiences

The website for dissemination of the RMIT Peer Partnership resources is available at www.rmit.edu.au/teaching/peerpartnerships

2 Outcomes

Outcomes of the project include:

- The Peer Partnerships principles and model, grounded in adult learning pedagogy.
- Establishment of Peer Partnerships as an evidence based initiative within the Peer Feedback Professional Development framework at RMIT.
- The RMIT Peer Partnerships website for dissemination of the project resources.
- Development of a distributed leadership model for the sustainable integration of Peer Partnerships into university practices.
- Enhancement of reflective practice and quality teaching in the six participating schools.
- Dissemination of the project outcomes in the following journal articles and conference presentations:

White, K., Boehm, E., & Chester, A. (In press). Peer review of teaching. *Higher Education Research and Development*.

Chester, A. (2012). Peer partnerships in teaching: Developing a voluntary model of professional development in tertiary education. *Journal of Scholarship in Teaching and Learning*, 12(2), 94-108.

Chester, A., Clarke, A., Wingrove, D., & Denny, B. (2013, July). Talking about teaching: Empowering staff through peer partnerships. Paper to be presented at the Enhancement and Innovation in Higher Education Conference. Glasgow: UK.

Clarke, A., Wingrove, D., Denny, B., & Chester, A. (In preparation). Peer feedback on teaching: A model for sustainable change.

3 Project Outcomes and Impacts

What is Peer Feedback?

Peer feedback is the general term that will be used to describe the use of commentary, suggestions, or review by an academic or teacher on the work of another academic or teacher in relation to learning and teaching. In order to distinguish between the two forms of feedback, one for developmental purposes and one for decision-making purposes, the Committee proposes that the term **peer partnership** be used to describe feedback for developmental purposes and **peer review** be used to describe feedback for decision-making purposes.

RMIT Peer Feedback Working Party (2012)

As the definition of the RMIT Peer Feedback Working Party above suggests, peer feedback on teaching for developmental or formative purposes refers to a process of pairing academics who observe aspects of teaching. The peer feedback process of allowing partners to share their reflections and collaboratively discuss ideas for improvement leads to a collegial sharing of ideas, insights, and techniques that provide both parties with a unique and rich opportunity to enhance the quality of their teaching (Bell, 2001). This process can be applied to any form of teaching, however, it is currently most commonly applied to face-to-face situations

(McKenzie, Pelliccione, & Parker, 2008). A focus on the reciprocal sharing of ideas distinguishes peer feedback from other programs designed to improve higher education teaching, such as student evaluations, self-evaluations, and external review.

Studies overwhelmingly support the value of formative peer feedback processes (Bell, 2001; Bell & Mladenovic, 2008; Chester, 2012; Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004; Hendry & Oliver, 2012; Maeda, Sechtem, & Scudder, 2009; McMahon, Barrett, & O'Neill, 2007; Shortland, 2004). Formative peer feedback programs have been described as an authentic, practical, useful, and meaningful way to modify and improve teaching (Maeda, et al., 2009). Additionally, staff evaluations of such programs are overwhelmingly positive (Bernstein, Jonson, & Smith, 2000; Chester, 2012; Cosser, 1998; Maeda, et al., 2009; Pattison, Sherwood, Lumsden, Gale, & Markides, 2012). Perceived advantages include the development of new ideas and skills, improvement to teaching practices, its practical nature, its support for continued self-improvement, and ability to stimulate discussion (Bell, 2002). The benefits of peer feedback are strengthened when the model is a reciprocal one, allowing peers to not only learn through feedback, but also experience vicarious learning through the observation of peers' teaching practices and strategies (Cosh, 1998; Hendry & Oliver, 2012). The perceived disadvantages of peer feedback, including investment of time and participants' feelings of vulnerability regarding giving and receiving feedback, are not generally strongly endorsed (Chester, 2012; Morehead & Shedd, 1997).

Formative peer feedback programs vary in their design, with some focusing on cross-disciplinary partnerships (Chester, 2012; Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004), others compare peer feedback with student ratings and grades (Galbraith & Merrill, 2012; MacAlpine, 2001), some use triads of peers (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004), and observations across classrooms and video samples, syllabus reviews and teaching portfolios (Maeda, et al., 2009). Some programs, such as the Monash University Peer Assisted Teaching framework, specifically target staff in low performing courses and others are open to all staff. Regardless of format, successful peer feedback programs for formative or developmental purposes are guided by core principles that aim to promote a collegial and cohesive adult learning environment.

Peer Feedback in the Australian Tertiary Context

Peer feedback on teaching has received widespread recognition as a valuable process, with most Australian universities using some form of peer feedback for developmental purposes. A review of programs implemented at a range of Australian universities is included in the *Recommendations and Implementation Plan from the 2012 Working Party on Teaching Expectations at RMIT – Peer Feedback* and is attached to this report in Appendix A.

The Office of Learning and Teaching has supported the development of peer feedback projects via a range of projects and in 2012 awarded a National Senior Teaching Fellow in this area to A Prof Angela Carbone at Monash University. Funded projects include:

- *Developing a culture of peer review of teaching through a distributive leadership approach.* Queensland University of Technology (Lead), Charles Darwin University, Curtin University, University of Adelaide, University of Technology, Sydney.
- *Peer review of Teaching for Promotion Purposes: a project to develop and implement a pilot program of external peer review of teaching in four Australian universities.* University of Adelaide (Lead), Griffith University, University of New South Wales, University of Wollongong.

- *Peer review of online learning and teaching: online resources*. University of South Australia
- *Peer Review of Teaching in Australian Higher Education*. University of Melbourne
- *Embedding peer review of learning and teaching in e-learning and blended learning environments*. Australian Technology Network of Universities.

The adoption of peer feedback processes by Australian universities is not surprising. As indicated in the previous section, peer feedback programs are an effective method to support the developmental process of improving the quality of teaching in higher education settings (Bell & Mladenovic, 2008; Hendry & Oliver, 2012). Heralded for its focus on fostering reflective practice, peer feedback is proposed as a way for universities to meet the increasing need to demonstrate accountability and increased quality as well as support the professional development of staff at all levels (Brew, 2001; Crisp et al., 2009).

Peer Feedback at RMIT

As the first step in this project, the team met in February to review the literature summarised above, share our own experiences of implementing three distinct, but conceptually overlapping formative peer feedback programs and develop the principles and model for RMIT Peer Partnerships.

Based on this model, a four-stage cycle was established to support the implementation of Peer Partnerships. During semester 1 work was undertaken to secure commitment to Peer Partnerships in six schools across the three Colleges. Securing this commitment involved building an understanding of Peer Partnerships across the university through presentations to University leaders, College Learning and Teaching Leadership Groups, meeting with school Executives, Heads of School and school Learning and Teaching Committees as well as circulation of the project Briefing Paper (Appendix B).

In semester 2 the team worked with leaders in the chosen schools to recruit, train and support peer partner participants. A pre post-test mixed method evaluation was conducted to examine the effectiveness of the Peer Partnership model for both participants and leaders.

During 2012, while the team worked on the model and its implementation, the University established a Peer Feedback working party on which the project team was represented. The working party endorsed the work of the project team and supported the implementation of Peer Partnerships at RMIT.

RMIT Peer Partnership Principles and Model

We developed the RMIT Peer Partnerships program around 6 core characteristics for professional development and sustained education change articulated by Speck (1996). These core principles are described in Table 1.

Building relationships is core to the Peer Partnerships program and has been evidenced as an outcome of several peer feedback programs (Barnard et al., 2011; Chester, 2012; Donnelly, 2007). In particular Peer Partnerships is designed to operate within schools, where the development of a community of practice can lead to a range of productive outcomes including enhancement of professional identity, sharing of teaching resources and even research collaborations. Maximum benefit arises from reflection on teaching practice when that practice

takes place within a community, when there is mutual valuing of personal and intellectual growth and when time is dedicated to the task (Rodgers, 2002).

Table 1
RMIT Peer Partnership Principles

RMIT peer partnerships	Alignment with adult learning principles*	Purpose
Build relationships	Learning is supported and facilitated through peer collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds inter-disciplinary school-based relationships Fosters a sense of belonging and identity
Foster learning	Learning is practical, applied and collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fosters meaningful learning about teaching Focuses on process rather than content Aligns learning about teaching with career development and university systems of rewards and recognition
Encourage reciprocity	Learning values and brings life experience and knowledge into play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds collegiality Encourages reciprocity of knowledge exchange based on life/teaching experience Supports learning communities Provides support that reduces the fear of judgement during learning
Value voluntary participation	Learning is internally motivated and directed (intrinsic motivation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respects appropriate timing for learning Builds a sustainable culture of reflective practice
Ensure confidentiality	Learning is private and respected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligns observations and reflections with personal learning and career goals Enhances the learning process through supportive power relationships Respects the vulnerability of participation
Respect ownership	Learning is realistic and relevant to short and long term teaching needs and aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures participant owns the focus of learning Enables self-directed/just-in-time/just-for-me learning Ensures school owns the development of PP in own context Requires senior management support (owned and valued by senior management)
Enhance quality	Learning supports best practice, and is evidenced and goal oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports continuous improvement in tertiary teaching practice Strategically embeds Peer Partnerships in university professional development strategy

*Adapted from Speck, M. (1996). Best Practice in Professional Development for Sustained Educational Change, *ERS Spectrum, Spring*, 33-41.

Peer Partnerships *fosters learning* with a focus on process rather than content. The program does this by encouraging participants to partner across teaching programs, pairing staff with

others inside the school, but outside their discipline area. In this way partners are forced to focus on the processes they observe rather than responding to the accuracy (or otherwise) of content. Participation in Peer Partnerships can be used as evidence of reflective practice for teaching awards and promotion applications.

In contrast to some other models of peer feedback that use expert reviewers, Peer Partnerships *encourages reciprocity*, with both participants taking the role of both observer and observee in each partnership. This reciprocity, a feature of some other peer feedback models (e.g., Barnard et al., 2011), is designed to build genuinely collegial relationships and works to diffuse the power imbalance often present in external reviews or mentorship programs (Cohen & McKeachie, 1980). In addition, as Graham Hendry and Gary Oliver (2012) have observed, participants gain as much from observing as being observed, with the potential for observation to increase self-efficacy.

