Cronfa - Swansea University Open Access Repository

_____

This is an author produced version of a paper published in:
Libraries for Nursing Bulletin

Cronfa URL for this paper:

_____

Paper:

Dalziel, K., Storey, S., Boucher, C. & Hall, C. (2008). A positive peer review experience. _Libraries for Nursing Bulletin,_ _28_(2), 5-10.

_____

A positive peer review experience
Clare Boucher: Deputy Subject Librarian, School of Health Science
Katrina Dalziel: Deputy Subject Librarian, School of Medicine
Chris Hall: E-Learning Support Officer
Stephen Storey: Deputy Subject Librarian, School of Health Science

Introduction
Teaching Information Literacy skills to nursing students now constitutes an ever increasing amount of time for many health librarians. For those who have been teaching for years, it is easy to become stale. For those who are new to teaching, it can be very difficult to judge your own effectiveness. And, for all but the lucky few, there is a feeling that we weren't educated to be teachers, so how can we tell if we are doing okay. The Health Team Librarians at Swansea University found themselves very much in this position and decided to re-assess their teaching by using a process of Peer Review.

What is peer review?
The University of Kansas define peer review as "an assessment of an instructor's effectiveness by another library staff member who is also involved in providing library instruction" (University of Kansas, 2008, p. 2).

Health Team & Peer Review
We had already been looking at the IL instruction provided to undergraduate pre-registration nursing students. The six classes currently delivered are: Library induction session, CINAHL, ASSIA & BNI, Web-skills, PubMed and Cochrane. The structure of the sessions had been a fairly passive experience for the students, with plenty of 'hands-on' practice, but still a basic 'show and tell' feel. By introducing more interaction, we not only hoped to make the sessions more lively, but also to foster deeper learning by encouraging students to think about what they were doing.

We set to and revised the brief teaching notes we had in place, creating more detailed lesson plans which could be followed by any member of the team. We added more opportunities for interaction in the classes by including more questions and answers, group work and by using an Audience Response System (clickers) in class.

While we felt the changes put in place did indeed improve the class, we decided that peer review of the sessions by a colleague would help us identify the strengths and weaknesses in our new lesson plans and in our teaching.

Method:
The first step was to find a reviewer. We had previously worked with Chris Hall, E-learning Support Officer, on other projects. He is a qualified teacher and was willing to participate. The peer review of the Health Team would be a pilot project, which if successful, would be rolled out across the other subject teams in the library.

Next, we looked at possible peer review feedback forms that we could adapt to suit our needs. We didn't want one that was too prescriptive, but on the other hand we did want one that would give us some sort of guide as to what to look out for. The team met with Chris and we agreed together on what we wanted to get out of the experience, discussed why we wanted to do a peer review exercise, and settled on the design of a feedback form for the process

Each person being reviewed filled in the first part of the review form before the class. This included details of what the session was about and an indication of particular aspects that the reviewer might focus on. For example, we asked for feedback on the interactive aspects that we had introduced. Individuals also asked for feedback on aspects of their teaching, such as, "were my explanations clear" or "could I be clearly heard at the back of the room". The form was then sent to the reviewer, along with a lesson plan for the session. The observed sessions that took place in January-February 2008 were; PubMed, CINAHL, and Web-skills.

During the class, Chris sat at the back of the room, observing and taking notes. After the class, the teacher had to fill in part of the review form in which they reflected on how they felt the session had gone.

At the review meeting, held the day after the session, teacher and reviewer discussed how the session went. Chris provided feedback on what went well, commenting on good practice or good ideas, and suggesting further ideas to improve the class or make it more interesting.

Results:

Chris was able to suggest several ideas that we will try to incorporate in future teaching. In particular, he made us think of simple ways to help make our teaching more visual and interactive.

For example in the web-skills class he suggested the following;

- Could you elicit more from them about how they use search engines – do they have any hints and tips to share?

- I liked the 'who, what, where, when' for websites. Could you get the learners to create the rules? From pairs and then build to a group list?

