

Title: **Perceptions and use of peer observation of teaching in a 'HE in FE' context**

Presenter: **Kay Dutton**
University of Chester

Abstract:

This proposal details research undertaken in my role as an Academic Development Adviser into learning and teaching, and specifically in the use of peer observation of teaching (POT) as a tool for professional and educational development within a 'HE in FE' context. Peer observation of teaching is a generally accepted and valued method used for developing teaching and learning in universities. My research aims to understand the value of the use of peer observation in a HE in FE context. Initial analysis has found that FE colleges now appear to recognise the need for and value in utilising different approaches for HE teaching observations in comparison to those used for FE.

SEDA Values

Indicate which SEDA Values may be relevant to your proposal:

An understanding of how people learn		Scholarship, professionalism and ethical practice	√
Working and developing learning communities		Working effectively with diversity and promoting inclusivity	
Continuing reflection on professional practice	√	Developing people and processes	√

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Gain insight into the perceptions and use of peer observation of teaching within an 'HE in FE' context as reported by participants in a recent study;
- Consider the implications for academic development requirements for staff delivering and managing HE provision in FE colleges

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

This paper will report on findings from a recent study which explored the perceptions and use of peer observation of teaching (POT), within a Higher Education in Further Education ('HE in FE') context. The 'research problem' arose from my experience providing advice to staff on

the use of POT to develop their practice, and from reflecting on my own experience of POT whilst working in an HE in FE context.

Over the last decade POT has become established practice in HE, and is undertaken with the aim of enhancing teaching quality through reflective practice (Shortland, 2004). Although POT also takes place for staff delivering HE provision in FE colleges, there is limited literature evaluating the nature or purpose of this. Anecdotal evidence, and the literature that is available, suggests that FE colleges do not differentiate between the purpose and practice of POT for HE and FE teaching observations. In the few studies reported POT undertaken for taught HE sessions tend to be for evaluative and judgmental purposes, rather than for the development and enhancement of teaching and learning (Gray, 2010; Thwaites, 2011).

The research strategy for this work consisted of an exploratory case study of four FE colleges' approach to POT in their HE work. Data was collected from the colleges through an initial questionnaire to HE teaching staff and HE managers, which was then followed by a second phase of data collection consisting of semi-structured interviews.

Preliminary findings from the first phase of data collection support existing thinking that observation processes used are the same for HE as for FE, with many HE teaching observations being graded using Ofsted criteria. Findings also suggest that HE teachers do not feel that this FE observation approach is relevant to their HE teaching. Where there is a distinction between the two processes, POT for HE seems to be used as a more informal process.

This paper will discuss the main findings of the research and the implications of this for staff development in a HE in FE context.

Session Activities

The session will consist of an overview of the research, including a presentation of the research findings and discussion of implications for practice. Delegates with experience of supporting development for HE in FE will be invited to share their experiences in the light of the findings from this study. Indicative questions include:

"What have you learned from your experiences of HE teaching observations in FE colleges?"
"Do you perceive there to be a need for a distinct framework or process for observing HE in FE colleges?"

References

Gray, C. 2010. "I am not a number" - ascribing professional capability through graded observations for HE in FE staff. Paper presented to SRHE Conference, 2010.

Shortland, S. 2004. Peer observation: A tool for staff development or compliance? *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, **28**(2), 219-228.

Thwaites, J. 2011. HE in FE peer review research: to develop a lecturer-directed quality enhancement framework that also meets the needs of managerial FE quality assurance. Available from:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/heinfe/OTL_Petroc_peer_review_HEinFE_final_oct_2011. HELP CeTL, University of Plymouth.