The importance of the *voluntary* nature of the programs is underscored by research that suggests mandatory approaches are often associated with superficial engagement (McMahon, et al., 2007). A voluntary approach allows staff to choose their own timing for participation. In contrast to deficit peer feedback models that focus on under-performing staff, Peer Partnerships is designed as an opt-in approach engaging staff when they feel ready to participate, using the goals they set for their own professional development. This aspect is designed to encourage commitment and reduce defensiveness.

The *confidential* nature of the observations and reciprocal feedback maximises the opportunity for staff to engage in reflective practice (Chester, 2012). Important to the program is an acknowledgement of the inherent vulnerability of observation. The mandatory training focuses deliberately on the development of trust, explores how to manage the feedback process effectively and emphasises the confidential nature of all information generated by the partnership.

Peer Partnerships is founded on participant *ownership* of the process, School ownership of the training and ongoing support for the maintenance of the partnerships and University ownership in the form of senior management sponsorship and integration into university policy and procedures. While the principles help define the parameters of Peer Partnerships, some flexibility is built into the program to encourage adaption to the specific needs of each school. It was also considered important to develop a model that could be adapted for integration into the formal teaching qualifications such as the Grad Cert Tertiary Teaching Practice in later years, as described by other researchers (e.g., Donnelly, 2007; Hendry and Oliver, 2012).

The focus on *enhancing quality* of teaching, addresses the universal emphasis on teaching standards and is consistent with Neil Hamilton's (2003) ethical guidelines for peer feedback that maintain peer observation should contribute towards a culture of high professional ideals and high standards of professional conduct.

The principles outlined above informed the Peer Partnership model. The need for a clear and comprehensive structure of the program was consistent with calls for standardised implementation processes, clarification of expectations and protocols prior to observation sessions, and clear strategy and consensus surrounding peer feedback issues (Cosh, 1998; Fleming, Shire, Jones, Pill, & McNamee, 2004; Hamilton, 2003). These principles underpin the four-stage Peer Partnership cycle outlined in the next section.

RMIT Peer Partnership Cycle

While peer feedback programs may differ in design and implementation in order to meet specific requirements of individual institutions, most include the common stages of *preparation*, in which partners are paired and briefed, *observation*, *feedback* and *reflection*, including the provision of both written and face-to-face feedback (Bell, 2005).

Chester (2012) emphasised the benefits of compulsory training for all staff prior to engaging in a peer review program. This embedded and mandatory training is designed to facilitate a shared understanding of the principles underpinning the program, and may assist peers in overcoming challenges of peer observation, including concerns about the delivering and receiving praise and criticism (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2005).

A framework encompassing training, preparation, observation, feedback and reflection encourages the application of the principles of adult learning described in Table 1. This framework is articulated in the RMIT Peer Partnerships cycle, with 4 recurring stages; focus, observe, reflect/set goals, implement/evaluate, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

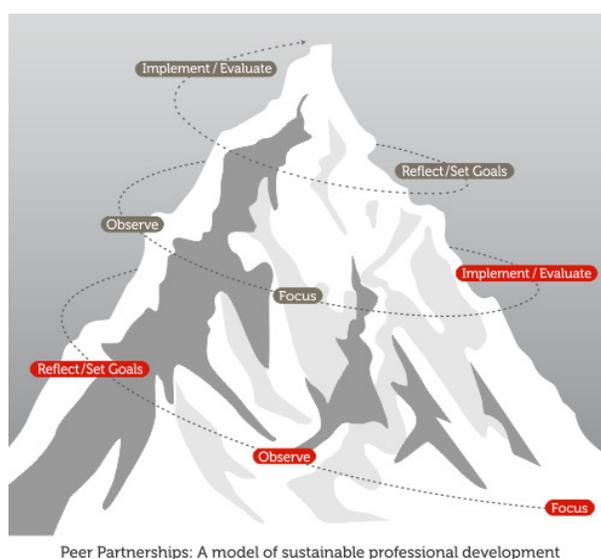


Figure 1. Four-stage cycle of RMIT Peer Partnerships.

Each of these stages is described in detail in the following sections taken from the RMIT Peer Partnership website www.rmit.edu.au/teaching/peerpartnerships

Stage One: Focus

The first stage of the peer partnerships process involves finding a focus for observation. This may involve observing your partner teach but it can also be observing your partner's teaching materials, blackboard discussions, podcasts, course guides, assessment tasks or any other teaching related activity. This [Suggested Teaching Activities for Peer Observation \[PDF, 41KB\]](#) document may help you to find a focus for your peer partner observation. This stage involves a facilitated training session which provides opportunities for you and your partner to:

- clarify a focus for your observations of one another's teaching or teaching materials. Some work may be needed to ensure your partner has access to appropriate documents e.g., access to myRMIT studies sites, assessment tools, etc.
- engage with guidelines for observing a colleague
- practise giving constructive feedback on teaching or teaching materials

This [Finding a Focus: Dimensions of Teaching to be Observed \[PDF, 37KB\]](#) document will help you provide constructive feedback to your partner on their chosen focus for observation. See also Appendix C: Finding a Focus for more details on this stage.

The [Focus Template \[PDF, 36KB\]](#) will help guide this initial stage

When this stage reoccurs in the peer partnerships cycle the focus stage becomes self-directed rather than group facilitated. However some schools may wish to formalise this process into a Community of Practice.

Stage Two: Observe

The second stage of the peer partnerships process involves observing your partner in action either in one of their classes or by engaging with some of their teaching materials and providing them with some feedback. Take notes about your observations so that you can synthesise and share them with your partner. Once this has occurred, meet with your partner to discuss your observations and provide feedback. We recommend that this meeting be held face-to-face and is supplemented by some written feedback.

The [Observe Template \[PDF, 32KB\]](#) will help guide this stage

Stage Three: Reflect/Set Goals

The third stage of the peer partnerships process is about reflecting upon the oral and written feedback from your partner and then setting goals for future implementation in your teaching. In this stage we encourage you to articulate, based on the feedback you have received from your peer partner, the three most important reflections you have made about your teaching practice. We encourage you to use these reflections to set at least one goal to work towards in your teaching. This goal might involve trialling a new technique, building your skills or knowledge in a particular area, and/or seeking more information from students or other staff.

The [Reflect/Set Goals Template \[PDF, 39KB\]](#) will help guide this stage

Stage Four: Implement/Evaluate

The fourth stage of the peer partnerships process is about implementing and evaluating your set goals. In this stage we encourage you to consciously try something new in your teaching and then evaluate how effective this change has been for both you and your students. It is important to be realistic about the level of change you and your students are able to cope with. It is better to make small, incremental and achievable changes over time rather than making large and stressful changes to every aspect of your curriculum.

Embedded Leadership and RMIT Peer Partnerships: Implementation within Schools

The factors that contribute to the success of any higher education innovation have been well studied. Amongst most writers in this area, leadership is generally agreed to hold a crucial role (McKenzie, Alexander, Harper, & Anderson, 2005). Southwell, Gannaway, Orrell, Chalmers,

and Abraham (2005), for example, examined projects and identified barriers to successful scalability of projects. These factors included effective multilayered leadership, institutional readiness for change, availability of resources and good quality communication systems. The RMIT Peer Partnerships program has an embedded leadership design.

RMIT Peer Partnerships was specifically devised for implementation within the local context of a school. Schools are the fundamental organising unit at RMIT University and as such are the ideal environment for continuing professional development. Leadership was strategically located within the school, with responsibility for recruitment, training, ongoing support located at this local level, supported by the project team.

RMIT Peer Partnerships is open to all teaching staff and caters for early, mid and experienced professional development needs. Six schools were identified for implementation of the program in the pilot phase. Schools registered their interest in participating and were selected if the following criteria were met.

Criteria for School Participation:

- Head of School endorsement
- An invitation from either the HoS or the L&T director/chair/school representative to all teaching staff providing them with the opportunity to participate in the program
- A commitment to engage both permanent and sessional teaching staff
- Participation in the program is acknowledged in all work plans with appropriate time allocation
- Appointment of a school-based leader in consultation with Head of School and L&T Deputy Head/Director/Chair

The following criteria were developed to support the recruitment of school-based leaders and participants.

Characteristics of School-based Leaders:

- L&T leadership role in the school e.g., Deputy Head L&T, L&T Director, member of L&T committee
- Established working relationships across the school
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Strong time and project management skills
- Available to commit to and attend all scheduled project activities/workshops – acknowledged in workplan

Characteristics of participants may include one or more of the following:

- A desire to participate
- Passionate about continuous improvement in L&T
- A commitment to building an engaged learning and teaching community within the school
- A need to document teaching practice for promotion application/teaching award
- A desire to trial new ways of teaching
- A willingness to share knowledge and experience with colleagues
- An openness to learning about teaching, regardless of level of teaching experience

- Available to commit to and attend all schedule project activities/workshops - acknowledged in workplan

The six schools selected for the 2012 pilot are listed in Table 2.

Table 2
RMIT Peer Partnership Pilot Schools

College	School	Number of staff participating
Design and Social Context	Fashion and Textiles	6
	Architecture and Design	4
	Education	4
Science, Engineering and Health	SAMME	6
	SLAPS	6
Business	Business IT and Logistics	10
Total		36

Training was undertaken in these six schools at the beginning of semester 2. Angela Clarke and Dallas Wingrove, from the project team, facilitated all training, in collaboration with the school Leader. The aim of this process was to skill leaders to take on the role of training in subsequent iterations.

Findings and Impacts

The evaluation methodology adopted in the present project was a pre post-test mixed methods design. Both leaders and peer partners were surveyed at the beginning and end of the implementation process. In addition, interviews and focus groups were held to complement and further explore quantitative findings. Findings for leaders and Peer Partner participants are presented separately below.

