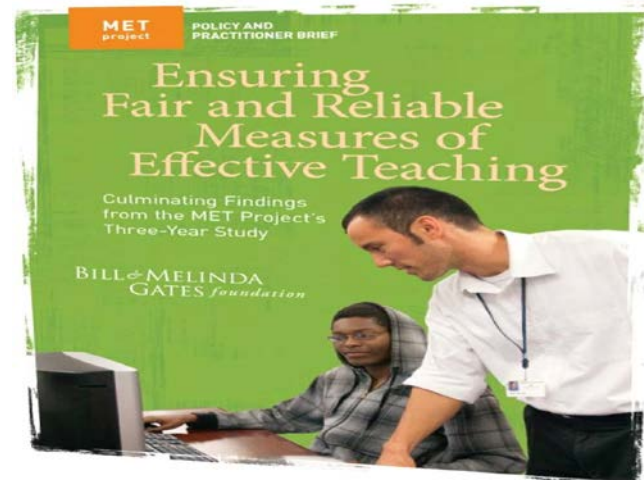


Evaluating and improving university teaching quality: exploring peer review in England and New Zealand

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Global Policy Context

- * Global interest in improving education systems > market focus on measuring education performance in global league tables such as PISA (OECD)
- * Growing importance of 'quality' of teaching, teacher evaluation & teacher effectiveness e.g. MET project in USA

