A REVISED PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING PROTOCOL:
A CASE STUDY AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

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PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING

• An important instrument for the evaluation of teaching
• Integrated with important human resource management and summative assessment processes (e.g. P&T, teaching awards, re-appointment etc)
• Allows for greater data triangulation and objectivity in determining a faculty member’s teaching performance
• Represents inputs from the perspective of the teachers
• Encourages peer collaboration and self-reflection in teaching
ISSUES WITH PRT

PRT process does not always deliver the intended outcomes (Chism, 2007; Harris, Farrell, Bell, Devlin, & James, 2008; Hubball & Clarke, 2011). In particular, it had not met the objective of distinguishing between average and excellent teachers for various purposes.

In the context of NUS, the quantitative scores on PRT have tended to be inflated, usually with scores of 4 and above (on a scale of 5); and the qualitative comments were short and lacking insight. (Wee, Wong, & Yong, 2008)

Kong (2002) attributes these problems to the lack of honesty among reviewers and the lack of anonymity in the review process.

Pan and Ip (2006) saw the problem as being rooted in a lack of consistency in review standards and criteria, lack of motivation among reviewers, and lack of training in review skills and reporting.
NUS CONTEXT

2001: Peer Review of Teaching (PRT) implemented at NUS

2010 (March): NUS Teaching Academy (NUSTA) was tasked to review the PRT protocol; a Peer Review subcommittee was formed

2012 (February): Submission of report to Provost Office (PVO)

2012 (March - December): Road shows and publicity

2013 (January - June): An implementation task force was formed

2013 (August): Revised PRT system implemented
KEY CHANGES

Changes to the PRT Procedure

• Peer reviewers are expected to have attended workshops designed and conducted by CDTL to prepare reviewers and to enhance the quality of PRT reports.

• Though peer reviewers are encouraged to observe the reviewee at the same teaching sessions wherever possible and to confer about the review results, they are to fill out individual and separate reports to allow for more independent and objective assessments.

• Peer reviewers are strongly encouraged to hold pre-observation meetings with reviewees for an overview of their teaching as well as post-observation meetings to provide feedback.

• Deans and Heads should ensure that the quality of the reports is good. Inadequate reports should be returned for rewriting.
KEY CHANGES

Changes to the PRT report form

• An online peer review report system has been set up for the reviewers to submit their reports electronically
• Evaluation items in the PRT report have been reorganized and reformulated. Some items have been replaced or deleted.
• Quantitative scores have been totally removed. Reviewers are expected to provide adequate qualitative comments in the report.
• Reference notes to explain selected evaluation items have been drafted and added to the form as an appendix to aid reviewers.
ITEMS IN PRT REPORT

A. Classroom Teaching

1. Preparation for, organization and effectiveness of the classroom activity in achieving the learning objectives.
2. Quality of faculty member’s exposition and delivery
3. Faculty member’s knowledge of the subject matter in relation to the content and objectives of the module
4. Degree of student engagement facilitated by the faculty member within the constraints of the class size
5. Faculty member’s ability to show the relevance of the day’s topic, its relation to other topics within or outside of the module
6. Faculty member’s ability to encourage students’ thinking
ITEMS IN PRT REPORT

B. Teaching and Assessment Materials

1. Currency and relevance of the teaching materials (textbooks, readings, cases etc.) for the target learning objectives
2. Emphasis on application of knowledge as well as independent thinking and learning in the teaching materials
3. Usefulness of information technology (IVLE, Internet, software, videos, animations etc.), if applicable
4. Appropriateness of the continual assessment tasks (essays, tutorials, projects, practical exercises, etc.) and/or final examinations in achieving the learning objectives
5. Effectiveness of the continual assessment tasks and/or final examination in differentiating students with differing accomplishments
6. Appropriateness of the assessment tasks in challenging the students to think independently and to apply knowledge effectively
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- Improving PRT protocol
- Planning/revision
- Implementation
- Feedback/analysis
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- To examine the extent to which the revised peer review system is able to provide a reliable and insightful instrument for the assessment of teaching

Specifically, we want to know how the revised system has impacted the key stakeholders:

- whether the reviewers provide longer comments and more elaborate feedback on reviewee’s teaching
- whether the end users find the reports useful in differentiating the reviewees’ quality of teaching
- whether the reviewees find the reports useful for improving their teaching
RESEARCH DESIGN

Methodology - Action Research  Ref: G. Cousin (2009)

Data Collection

- completed peer review reports
  - frequency of peer reviews conducted by departments;
  - frequency of accepted/rejected review reports by departments;
  - quality of the reviewers’ comments
  - consistency of internal and external reviewers’ comments
  - Heads and Deans’ comments
  - Reviewees’ responses to reviewers’ comments
- focus group interviews
- online surveys on stakeholders
PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Areas for Improvements

- Reduce the number of items in PRT report
- Align module folders with the items in PRT report
- Provide a section for formative comments
- Allow external reviewers to comment only on pedagogical issues
- Provide guidance for HOD’s role in the process
- Promote discussion between reviewers
PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Further investigation

- Institutional supports for PRT
- Training for peer reviewers
- Incentivise peer reviewers
- Formative PRT
REFERENCES


• Harris, K., Farrell, K., Bell, M., Devlin, M. & James, R. (2008). *Peer review of teaching in Australian higher education: A handbook to support institutions in developing and embedding effective policies and practices*. Sydney, Australia: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.