Leaders

Of the 6 leaders (1 female and 5 male), 5 were Deputy Heads, L&T or Chairs of the L&T Committee in their school. The sixth leader, who was supported by the Deputy Head L&T, was a Program Coordinator and member of the school's L&T Committee.

Leaders were asked to indicate their motivations for undertaking this task at the beginning of the semester. This data is compared to their reflections on the program at the end of the semester in Figure 2 below. It is of note that the strongest motivation for leading Peer Partnerships in their school was the leader's desire to support reflective practice. Also important (with scores over 4 on the 5-point scale) were the motivation to build collegial relationships, foster a culture of continuous improvement and, more personally, to develop leadership skills. Less important at the beginning of the project were motivations around CES

improvement and accumulating evidence for their own applications for promotion.

At the end of semester outcomes had met or exceeded expectations in all but one area, even in areas where initial expectations were high. Reality exceeded expectations in the following areas: supporting reflective practice (all leaders rated this 5 out of 5 at the end of the program), enhancing leadership skills and providing evidence of leadership for a promotion application (the largest increase was noted on this variable). At the end of semester the extent to which leaders believed they had improved CES scores in their scores was less than they had anticipated at the beginning of the program. This reduction is not surprising given that the program was not focused on improvement in CES change.

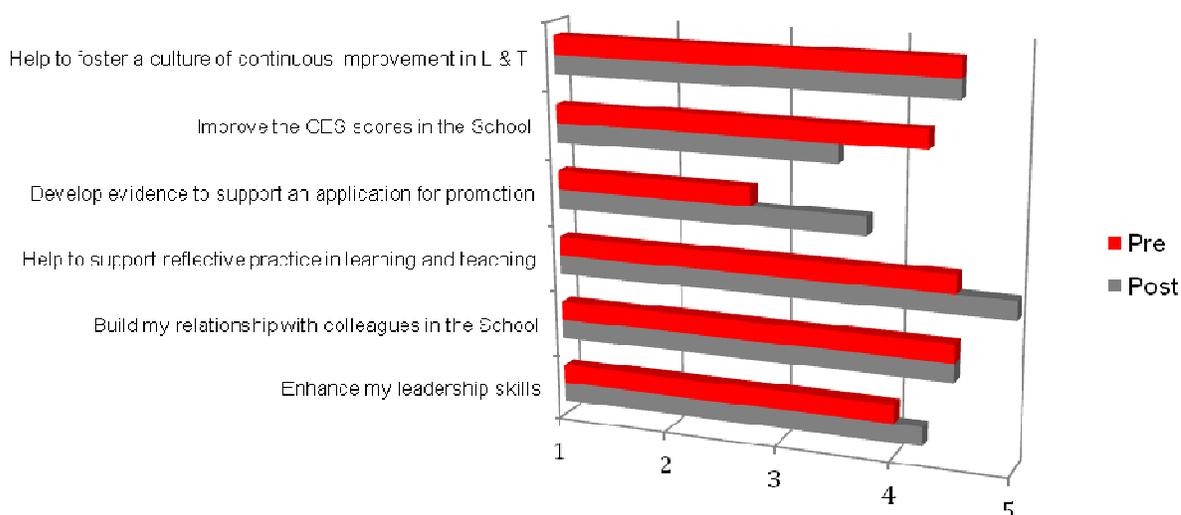


Figure 2. Leaders' expectations and outcomes of the Peer Partnerships program (n = 4)

The following five themes emerged from the qualitative data:

Top level support

Leaders reported that support from the Head of School was critical to the success of the project within their school. As one leader commented,

It was critical that the Head of School was supportive of this process as well as myself as Deputy-Head L&T and discipline heads – that way staff could really see that this activity was strategically aligned and that it would be noted at various level – this is important to our staff.

Endorsement and recognition by senior management was perceived to be a core aspect of success. Most leaders believed one of the main reasons peer partnerships would continue in their schools is because Heads of School hold “a lot of sway with our staff”.

Staff engagement

Leaders overwhelmingly reported positive outcomes in relation to staff engagement. They observed staff “deeply engaged” in meaningful reflection about their teaching

practice. It was noted that the project successfully created the “space” for conversation, reflection and collegial relationship building.

Challenges

A couple of leaders reported that one of the biggest challenges was attracting participants. There was a perception amongst some staff that peer partnerships was a remedial program and targeted individuals who were “not good at teaching”. It was noted that the training session was critical in overcoming this misconception and that “after this session there was very positive feedback on the program”.

Most leaders reported challenges related to logistics. This included trying to get everybody together at the one time for the training and de-brief sessions, matching partners when they are spread over two campuses and starting too late in the semester. Solutions included being organised well ahead of time and running the training session before classes start, getting group appointments in diaries well ahead of time, and matching partners within the same campus.

Shifting culture

Leaders recognised that introducing peer partnerships was a shift in culture at both the school and university level. Most noted that it was easier for them to get behind something within their leadership capacity if it was “seen as a positive form of professional development” that was “integrated into the university structure”.

Leaders strongly endorsed the idea that supporting peer partnerships could be “a way that shows the school cares about the continuous improvement of teaching”.

Leaders also recognised their role in raising awareness about peer partnerships as a positive step toward keeping reflective teaching practice at the core of learning and teaching activities within the school. This was particularly important as all leaders reported their frustration with learning and teaching committees that are heavily skewed toward compliance based activities.

Recognition

Leaders unanimously reported the need for some form of recognition for participation in peer partnerships. At a minimum leaders felt that the time spent on peer partnerships should be acknowledged in the professional development section of workplans and that this is linked to the successful implementation of peer partnerships. As one participant noted “if staff see that there is recognition, particularly in their workplans, and that the University, College, School and line manager are all speaking the same language then it has more chance of success.” Other suggestions from leaders for recognition for participants were a book voucher, time release, or support to attend a conference.

Recruitment and retention

None of the leaders, once recruited, withdrew from the role. Although one leader moved out of his role as Deputy Head, L&T during the course of the semester he continued his commitment as a leader of Peer Partnerships in his school. Another leader resigned from RMIT at the end of the semester prior to the completion of the debrief session. The project team was able to manage the completion of the cycle. In a third school, the leader has subsequently resigned from RMIT, meaning a new leader will be required. These transitions in leadership point to the value in sharing leadership. The school that recruited the largest number of Peer Partnership

participants used a model of dual leadership, with the Deputy Head supporting a leader within the school. This approach was seen to be particularly effective.

Conclusions

At the beginning of semester leaders indicated, both in the quantitative and qualitative data, that their motivations for taking on the leadership role were altruistic rather than personal. For example they anticipated that the benefits of their leadership role were about building professional collegiate relationships and providing opportunities “to make people more positive, comfortable and to enjoy teaching”. They also reported that the benefits of leadership related to being “inspired by staff participating in the project”. Leaders noted that the work of peer partnerships aligned with their work goals and that they considered this work an important way to “support [my] staff”.

At the end of semester the leaders’ anticipated benefits for taking on the leadership role were exceeded. One leader reported that it was a “fantastic experience that increased my academic leadership skills in the school and college”. Another leader said, “the greatest benefit was that I became acquainted with people that I did not know in the school, I learnt a great deal from others and the team itself was a dedicated group of individuals who wanted to learn about great teaching practice and engage with the students at a very deep level”. Leaders also acknowledged the benefits of having a specific program within the school that “helps foster a culture of reflective practice”.

Overall both the quantitative and qualitative data suggests leaders took a transformational approach to their leadership of peer partnerships. Transformational leaders have a strong vision and encourage development and change (Basham, 2010). The peer partnerships guiding principles resonated with leaders who were then able to comfortably adopt the overall vision and use this to “get people on board”. In some cases leaders recognised the need to lead by example and also became participants. Key to transformational leadership is helping others align individual objectives to the leader, group and larger organization's objectives (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The leaders in this project measured their success based on group engagement rather than their own engagement and were keen to align individual goals to the broader strategic goals of the university. Leaders actively fostered an environment of collegial support so that learning and teaching issues could “be shared in a more comprehensive and constructive way”.

Participants

There were 36 participants (14 females and 22 males) who engaged in Peer Partnerships in 2012. Of these, 30 provided written feedback for the evaluation. Years of teaching experience varied from 6 months to more than 30 years, indicating that Peer Partnerships was attractive to staff who were relatively new to teaching through to those with many years of experience. More than half the participants had formal teaching qualifications, with several staff having more than one teaching qualification.

Table 3 compares participants with the demographics of RMIT teaching staff. Compared to RMIT teaching staff, Peer Partnership participants were more likely to be male and have already demonstrated a commitment to the formal study of teaching.

Table 3
Comparison of Peer Partnership participants with RMIT teaching staff

Demographic	Peer Partners	RMIT teaching staff
Sex	Female = 39%	Female = 43%
Sector	HE = 68%	HE = 66%
Teaching qualification	58.6%	35%
Teaching experience	Mean = 9.1 years (SD= 7.55)	NA

At the beginning of the Peer Partnership program participants were invited to rate how important 9 aims were to them. At the completion of the program participants rated the extent to which these aims had been achieved through the program. A comparison of pre and post-test data is presented in Figure 3 below.