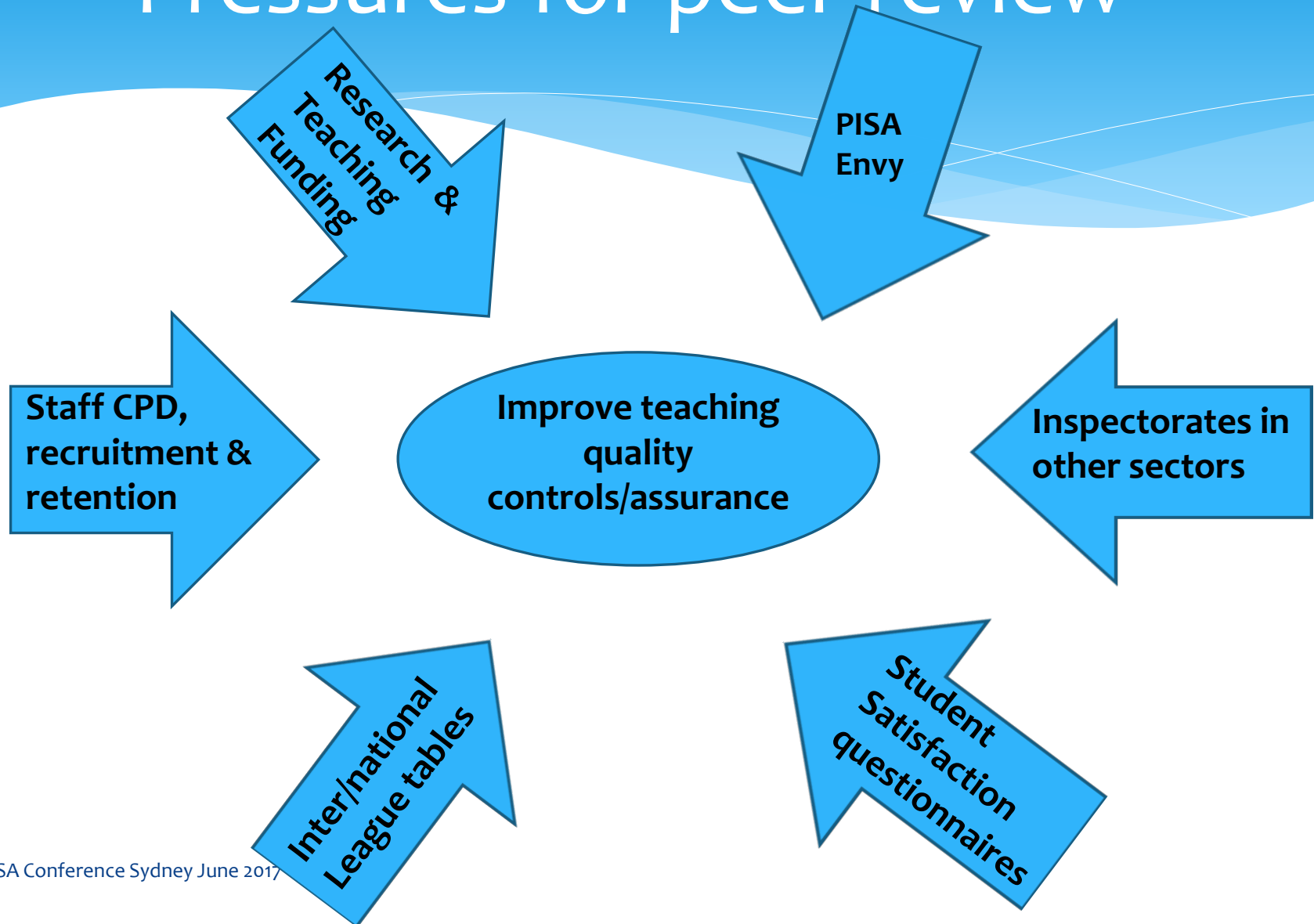


Peer Review Context

- * UK, USA and elsewhere, high quality **research** has long been regarded as the **gold standard** for recognising and rewarding **academic excellence**.
- * More recently the quality of **teaching** is under scrutiny; HEIs are required to justify measures taken to evaluate and improve it.



Pressures for peer-review



HEA UK Framework

- * Establishing effective organisational policies and/or strategies for supporting and promoting others (e.g. through mentoring, coaching) in delivering high quality teaching and support for learning (p7).

Associate Fellow (Descriptor 1)

You will [...] demonstrate an understanding of:

- *observation of practice (etc)*

Through...

- feedback to colleagues during teaching observations...

Including:

- **inviting observation and feedback** on your own practice (p8 ‘Dimensions’)

Peer review and teaching in HE

Why?

...peer-review plays a **major role in evaluating and improving the quality of teaching in HEIs**. However, unlike its role in assessing the quality of research, peer-review of teaching remains a much **more random and undeveloped area, with practices either completely absent or differing markedly within and across institutions/countries...**

How?

- * via a physical presence in real-time;
- * a recorded session and/or
- * an a/synchronous observation (of a virtual classroom)....



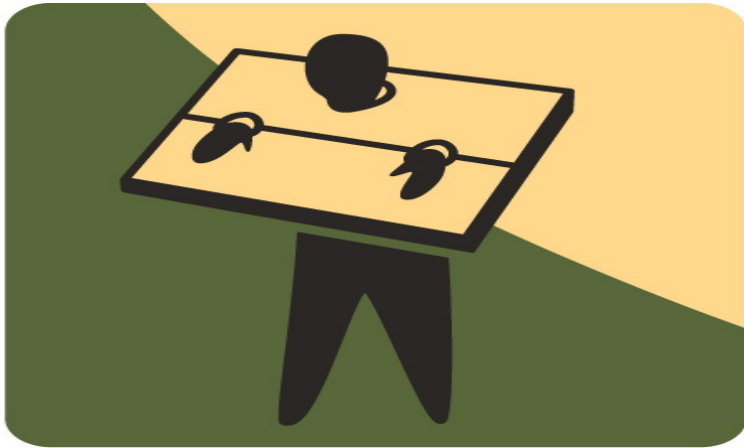
Hence peer review can...

- * Engage staff in a developmental, reflective approach to course development. Delivery and assessment **practice encourages discussion about individual's teaching philosophies**. The focus of most academic literature in this area is the intrinsic value of reflection for improved pedagogy, not the micro-level aspects of change *per se*.
- * **So...**
- * **Peer-review processes are crucial to ensuring workforce capacity, capability and working patterns are aligned with change and innovation.**

HERDSA Fellowship

- * **Criterion 4: The wider departmental/institutional/community context for learning is recognised and built upon in improving educational practice...**
- * **Criterion 6: Critical reflection to improve educational practice takes place in the light of evidence obtained from different types of evaluation**

Obstacles to Effective Use of Observation



Challenges of Peer Observation in HE

- * **Emotional Labour** of teaching: explicit/hidden ?