Of the PubMed session:
- Much of the delivery, whilst good, was aural. Could some more visual elements be added to explanations?

Of the CINAHL session:
- Pointing at the screen with your hands, rather than just the mouse, was good. This made it easier for students to see where they needed to be on screen. Would using the interactive nature of the whiteboard be good here?

- As CINAHL is the first database shown to students would some introduction to searching and why using databases is a good idea be useful at the beginning?

Peer reviewer's thoughts

I really enjoyed the process and would gladly do it again but that's perhaps easier for me to say as all I had to do was sit there and watch. Well, not quite but I wasn't the one having my teaching reviewed. To counteract this 'fear of being reviewed' we felt that it was important that both the teacher and reviewer see the reviewer as a peer and not an assessor. I felt it was key to the success as even though we established this (and I think I mentioned that I was 'only a peer' every time we met) the process still made those teaching the sessions nervous. Also, being a 'non-librarian' I was something of an interloper, which could have

been an issue. However, the main focus of the review process was on the teaching & learning that was taking place in the sessions, so the fact that I didn't have in depth subject knowledge was not a major issue. In fact it perhaps made focusing on the learners' experience easier.

So, as a 'non-librarian peer' the main things I was looking for were 'what's good in the session?' and 'what could there be more of?' I also wanted to see how the learners interacted with the teacher and with each other. In order to answer these questions I felt that it was important to see the whole session to get the full view of the group were trying to achieve, rather than to just get a 20 minute or so overview as can often be the case.

At the outset I felt that it was crucial that the whole process was a dialogue and that it was driven by the teachers. We also felt that we should all design the process together before we started rather than one person handing out a predefined way of working. Furthermore, it was essential that the teacher should lead the dialogue at each stage. The post-session meeting started with the reflections of the teacher on the session, which then shaped the dialogue that followed. The documents were important in helping with this. Although they may make the process seem a bit formal and bureaucratic, they actually made the process much smoother. The pre-session form helped drive the meeting before the session, the lesson plan allowed the reviewer to follow in the session and the post-session form helped both reviewer and reviewee reflect on the session and made the debriefing more productive. The dialogue based reflective approach enabled us to create a situation where both the reviewer and the teacher can learn though the process. Additionally, one of the main reasons for the success we had was that we had a team that worked together and were willing to learn from each others experiences.

Overall, from a reviewer's perspective, I've gained a great deal from the process and, as an added bonus, I've also improved my own search strategies.

Conclusion
Doing peer review encouraged the team to think about the content and format of sessions. In part this came through writing the lesson plans, but also through the feedback sessions. While each team member had been nervous in the run up to the peer review we agreed that once the session had started we had all forgotten that Chris was there! The anticipation of the event was much worse than the experience itself and we feel the quality of the IL sessions has been much improved for the students, and is now more fun for the participants and librarians. The result of the process has been to re-invigorate our teaching methods and re-affirm our faith in ourselves as teachers.

The Health Team have since further developed the sessions on the basis of suggestions and comments from the reviewer.

The completed review forms from the pilot have been made available to all subject teams and the Health Team have presented on the experience to the LIS Teaching Group to inform future peer review of Information Literacy sessions in Swansea University Library.

Tips
Share your teaching with a colleague – just watching someone else will give you new insights into teaching. It will also allow you both to reflect on how well the session went.

Make it clear to the reviewer if there are any particular aspects of the session on which you want feedback. Comments requested by us included:

i)   Are we explaining concepts clearly at 'correct' level?

ii)   Are we keeping students engaged in the process?

Meet the reviewer the following day, or as soon as possible, to discuss the feedback.

The aim is to improve information literacy teaching, not to criticise. Therefore, keep peer review a relaxed and positive experience.

Reference

University of Kansas. Task Force on Peer Review of Instruction (2005) *Peer review of instruction: report of the task force.* Available at:
http://www.lib.ku.edu/instruction/lib/peerreview/report.pdf (Accessed: 9th April 2008)