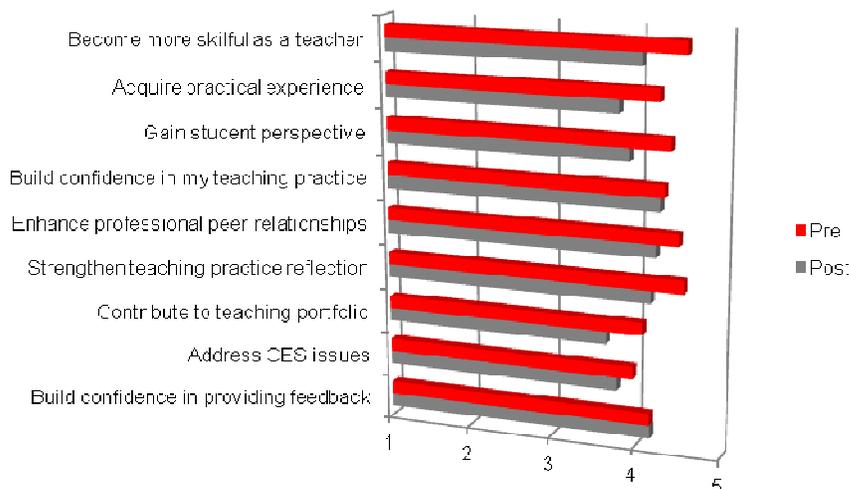


Figure 3. Participant expectations and outcomes of Peer Partnerships program

At the beginning of the program participants indicated quite high agreement (agree or strongly agree) with all aims. By the completion of the program outcomes were positive, with all mean scores sitting above neutral, however, scores on nearly all items were lower than at pre-test. This may reflect a more realistic understanding of the strengths and limitations of the Peer Partnership program. It is of note that there were two items on which expectations appeared to match reality, both of which related to confidence: confidence in one's teaching practice and confidence in one's capacity to give feedback to colleagues on teaching practice. It is of note that the variation in scores was greater post-test compared to pre-test, perhaps indicating that the Peer Partnership experience produced different outcomes for individual participants.

Training and Debrief

All participants undertook a 90-minute training workshop. Training was facilitated in each

school by members of the project team and in most cases supported by School Leaders. The content included:

- Discussion of peer partnerships principles, ethical parameters, RMIT model and benefits of observing peers
- Video of past participants discussing their positive experiences with peer partnerships
- Activities on giving and receiving feedback to colleagues using peer partnerships resources including observation of a videotaped lecture
- Activities on finding a focus for peer partner observation sessions using templates developed for RMIT peer partnerships
- Practise sessions on giving and receiving sensitive feedback using scenarios

At the completion of this workshop 30 participants completed a short evaluation. The results are summarised in Table 4 below. The training evaluation suggests the value of the session for participants, with all participants agreeing it was a worthwhile activity and prepared them well for participation in the program.

Table 4

Peer Evaluation of Training Session (N = 30)

	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
The training session was useful	56.7	40.0	3.3	-	-
The content of the training was relevant to my needs as a teacher	63.3	33.3	3.3	-	-
I gained new skills/knowledge	33.3	53.3	13.3	-	-
Overall it was worth attending the training	63.3	36.7	-	-	-
The training helped me feel confident to participate in the Peer Partnerships program	66.7	33.3	-	-	-

A one-hour debrief session was held in each school for partners and leaders to reflect on the program. The debrief session provided opportunities for participants to share aspects of the program that had been useful, discuss ways in which the processes could be improved and compare ways in which they planned to continue to reflect on and make changes to their teaching practice.

At the completion of this session 22 participants completed a short survey to evaluate the debrief session and the Peer Partnerships program more broadly. This data is summarised above in Table 5. The debrief session was positively evaluated.

Table 5

Peer Evaluation of Debrief Session (N = 22)

	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
The debrief session was useful	81.8	18.2	-	-	-
The content of the debrief was relevant to my needs as a teacher	63.6	36.4	-	-	-
I gained new skills/knowledge	36.4	50.0	9.1	-	-
Overall it was worth attending the debrief	81.8	18.2	-	-	-
The debrief helped me feel confident to participate in the Peer Partnerships program	72.7	22.7	4.5	-	-
I would recommend the Peer Partnerships program to other teaching staff	72.7	27.3	-	-	-

At the completion of the program all participants noted that they would recommend the Peer Partnerships program to others.

Qualitative data was collected from participants via surveys completed at the start of semester training and the end of semester debrief and from five face-to-face interviews with participants. The following six themes emerged from the qualitative data:

Building relationships

All participants commented on the positive benefits of building relationships with their colleagues through peer partnerships. This was particularly useful to participants when their partner was outside their discipline. Benefits included good networking, recognising that the same issues are faced by more than one department, and getting to know more people within their school. As one participant commented “I built a relationship... that is a big benefit”. Another noted “it’s good to network... and to know that the same things happen in other departments”.

Peer Partnerships structure and training

Participants were very supportive of the peer partnerships structure and believed the clear stages helped them effectively navigate the process. One participant noted “if I hadn’t gone to that first workshop [training session] it may have taken longer to sink in”. Another participant believed that without the training sessions the process would be “more vulnerable to things going wrong and people being uncomfortable”. Participants also reflected on the usefulness of the resources, “...the resources that you have are fantastic. Not only are the resources good, but the way that the initial stages, the way that sessions are planned. The resources give you something to ... hang onto”.

Recognition

Participants strongly believed that time spent on peer partnerships should be included in workplans and that line managers should be explicit in encouraging participation, “it’s very worthwhile professional development”. There was much support for including sessional staff in this activity and that this should also be recognised in their workplans. Participants believed that using peer partnerships in workplans should “come from the top”, meaning it should be

endorsed by line managers and Heads of school. One participant noted, “it needs to be supported by your manager, because if it’s not supported then they won’t give you that time release”.

Giving and receiving feedback

Some participants reported that it was “confronting having someone else in your class” and that they also felt anxious giving feedback to a colleague. As one participant said, “you do go ‘ooh’...‘I want to be nice, you’re really good’ so, yes, there is anxiety”. This participant went on to note, however, that their anxiety was overcome by the use of the peer partnerships resources and the initial training they received saying “that’s where I think the resources are really good....[and the scenario training]...a scenario of giving sensitive critical feedback gave me something to frame ‘well, how would I go about that...?’ if I had to do that in my peer partnership”.

Other participants reported that they felt “quite comfortable” being observed because they had observed many teachers at RMIT over the years. One participant noted however that the voluntary nature of this experience made it a more positive process, “having someone say ‘I’m happy to be observed’ as distinct from ‘I have to be observed’ was just lovely”. This participant also noted that the process was more useful than they had experienced in the past because partners were “really interested in giving feedback”.

Qualitative data suggested that all participants took their observation role very seriously and were genuinely focused on providing constructive and authentic feedback to their partner. As one participant commented, “I was trying to think about how I can word something without offending him. But [then] I looked at it from a student perspective, sitting in a particular room, and that’s how I felt”. This demonstrates a sophisticated approach to the role of observer and that the focus was genuinely on improving the student experience whilst being sensitive to the lecturer’s ability to receive potentially critical feedback.

Participants also noted that the process of meeting face-to-face with their partner was important and that “as a teacher you kind of go ‘look, they’re all adults, surely, if you give them a form they should fill it out’, but I think it’s that caring nature and that support that made the difference”. This once again reinforces the critical nature of building good collegial relationships and the value of the structured process developed in the Peer Partnerships program.

Benefits of a clear focus for observation

All participants reported that finding a focus for observation beforehand was very useful. As the following participant commented:

I really liked the training... being really clear about what you wanted to be observed on, and that you were in control of that...now, if I’m feeling iffy about my teaching, and having you there, I don’t need to get feedback from the things that I’m really iffy about, I can get feedback from the things thatI would get quite good feedback on. So, you as the observee was really in control of what was observed.

Another participant noted that finding a focus was “a really good thing, because it made you, the observee, in control. If you’re feeling slightly vulnerable, that would make a huge

difference”.

Participants also reported that having a focus made it easier for them to be honest in their feedback, saying:

If I'm the observer... I don't have to worry about observing that aspect. If I was observing you and you said, 'can you focus on people who come late?' then it gives me the OK to say 'actually, when those people came late...' you don't feel like you're picking on the person because they've asked you to observe that.

Another commented:

I didn't feel awkward, because we were frank and honest with each other. I feel very comfortable. He also gave me it in a way - first positive comments, then negative one. So I feel very comfortable. I don't feel awkward or something bad like embarrassed.

Reflective practice

Participants overwhelmingly reported that peer partnerships provided useful opportunities for self-reflection. As one participant said “it's interesting the self-reflection you get, and the ability to self-reflect is probably one of the most powerful outcomes”. Another participant noted “it can be quite reassuring as well, like you notice when you're focusing on observing someone else that there are some things that you do well, as well”. Yet another said “there were a number of things that I observed going on in [peer's] class, and when I sort of sat back and thought about it, my reaction was 'hang on, I think I do the same thing' and, in fact, there's a lesson there for me, and some bits and pieces that I do”.

Participants also considered the notion of continuous improvement of their teaching very important, saying things such as “I'm always looking for continuous improvement, so it [peer partnerships] aligns with that. What can I do better? - it aligns with that. I got a lot out of it”. Participants were honest about the fact that this process for them was about “keeping you on your toes in the kind of way that having a student teacher keeps you on your toes”. They reflected that over time it is easy to become complacent and difficult to maintain energy for positive change,

it's very easy to fall into bad habits. You work well, everything's going fine, you're busy...why be any better than you were? And it's easy to ...start good things, and they...kind of fall off the radar. So it's quite good to have somebody put it back onto the radar.

Interestingly, participants were realistic about what improvements can actually be achieved within the time frame. One participant commented thus:

Don't expect it to revolutionise your teaching. There will be little bits and pieces, but it's not going to turn your whole teaching philosophy around. There will be a couple of little gems of ideas or glimmers of ideas that will come back to you which will add and improve.

Notably participants reflected that the process of peer partnerships provided a sense of belonging not only to a school but to the wider university community. As one participant put it:

I think it enriches your teaching practice...it increases your networking, so working with other people across the institute. And it gives you that sense of belonging too, as if you are part of the big thing rather than 'we're [discipline] here and that's what we do'.

Recruitment and retention

In addition to the six themes outline above, observations about recruitment and retention were made by the project team. Of the 36 staff who undertook training, all but one completed a peer partnership cycle. The staff member who withdrew was not teaching in the semester in which the project was undertaken and additionally indicated reservations about the evaluation of the project that was being undertaken as part of the LTIF project. This withdrawal, after the semester had begun, left one participant without a partner. In order to pair this participant quickly one of the members of the project team, who was a teacher in another school, took up the role and the partnership cycle was completed.