(Q. What is or isn't **measurable** about our teaching/learning ?)

- * **Power Relationships** (inc. *Tall Poppy Syndrome*)

- * **Objectives/Conflicts of interest:** CPD, promotion, other...

- * **Sector hierarchy**

(over schools/colleges inspection via ERO/Ofsted etc)



“Under the radar...”

- * “Teaching feedback is returned to the individual teacher, **and may be used for promotion purposes.**”
- * “there is a **small group** of practitioners here who engage in peer-obs, but to be honest, it’s all **under the radar**”
- * “**It’s up to individuals** if they want to engage in observation for reflection, it’s a personal thing.’

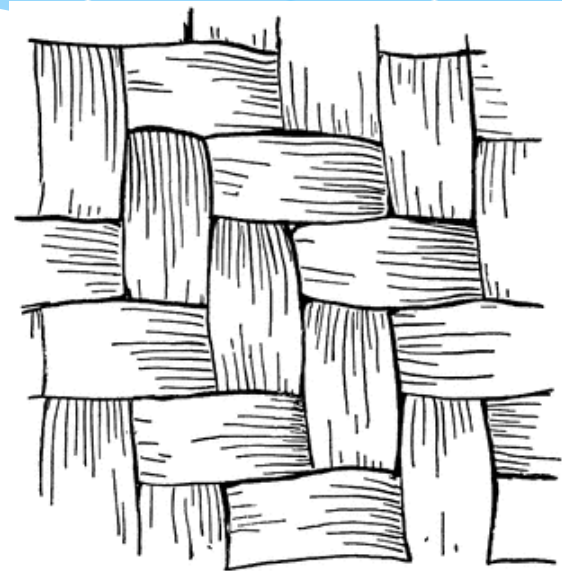


Value of peer observation

The best model has to be one based on a **genuine spirit of enquiry and research**. To explore what's happening in that **messy business of learning**, and to be a starting point for professional discussion and debate. This means that both people involved in the discussion - teacher and observer need to be **equal partners* in the process**, both working to improve things for teachers and learners. This means sharing a common purpose - why are we doing this and what do we both need to get out of it? (Vera, [UCU Project 2013](#))

Māori Concept of Ako

- * “Creative processes awaken our senses to new possibilities; an interpretive dance between creator, creation and audience (Tharp, 2007). Ultimately, this is what learning offers; symbolised in Māori philosophy **ako**. The student/teacher [or teacher/teacher] relationship is **not hierarchical, but symbiotic and spontaneously playful.**”



Value of peer observation

*‘I found this approach so useful as the discussion, after the observation, was **almost like I was watching a video recording of my lesson**. We were able to take sections of the lesson where I had made a pedagogical decision; **intuitively or deliberately, and then unpick it to discuss the impact** of my decision on the students learning experience as well as allowing me the opportunity to **reflect on my decisions** which may impact on my future planning and delivery’ (Clair – Lecturer in Primary Education)*

The value of peer observation

This was about “observing” – not telling me where I went wrong and how I could make it better. My observer’s message was definitely more about us being equal professionals and not about one of us being better than the other.’ (Chris – Lecturer in Drama)

‘As someone who has often been paralysed by fear about how lesson observations might go, this felt much calmer, more productive and non-threatening, it was a collaborative and supportive approach to observation. As an observee, I felt very much part of the process, rather than feeling it was something that was being done to me.’ (Mary – Lecturer in Mathematics)

Conclusions

- * **Paradox** of (observed/observing) ‘good’ teaching practice being seen as ‘deviant’. (only minority voluntarily engage with it: *under the radar*)
- * How can we incorporate valuable **cultural contexts** ?
- * How can we **open-up more dialogue** about peer-review observations of teaching and learning in HE?
- * Where/how will peer-review of learning **develop** in teaching quality systems?
- * Where does peer-review **fit within Fellowship** schemes/professional recognition?

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