While retention was therefore good, recruitment of peer participants proved challenging in nearly every school, with quite small numbers of staff taking up the invitation to participate. The project team noted that where leaders had past experience with peer partnerships and were overtly championing the process in their schools, recruitment was an easier process. Participants commonly reported reservations or suspicious attitudes toward the usefulness of peer feedback, however in all cases these concerns were addressed within the training session.

It is anticipated that the data collected in this project and the additional resources now available online will help to recruit participants in subsequent iterations. Positive staff experiences can be used to allay concerns and encourage engagement. This was evidenced by the use of a video produced for the training sessions. The project team worked with EduTAG to produce a five-minute video of past participants discussing their experiences with previous iterations of peer partnerships. This video was included in all training sessions and was extremely well received by participants who commented on how useful it was to hear other RMIT staff speak so positively about the experience. Participants also noted that the video gave them confidence in the process. The video material can be seen on the website using the following link: www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=atuf5xqgruzaz

Suggestions for improvement

Participants offered a range of suggestions for ways the Peer Partnership model could be improved. These were generally tweaks to the process rather than major changes and included more specific information up front about points such as the time commitment, and the chance to participate in more cycles and follow-up sessions.

Although all participants were informed of the estimated time commitment at the beginning of the process, it was apparent that this information was not clear to all

participants and some adjustments to this communication process are required. Participant comments underscored the importance of having a clear indication of the time commitment required to participate in peer partnerships. The model requires 8 - 10 hours, which most participants felt was realistic and achievable. Interestingly, although most did not want to commit any more time than this at the beginning of the process, by the end a number of participants made comments like:

I would like to see the opportunity for more cycles... in that I think my partner and I were still at the start of it, and were still very much working around each other. I guess getting to know you, and get comfortable giving more constructive feedback.

And “more observations for sure [but] for shorter periods of time”.

Participants generally wanted a follow-up session built into the process “to see whether or not it’s [changes to teaching] happened, and happened effectively”. Most participants also felt that swapping partners would be a good experience and would provide “a fresh perspective”.

Conclusions

The quantitative and qualitative data gathered in this pilot project indicated participants were keen to approach peer partnerships with professional integrity and collegial support. They strongly endorsed the notion of recognition for peer partnerships in their workplans as a legitimate form of professional development that was strategically aligned to the directions of the university. Participants reported that the process provided opportunities for collegial relationship building, continuous improvement of teaching, self-reflection, networking and a strong sense of belonging.

The process also kept them “on their toes” and allowed for incidental learning about their own teaching through observation of their peers. What seemed particularly important to participants was feeling in “control” of the process and that there needed to be a period of time where they established a good relationship with their partner. They felt that feedback should begin by being positive, that is, asking for feedback on things they knew they would get “good feedback on” and then they were more comfortable asking for feedback on things they were less confident about down the track. Participants reported feeling anxious about observing and being observed, but these anxieties were successfully alleviated by the use of the Peer Partnership templates and resources, and through training about giving and receiving feedback.

Overall, the participants were strongly supportive of the Peer Partnerships process and engaged in processes of deep reflection about their own and their peers’ teaching practice. They also made legitimate suggestions for improvement of Peer Partnerships, demonstrating a deep engagement with the vision and guiding principles of the RMIT model.

4 Dissemination Strategies and Outputs

The project outcomes have been and will continue to be shared both within RMIT and more broadly across the university sector via the project website, the publication of articles and presentation of conference papers and through a series of workshops planned for 2013 as the project team continues the implementation of Peer Partnerships across the University.

Peer Partnerships Website

The project team worked with EduTAG to develop a range of online resources in support of peer partnerships. A Peer Partnerships webpage has been developed and includes the following components:

- Peer Partnership principles
- How to get started
- A tool kit with templates for stepping partners through the process
- Resources for peer observation

There are also two videos of past participants that appear on the website. The first video is a conversation between two peer partners about their experiences of peer partnerships. This video was used in the training sessions and was an effective resource in helping new participants feel comfortable with the process. The second video is a reflection to camera about the experience of leading peer partnerships in a school from one of the leaders in the 2012 pilot.

The website can be found at: www.rmit.edu.au/teaching/peerpartnerships

Publications and Conference Presentations

A list of publications arising from the project is provided under Outcomes above. These include a presentation at the Enhancement and Innovation in Higher Education conference to be held in Scotland in 2013.

Workshops

The project team will continue the implementation of Peer Partnerships in a further 6 schools in 2013. As part of the process of recruiting and training new schools, dissemination of the project outcomes will continue across RMIT.

5 Evaluation of Project Outcomes

External Review of RMIT Peer Partnerships

An external review of the Peer Partnerships website was conducted by Dr Nicola Parker, from the Institute of Interactive Media and Learning, University of Technology Sydney. Dr Parker teaches in the Graduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching and Learning and she supports all aspects of learning and teaching in her role at UTS. She contributed to the ALTC project Embedding Peer Review of Learning and Teaching in Online and Blended Learning Environments and has a background in peer feedback.

Dr Parker reviewed the resources supporting Peer Partnerships on the website. Dr Parker concluded that

The Peer Partnerships site is an important resource for teaching and learning at RMIT. It suggests, informs and promotes improvements to the quality of teaching and learning through iterative, collegial partnerships and thoughtful reflection and change. It also represents an important evolution of the peer review and peer observation program at RMIT since 2009 for ongoing professional quality in teaching and learning and professional development for staff.... this site will continue to be a key resource for the Peer Partnerships project and a successful strategy for the university for many years to come. It will enable more staff to encounter and implement an ongoing process of peer observation and improvement of learning and teaching and will have a lasting impact on student's experiences of learning at RMIT.

Dr Parker provided the team with a range of recommendations including refining the text around some further resources supporting the Peer Partnerships model and branding of documents, links to other projects, including Peer Review when available, labelling of video clips, and summarising the outcomes of the current project on the site.

Dr Parker's review is included in Appendix D.

Factors Critical to Success

At the conclusion of the pilot phase, the project team met to reflect on the characteristics of the least and most successful applications of Peer Partnerships in schools and identified the factors that support successful implementation. These are summarised below.

Each school demonstrated a range of characteristics that contributed to success. These have been collated, together with outcomes derived from the quantitative and qualitative evaluation, to produce a list of factors considered critical to the future successful implementation of Peer Partnerships in schools.

- Head of School endorsement and ongoing support is crucial for the success of Peer Partnerships. Several Heads lead a range of initiatives that helped to embed Peer Partnerships in the School culture. These included formally acknowledging Peer Partnership participation as professional development in workplans, awarding certificates (provided to all participants by the project team) at an end of year school meeting to publicly acknowledge participation in the program, making time at a retreat for staff to share feedback on their experiences as partners, and holding a lunch at the completion of the semester to celebrate Peer Partnerships.
- All schools noted the importance of starting the process early so there is time to complete one or more cycles within the semester. It is recommended that training be undertaken before the semester commences.
- Success of the model is dependent on a distributed model of leadership, with responsibility resting at school level. Schools that demonstrated the highest level of success in terms of retention and engagement of staff had leaders who owned and were committed to the process, worked actively to recruit and maintain a critical mass of participants and kept up the momentum through follow up and checking in with participants throughout the semester.

- Given inevitable changes in staff it is recommended that school leadership for Peer Partnerships be shared. The school in which this worked particularly effectively used a dual model of leadership, with the Deputy Head, L&T supporting another staff member in the role of leader. This meant two staff were trained as leaders and responsibilities could be shared. This approach also means that acquired knowledge and experience have a greater chance of remaining within the local context and helps contribute to the long-term sustainability of the process.
- In some cases leaders were also peer partners. In schools where this was done (sometimes initially simply because an additional partner was required) leaders developed a strong understanding of and investment in the process and lead by example.
- Participants suggested the implementation of a confidential system to nominate preferred partners. This refinement may be a useful way to reduce some of the concerns that staff expressed around vulnerability.
- Future implementations of Peer Partnerships may wish to consider the inclusion of a formative online self-reflection app to monitor attitudes and behaviour prior to and at the completion of engagement in Peer Partnerships and provide feedback on areas of change.

6 Budget Report

This project came in fractionally (\$1,179) over-budget. This small overspend is the result of sharing the role of Project Manager within the project team. As we were unable to recruit a suitable Project Manager in the early stages of the project, we decided to share the role. Our pay rates were slightly different to the amount originally budgeted, resulting in a small overspend.

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Appendix A: Peer Feedback Approaches at Australian Universities

The following information is taken from the *Recommendations and Implementation Plan from the 2012 Working Party on Teaching Expectations at RMIT – Peer Feedback*, submitted to VCE in 2012.

University of South Australia requires all academic staff to attend the [Teaching@UniSA](#) course that offers peer observation of teaching as an optional activity. Academic staff applying for promotion are required as part of their evidence for teaching performance to provide a summary of the results of at least one peer review of teaching ([University Academic Promotion Policy HR-26.0](#)). UniSA has had a 'guide to peer review' since 1999 produced by the Learning and Teaching Unit (LTU) and there are two research projects on peer review at UniSA currently being undertaken by the divisions of EAS and BUE with LTU input. An online resource supporting the ALTC peer review project of online teaching and learning at UniSA is available (<http://resource.unisa.edu.au/course/view.php?id=2593>).

University of Technology Sydney led an ALTC project on embedding peer review of learning and teaching in e-learning and blended learning environments. The project provided a framework and resources to support a scholarly review process and elicit information that helps teachers to improve teaching practice as well as to provide evidence for recognition and reward of teaching (<http://www.iml.uts.edu.au/peer-review>).

University of Wollongong encourages the use of formal peer observation for academic promotion or probation, although it is not mandatory for all disciplines (<http://www.uow.edu.au/asd/PeerReview/process/index.html>). They use different peer observation templates for different types of teaching situations, for example a Generic UOW Observation Pro Forma; a Videoconference Observation Pro Forma; a Laboratory/Field Work Observation Pro Forma; and a Clinical Demonstration Observation Pro Forma. Peer partnerships are part of the University's Learning and Teaching Course and formal peer review of teaching is part of the "Mix of Evidence" approach to providing evidence of quality of teaching in probation and promotion applications.

The University of Queensland, through the Teaching and Educational Development Institute (TEDI), promotes a Professional Learning Framework that uses optional peer observation of teaching for informal learning. There is a guidebook for peer observation of teaching (<http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/sites/default/files/PeerObservationTandL.pdf>).

Macquarie University has extensive documentation on leadership related to peer feedback from an ALTC project (<http://staff.mq.edu.au/teaching/projects/peer/>). Macquarie uses peer feedback for multiple purposes; it may be formal or informal, highly structured or semi-structured, and may be undertaken purely for personal development as a teacher or for summative purposes such as applying for promotion, probation, employment or teaching awards. They have a range of peer observation and review activities on offer for staff. They provide some simple and quite useful templates for using during observation. The process seems to be initiated by staff themselves rather than having any systematic university wide approach.

University of New South Wales has peer review as an optional part of the academic promotion process (http://www.hr.unsw.edu.au/employee/acad/ap_toolkit.pdf). Peer review is part of the Foundations of University Learning and Teaching program (<http://teaching.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/upload-files/FULT%20program%20example.pdf>).

For the **Australian National University** there appears to be no publically available information on University-level processes addressing peer feedback/review/observation. The University's Centre for Higher Education, Learning and Teaching provides basic information on 'Evaluation of Teaching', which includes a section on Peer and Self Evaluation (http://chelt.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/toolkitv2_peer_self.pdf).

There is inclusion of a peer observation assessment as part of the **University of Tasmania's** Graduate Certificate in University Teaching and Learning (Unit: ELT 502). Upon completing this unit staff will have been exposed to a detailed peer observation/peer feedback process. The staff advisory document on Promotion and Teaching Excellence Awards includes advice on evidencing the impact of staff professional output on student learning. As part of this section staff are advised to include evidence of peer feedback, but it is informally presented and gives no indication that there is a formal process to be followed by the staff member. Within the Faculty of Education there is a brief description of the peer feedback process, with no expectation placed on staff to engage with the process. It is referenced in the Faculty of Education under an evaluation and feedback initiative (<http://www.utas.edu.au/education/learning-and-teaching/teaching-and-learning-initiatives/evaluating-practice>).

Curtin University is part of an OLT grant "Developing a culture of peer review of teaching through distributive leadership" along with Queensland University of Technology (Lead), Charles Darwin University, University of Adelaide and University of Technology Sydney.

University of Canberra uses peer feedback for developmental purposes where participation is voluntary and confidential; it is not required for teaching awards or academic promotions (<http://www.canberra.edu.au/tlc/evaluation/feedback-from-peers>). It is also noted that the University has just begun staff discussions on peer feedback as part of an ALTC/OLT project (http://www.canberra.edu.au/events/home/view_by_event_id/666).

Griffith University are an active participant in the ALTC/OLT project with Prof Kerri- Lee Karuse being a Co-leader and Dr Duncan Nulty as a team member. They have developed a major professional development project around peer assisted development needs – "The Griffith PRO - Teaching Project, Sharing Ideas to Develop Capabilities". This project is aimed at creating evidence suitable for staff applications for teaching grants, awards, promotions and yearly staff reviews of progress (<http://www.ict.griffith.edu.au/~sdrew/PRO-Teaching>). A good practice guide in relation to peer review has also been created (http://www.griffith.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/144790/GPG-PRT.pdf). The guide indicates that it would be useful evidence for promotion and teaching awards. Peer review also forms part of the Universities seven principals to promote excellence in learning and teaching practices (<http://www.griffith.edu.au/gihe/learning-teaching-principles>).

The peer review of teaching policies at **University of Western Australia** has been designed for the purposes of development and improvement of teaching practice, so they are predominantly formative. The peer review process is reflected in the workload model for both the observer and the observed and encompasses more than just observation of teaching practice. There are ten areas which can be subject to peer observations and a checklist has been developed for the purpose of grading the observation (<http://www.catl.uwa.edu.au/evaluation>).

Peer review of teaching at **Murdoch University** is used for probation reviews of academic staff. They are conducted according to a confidential process culminating in a report to the academic's supervisor. Peer review can be conducted by a wide range of people including peers, supervisors, those associated with the academic's professional service and even students (<http://our.murdoch.edu.au/Educational-Development/Preparing-to-teach/> and <http://www.murdoch.edu.au/hr2/forms/FP0005.pdf>).

University of Melbourne encourages voluntary formative peer review for individuals for teaching development and as a mandatory component of the Melbourne Teaching Certificate (http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/resources_teach/feedback/docs/PeerReview_teach.pdf). Peer review is an optional component of the promotion process.

Edith Cowan University provides documentation on peer review of teaching but emphasises that the person conducting the review should be an expert in education and the review process must use agreed criteria. The University provides a seven stage model for implementing the process of peer review of teaching (http://intranet.ecu.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/295534/Peer-Review-of-Teaching-factsheet-CM.pdf).

At the **Queensland University of Technology** peer review does not appear to be incorporated into the policy 'Evaluation of courses, units, teaching and experience' (under review); or the 'Evaluating teaching quality' policy. Feedback from peers (peer review of teaching, uptake of curriculum innovations by peers, informal feedback from peers, requests for advice from peers, feedback from Head of School/Portfolio) is used as an example of evidence to be used for promotion to levels C, D and E but it is not a mandatory requirement for promotion or awards and grants.

Appendix B: Peer Partnerships Briefing Paper



RMIT Peer Partnerships 2012 LTIF project

What is Peer Partnerships?

RMIT Peer Partnerships is sustainable, school-based professional development involving peer observation of teaching. It is a model that:

- enhances quality teaching
- builds relationships
- fosters learning about teaching
- encourages reciprocity
- values voluntary participation
- ensures confidentiality
- respects ownership

RMIT Peer Partnerships has been specifically devised for implementation within the local context of schools. The program is open to all teaching staff and caters for early, mid and experienced professional development needs. The RMIT Peer Partnerships model is based on research into best practice in professional development and uses an action learning methodology.

The program will be piloted in Semester 2, 2012 in two schools from each College. A mixed-method evaluation will be conducted.

Success of the program requires endorsement by the Head of School, appointment of a school-based leader and voluntary participation by academic staff. It involves approximately 10 hours commitment from staff who participate in the program and 8 hours from the school Peer Partnership leader.

Benefits for Heads of School and Deputy Heads, L&T

RMIT Peer Partnerships provides schools with opportunities to:

- promote good teaching
- enhance collegial relationships
- embed a model of professional development at the local level that is endorsed by the university
- provide staff with effective peer observation training
- build learning and teaching leadership capacity

Benefits for school-based leaders and staff participants

RMIT Peer Partnerships provides academic staff with opportunities to:

- reflect on and document teaching practice
- learn new skills and teaching strategies
- foster relationships within schools
- support transitions to new teaching spaces and innovative practices
- generate evidence for academic promotion and teaching awards
- build leadership capacity in learning and teaching

We look forward to your support and engagement in RMIT Peer Partnerships, 2012.

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Appendix C: Finding a Focus

The following dimensions of teaching practice are intended to be used as a guide for your teaching observation sessions. Once you have decided on the teaching activity you would like your peer partner to observe, you may like to use the following dimensions of teaching practice to help you find a specific focus for your teaching observation sessions.

The twelve dimensions of teaching outlined below are not independent; inevitably there is overlap across different dimensions. It is unlikely that any one teaching session would demonstrate all of the outlined teaching strategies to the same, significant extent. We suggest that you choose one or two dimensions only as the focus for your first peer partnership observation.

The following dimensions are based on the 2009 ALTC project [Peer Review of Teaching for Promotion Purposes](#).

Dimension 1: Ensuring students are actively engaged in learning

Indicative teaching strategies for demonstrating this dimension may include:

- fostering a supportive, non-threatening teaching/learning environment
- encouraging students to express views, ask and answer questions, and allow time and opportunity for this to occur
- using questioning skills which encourage student engagement
- providing immediate and constructive feedback where appropriate
- demonstrating enthusiasm for teaching and learning
- providing opportunities for self-directed learning
- (for smaller groups) fostering extensive interaction
- (for very large groups) presenting in such a manner as to achieve maximum engagement

Dimension 2: Building upon students' prior knowledge and experience

Indicative teaching strategies for demonstrating this dimension may include:

- being fully aware of and/or determining students' prior knowledge and understanding
- building on students' current knowledge and understanding, and taking them conceptually beyond this level
- where appropriate, using and building upon student contributions and preparation

Dimension 3: Designing learning that caters for student diversity

Indicative teaching strategies for demonstrating this dimension may include:

- demonstrating an appreciation of the different levels of knowledge and understanding in a group
- addressing, as appropriate, different learning needs and styles within the group
- focussing on building confidence, enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation
- fostering students' responsibility for their own learning, encouraging them towards being self-directed learners, (as distinct from teacher-directed learners)
- using appropriate strategies for different needs, balancing discursive interactive strategies with those that are more didactic (where simple transmission of knowledge is needed)
- recognising, at times, the need for teacher-directed strategies such as explaining, and being able to implement these effectively
- exercising balance between challenging and supporting students
- designing activities/tasks that allow students of differing abilities to participate/engage and demonstrate/enhance their learning
- providing examples or opportunities for discussion that cater for cultural diversity

Dimension 4: Encouraging students to develop and/or transform conceptual understandings

Indicative teaching strategies for demonstrating this dimension may include:

- helping students bridge the gap between their current conceptual understanding and the next “level”
- helping students become aware of what the next levels are
- encouraging students to become self- directed learners by using the “lecture”/presentation as the stimulus for individual study/learning
- challenging students intellectually eg by extending them with question/answer/discussion components where students’ conclusions must be justified to the teacher and peers. This usually involves questions such as “What do you think is going on”; “Why”; “What if...?” etc
- encouraging students construct their individual conceptual understanding (ultimately the learner must be responsible for his/her own learning)
- encouraging deep (intrinsic) rather than surface (extrinsic) approaches to learning
- working cooperatively with students to help them enhance understanding
- clearly demonstrating a thorough command of the subject matter

Dimension 5: Making key learning outcomes explicit

Indicative teaching strategies for demonstrating this dimension may include:

- ensuring students are progressively aware of key learning outcomes
- focussing on learning outcomes at key points in the presentation
- ensuring a synthesis of key learning outcomes is emphasised towards the conclusion of the session so that individual student follow-up work is well focussed
- encouraging each student to accept responsibility for learning issues to follow-up and consolidate
- ensuring students are aware of the link between key learning outcomes and assessment (formative and summative), as appropriate

Dimension 6: Encouraging students to make links between disciplinary and/or inter-disciplinary theory and practice

Indicative teaching strategies for demonstrating this dimension may include:

- emphasising, where appropriate, links between theory and practice
- providing opportunities for students to make their own connections between theory and practice
- using research links appropriately, given the level of student conceptual development
- raising students’ awareness of what constitutes research and how it applies to practice

Dimension 7: Making appropriate use of learning environments, resources and technologies

Indicative teaching strategies for demonstrating this dimension may include:

- using IT techniques effectively, eg PowerPoint or multimedia presentations of a professional standard
- using, as appropriate, a balance of IT and other strategies
- using available classroom resources to support student learning effectively
- supplying resources, materials and literature to support student learning
- using specific educational strategies and techniques in the design and delivery of teaching sessions, to achieve key objectives
- encouraging self-directed use of technologies and resources

Dimension 8: Presenting material in an appropriately structured manner

Indicative teaching strategies for demonstrating this dimension may include:

- providing an early brief structural overview of the session
- developing this structure in a coherent manner, ensuring students are constantly aware of the development of the session
- providing time for reviewing at key stages, including closure
- establishing closure, aiming at helping students draw together and understand major issues and identify individual learning needs and short-comings

Dimension 9: Seeking feedback on students' understanding and acting on this accordingly

Indicative teaching strategies for demonstrating this dimension may include:

- seeking feedback progressively during the session eg through constant observation of interest level and engagement and by using specific questions to test understanding
- modifying the presentation to accommodate feedback messages
- seeking feedback towards the conclusion of the session to assist student to determine individual work to be consolidated

Dimension 10: Providing timely feedback on student work and/or progress

Indicative teaching strategies for demonstrating this dimension may include:

- recognising the time it takes to learn and complete tasks
- helping clarify good performance (goals, criteria, expected standards)
- facilitating the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning
- delivering high quality information to students about their learning
- encouraging teacher and peer dialogue around learning
- encouraging positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem
- providing opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance
- Carefully communicating concepts
- Asking open questions and providing clear feedback
- giving feedback that acknowledges effort and personal standards and encouraging students to be intrinsically motivated

Dimension 11: Communicating high expectations

Indicative teaching strategies for demonstrating this dimension may include:

- creating learning environments that inspire students to work hard
- promoting deep understanding of materials
- taking responsibility to motivate and stimulate students
- developing supportive teacher-student relationships and promoting student-student relationships through discussion and projects
- promoting student autonomy in learning
- giving explicit guidance in how you expect students to use resources to help develop independent learning skills
- providing examples of work that demonstrate a range of standards
- using technology to communicate or generate explicit evaluative criteria
- running workshops in topics such as study skills and time management for students
- emphasising the importance of putting hard effort into learning and be confident that the improvements that they make are for the long term
- telling students that what they are doing is important and that that they can do it

Dimension 12: Encouraging imagination, innovation and creativity

Indicative teaching strategies for demonstrating this dimension may include:

- encouraging approaches and methods of working that transcend traditional ideas rules, patterns, relationships or the like
- encouraging divergent thinking
- fostering curiosity and risk taking in relation to learning
- encouraging imaginative processes and methods
- providing opportunities for applying observant ways of being
- encouraging an open, flexible, playful and persistent approach designing, developing and realising their work
- promoting a sophisticated approach to spatial and aesthetic relationships by exploring the appropriate materials to express and communicate ideas

Appendix D: External Review of Peer Partnerships Website

Peer Review of Teaching and Learning Project

Evaluation Report

RMIT Peer Partnerships Project Website

Project Team: Andrea Chester, Dallas Wingrove, Angela Clarke

Reviewer: Nicola Parker

January 2013

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Search

Learning and Teaching Peer Partnerships

Home > Staff > Learning and Teaching > Professional Development > Peer partnerships

RMIT Peer Partnerships is sustainable, school-based professional development involving peer observation of teaching. The RMIT Peer Partnerships model encourages teaching staff to voluntarily take a critically reflective approach to their teaching practice for developmental purposes. Through a process of confidential peer exchange, staff can learn about teaching and/or work toward enhancing the quality of their teaching practice.

Research on RMIT Peer Partnerships shows that participation builds relationships, enhances confidence, and can impact positively on student perceptions of teaching.

If you are interested in participating in *RMIT Peer Partnerships* browse the following pages for more information:

- [Principles](#)
- [Participation](#)
- [Getting started](#)
- [Finding a focus](#)
- [Tool kit](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [Staff experience](#)
- [Contact and help](#)

Index

- Home
- » Staff
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- » Induction modules
- » Peer partnerships
- » Contact
- » Finding a focus
- » Getting started
- » Participation
- » Principles
- » Resources
- » Staff experience
- » Tool kit
- » Tertiary Teaching Practice

Staff experience

Staff share their experiences of peer partnerships.

Getting started

What you need to know to get started with peer partnerships.

Introduction

The Focus of the Review

This evaluation report focuses on the RMIT Peer Partnerships website as an information and communication resource, which inspires engagement with the program of peer observation developed as part of this project in order to enhance the quality of teaching practice. The evidence for this report came from reviewing the website itself, including all online materials, activities and attached materials; as well as the project proposal. For project website see <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse/Staff/Learning%20and%20Teaching/Professional%20Development/Peer%20partnerships/>

Evaluation Criteria Used for this Review

The Peer Partnerships site has been evaluated using criteria that have been previously used as part of the framework for peer review in Australia as part of an Australian Learning and Teaching Council funded peer review project to evaluate the intentions, processes and outcomes of learning (McKenzie & Parker 2010). The criteria were modified from Glassick, Huber & Maeroff's (1997) qualities of scholarly work and are summarised as:

- **Clear Goals:** for the site, for the design of the learning environment, the program and for learning and teaching in the project.
- **Current and Relevant Preparation:** includes consideration of content, processes and responsiveness to the range of dynamic needs
- **Appropriate Methods and their Implementation:** for informing, engaging and creating change
- **Effective Communication:** within the online environment, the associated materials and all other related communication
- **Important Outcomes and Impact:** staff learning and engagement, other intended and unintended outcomes, scholarly presentations or publication.

- **Evaluation and Reflective Critique:** including use of feedback and reflection for improvement embedded in the site, the program and the project.

The review considers the site in regard to each of these criteria, and elements of these, and incorporates some feedback suggestions (in italics).

Scope of Review

Email correspondence, phone calls and a meeting with the project leader established that the focus for this review was the website only, not the program or the project directly. Accordingly, the website has been considered in a standalone manner as far as possible with the project proposal the only project documentation used.

'Peer observation of teaching' (Bell 2005) is a term that has been widely adopted to describe peers observing each other's teaching in face-to-face contexts in a mutually supportive relationship.

Peer observation has been firmly established in Australia for many years, especially in health sciences. Evaluating teaching in disciplinary or departmental groups as part of peer observation initiatives, in the quest for supporting good practice and ongoing 'quality enhancement', is well recognised as an important part of the process of peer review (Menzies et al 2008). NB: In this project and, therefore the report, the term peer observation has been used instead of peer review.

Review

I. Clear Goals - for the site, for the design of the learning environment, the program and for learning and teaching in the project.

- Goals of the program for staff are clear from the website: The goals of this program are to encourage "teaching staff to voluntarily take a critically reflective approach to their teaching practice for developmental purposes... learn about teaching and/or work toward enhancing the quality of their teaching practice". These are clearly stated on the first page and reiterated throughout the site. The role of individual staff in terms of implementing this program, in light of the clearly school-based approach is not as clear. Having the 'Contacts' page makes members of the project team themselves seem very approachable but for those visitors who might be exploring the idea of peer observation for the first time the lack of a clear role for individuals might be off-putting. For example, on the Participation page the emphasis on the school-based success factors could be daunting. ***Moving the Individual Characteristics further up on this page could help staff recognise what they will gain, before they consider all the challenges that might exist for implementation.***
- Goals are related to the needs of staff, the university overall, as well as the aims of the project: The link to the needs of the staff is provided briefly but explicitly on the site and reiterated at key points. Interestingly, the only place that mention is made of the use of the peer observation processes for promotion is in on the 'Participation' page under possible characteristics of participants ("a need to document reflective teaching practice for promotion application/teaching award"). Some of the key twelve dimensions of teaching, provided as suggested prompts for the focus of peer observation sessions, are taken from a project that focused on promotion. Promotion and other applications could also be a strong motivator for staff to initiate Peer Partnerships in their school, with all the positive benefits that flow from that. ***Therefore, it would be useful to explain the goals of the program in terms of promotion clearly on the site.***

- There is a clear rationale for the design of the online environment, including the chosen blend of materials: The clarity of the first page is inviting for new visitors to the site and sections are clearly outlined on the first page as a form of contents page which gives an overview of the sites coverage. However, the purpose of the website and how it links to the program and project is not explicitly covered here, with just a brief statement about funding and stakeholders appearing on the 'Participation' page. ***It would be both interesting and motivating for staff to have a statement about this on the first page.***
Each of the main sections of the site can be accessed from the first page by a single keyword as a link. ***Providing a brief description on the first page of each section and how to use the site would assist visitors to the site to judge whether it was of interest, which sections to look at as well as how they link.*** Internal links within the site would also help visitors understand how the project team conceptualises the links and pathways though the materials on the site (for example, it is not clear how different types of individuals visiting the site should proceed).

II. Current and Relevant - includes consideration of content, processes and responsiveness to the range of dynamic user needs

- Content is current, relevant and informed by research and/or current practice; the programs' approaches to teaching and learning practice are informed by scholarship and awareness of relevant innovations: The site explains that the project is based on "research into best practice in professional development...action learning methodology." The principles of good practice for peer observation and peer review (Bell 2005; Gosling 2010; McKenzie & Parker 2011; Van Note Chism & Chism 2007) are evident in the program and communicated well through the website but particularly in the Principles; Getting started; Finding a focus; and Staff experience clips. The Principles thoughtfully embody best practice for sustainable peer review and observation. ***It would be both interesting and useful to know more about the development of these important foundations for the project from the literature beyond the two sources mentioned on the site. A short section on the Resources page summarising or linking the literature the project team have found useful and relevant (or linking to the Health peer review page which has some links) would situate the program and be helpful for staff to follow up if interested.***
- Program takes previous knowledge and experience of staff into account, and their diversity: Although this is something that is best evaluated at the program level the inclusion in the project team of academic developers with teaching and learning expertise ties the project both conceptually and practically to developments in best practice for professional development in teaching and learning for a range of academics. The site and program will also be of enormous benefit to sessional staff. ***It would be useful to have some explicit recognition and inclusion of sessional staff on the site,*** so that the substantial contribution this important group of staff to the students learning experience can be both supported and enhanced. The site's use of video clips is another important contributor to expanding the range of staff who will find value in the program. However, see comments above regarding how individuals fit into the school-based focus of the program.
- Online site and resources are well structured and updated in a timely way: The structure of the first page of the Peer Partnerships site is clear but the menu on left is organised differently and less logically. ***Making this menu reflect the Contents listed on the first page would be helpful for visitors to the site if possible.*** Other pages on the site are clear.

Program template documents are thoughtful, very well presented with program branding on the 'Toolkit' page. ***There are sections of the Induction workshop plan that need further explanation (links) to stand alone. The Toolkit section could also be expanded to include additional materials (for example, information for students) and to hold all project related***

documents and templates so they are accessible in one place. A unifying 'branding' of all the linked documents attributed to the project and team would be worthwhile. Further differentiation of resources (helpful for the program) versus documents that are part of the program would be useful for staff and other visitors to the site.

Links to other resources are provided on the Resources pages but are limited to two related documents only (Giving and receiving feedback skills; Giving sensitive/critical feedback) and an RMIT school level site 'Principles of good teaching'. **If there are additional relevant teaching resources at the university level and other external resources that fit the programs aims this selection could be expanded.**

Updating of the site appears good but this should be reviewed at least quarterly.

III. Appropriate and Effectively Used Methods and Implementation for informing, engaging and creating change

- Participants are encouraged to see the connections between the parts of the site and the program, as well as how the whole project relates to teaching and learning quality in universities more broadly and will have opportunities to relate what they are learning to broader contexts: The website is a highly appropriate tool for the RMIT community to use to find out about peer observation. The links between this project, its funding and sponsors is clearly set out on the 'Participation' page, which states "the RMIT Peer Partnerships is an LTIF funded project and is endorsed by the Dean Learning and Teaching and the Associate PVC's Learning and Teaching (DSC, Business & SEH)". **It would be useful for staff to know about the links to the project when they first encounter the site so putting this information on the first page is suggested. Links to previous projects in Health Sciences could be highlighted by providing a direct link to the Health Sciences site.**
- Participants are encouraged to engage actively in the program and there is evidence of opportunities to interact, collaborate with and learn from others: Collaboration is a cornerstone of this project and actively explained throughout different sections of the site, along with resources to assist with successful collaborations. The case studies considered in the proposal would make a useful addition to the site but the current video clips and materials are an important tool to support collaboration.
- Evidence that intellectual challenge and support will be balanced for participants: The challenges of the process of peer observation are very clearly outlined in the sites pages, especially in the Participation page (see I above). This is well balanced by the support framework provided for the Peer Partnerships program and on the website in materials (for example, the two resources about feedback). The helpful questions and explanations provided in the video clips and transcripts indirectly address the issues of challenge and support very well.

IV. Effective Communication within the online environment, the associated materials and other related communication

- Explanations are clear and appropriate for onscreen understanding: Communication is clear in the sentences and pages and information is concise. Accessibility of the site may be problematic for those not aware of the activities at RMIT if they do not include this locator in their search terms. Without a direct link or url external browsers and even RMIT staff may have trouble locating the site. A Google search does not retrieve the Peer Partnerships site on the first two screens when using the search terms 'peer observation'; 'peer observation Australia' and 'peer observation of teaching'. The term 'peer observation RMIT' retrieves it as the third item and 'peer observation of teaching RMIT' as third with a related document at two. The Learning and Teaching, Professional Development site with a primary link to the peer partnerships site appears first. Using the terms

'peer review' or 'peer review Australia' also does not retrieve the site, although 'peer review RMIT' brings up the health sciences page: School of Health Sciences, Peer Review of Teaching in Health Sciences at:

<http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse/Our%20Organisation/Science%20Engineering%20and%20Health/Schools/Health%20Sciences/Staff%20Intranet/Learning%20and%20Teaching/PRoT/?QRY=environment>

By including the additional term 'peer review' in key areas of the site (for example, first few sentences of first page) browsers interested in this area who are using related search terms would also be directed to the site.

- Participant interest and engagement is encouraged: The site uses a simple structure, and highlights 'Getting started' and 'Staff experiences' sections on the first page to capture the interest of staff. The use of the mountain graphics to explain the iterative nature of peer observation and review works well too. Access to the site using an iPad was excellent so browsing or referring to the site on the move would be easy.
- Communication is appropriate and responsive to staff understanding and ideas: The video clip transcripts provide key accessibility for some groups and are a useful resource for everyone using the site. They provide useful short topics for staff to engage with for a few minutes at a time and excellent insight into the process of peer observation in this program. ***Labelling each clip with their keywords (for example, 'Giving advice') instead of question number would make them easier to identify, as the questions do not always appear on the screen. It would also be useful to have access to the whole interview clip for staff who would like to watch it in one sitting.***
- Site communicates program's encouragement of interaction with others and discussion to compare, develop and challenge ideas: This is well communicated (see III above). The stage based templates documents work well to frame interactions and are cohesively branded and linked to the program.
- There is clear guidance about the structure of the online resources and the choices that are available, as well as the other resources that are part of the program: Current navigation via breadcrumbs takes you off the site to Learning and Teaching/ Professional Development. Internal communication in pages emphasises clarity and is very concise which is ideal in an online environment. However, at some points the condensed nature of the information can make it hard to know how each section of the page links. For example, on the 'Principles' page there is a very useful table with a column headed 'RMIT peer partnerships' that seems to list their benefits (although this is not explicit), with another column linking these to adult learning. However, the following section is an elaboration of each item in the first column but is not explicitly connected. ***Providing a hyperlink, explanatory or title link to the table would help browsers and mean visitors to the site would not have to check back to work out how the information fits together. Matching this format for all documents and materials linked to the program and site would be helpful.***
- There is evidence of effective co-ordination and communication between staff involved in leading the program: This is signalled by the Contacts page and the success of the program the site is supporting.

V. Important Outcomes and Impact: staff learning and engagement, other intended and unintended outcomes, scholarly presentations or publication

Participant Outcomes:

- Staff have engaged in the website and have made enquiries about participating in the program: There is evidence on the Peer Review of Teaching in Health Sciences site of past successes of this program. Data about staff participation in the current program and the role of the website in this was not available so is not within the scope of this review in the revised timeframe. **The project**

team have reported that many schools within RMIT have adopted the program but since the site has become available to staff it is not clear what the impact has been. It would be helpful to the project team to establish this for future development of the program and site.

Other outcomes:

- Evidence that learning innovations are effective in achieving their goals and that innovations or methods have been adapted and used by colleagues and others: The spread of this program of peer review and peer observation across RMIT is testament to the adoption of this very well contextualised innovation by a large number of colleagues. The streamlined stages of the Peer Partnerships process for staff since the 2009 -2010 projects are important developments and along with the principles provide a strong foundation and resources peer observaton. Presentations of scholarly practice have been given to peers: This is an ongoing part of the process of engaging schools in the program across the university.
- Scholarly publications have been produced and recognised by peers: Publications as a result of the project but not specifically the website include Chester et al 2011.

VI. Reflection, review and improvement, including embedding use of feedback and reflection for improvement in the site, the program and the project.

- The project team has learned from staff and adapted the site, program and materials in response, during the current project and beyond; project Evaluation has been informed by a variety of sources such as staff feedback, staff learning, peers and relevant literature: The site was developed as a result of the project team considering their experiences of implementing the Peer Partnerships program from 2009 - 2011 across several schools. Some of the sources of feedback used by the team as they have developed this important program are unstated. ***Sources of feedback could usefully be discussed by the project team and included in the website when they have had an opportunity to collect and review feedback from staff utilising the site.***
- Reflection, feedback and evaluation have been acted by the project team in order to improve the program and outcomes for participants: This program is explicitly structured around iterative processes of reflecting upon feedback, setting goals, implementation and evaluation and this is evident in the key pages of the website (see for example, 'Getting started' page). ***Subtitling (or renaming) this page to highlight its central role in the Peer Partnerships process should be considered.*** The project team utilise this process themselves for ongoing program improvement and have requested the current Evaluation Report as part of their process of project evaluation.

Concluding Comments

The Peer Partnerships site is an important resource for teaching and learning at RMIT. It suggests, informs and promotes improvements to the quality of teaching and learning though iterative, collegial partnerships and thoughtful reflection and change. It also represent an important evolution of the peer review and peer observation program at RMIT since 2009 for ongoing professional quality in teaching and learning and professional development for staff. With the few minor changes noted above, and ongoing review and development, this site will continue to be a key resource for the Peer Partnerships project and a successful strategy for the university for many years to come. It will enable more staff to encounter and implement an ongoing process of peer observation and improvement of learning and teaching and will have a lasting impact on student's experiences of learning at RMIT.

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