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Using digital peer observation to balance professional development and performance evaluation

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This paper reports on how our Digital Peer Observation Process was developed; it describes the small scale pilot project, analyses feedback from the participants and manager, and speculates about further refinements to the process and possible future applications. The benefits of peer observation include evaluating expectations and beliefs, increasing confidence and collegiality, and improving pedagogy (Brockbank & McGill, 2006; Chester, 2012). Limitations included risk of self-deception and a lack of action following reflection (Brookfield, 1995; Carroll, 2009), time commitments (Chester, 2012; Hampton et al. 2004; Malthus, 2013) and the potential impact of having an observer in the consultation room. While acknowledging these benefits and limitations, the Navitas Academic Language and Learning (ALL) team had some additional concerns with the traditional peer observation process. These concerns included participants' geographical distance, variations in work schedules, and balancing requirements for performance evaluation and low-cost professional development.

During the pilot project, various ALL services were recorded via video conferencing or screen capture software, then observed using reflection guidelines developed by the team. The new digital process had three main benefits: team collegiality, clarity of the team's vision and identity, and a balance of professional development and performance evaluation. In the pilot project, three challenges emerged from staff feedback: time commitment, misunderstanding of the process and materials, and concerns around giving colleagues 'negative feedback'. In subsequent iterations, there is potential to explore further uses of technology and data in other contexts. The aim of this pilot project was to examine if digital tools and explicit processes could effectively balance teacher professional development using critical reflection and performance review for our national ALL team.

Key Words: digital, peer observation, self-reflection, critical reflection, technology, ALL values, professional development, performance evaluation

1. Introduction

It is important to critically reflect as an individual, with peers and as a team to enable continual, accountable professional growth (Brookfield, 1995; Kato, 2012). Bambino (2002) states that "the word is *critical* because it challenges educators to improve their teaching practice and to bring about the changes that schools need, but the process is neither negative nor threatening" (p. 27).

This self-reflection and peer observation is particularly powerful when engaged in as a team, and when rooted in shared values and understandings of best practice (Bambino, 2002; Brookfield, 1995). In addition, researchers have found that professional development is most effective when it is driven by participants' prior knowledge and real-life experiences, and when it addresses their self-selected needs (Brockbank & McGill, 2006; Girvan, Conneely, & Tangney, 2016; Hampton, Rhodes, & Stokes, 2004; Luneta, 2012). Furthermore, Chester (2012) cites a variety of worthwhile consequences for individuals who take part in peer observation, including emotional (confidence and collegiality) and pedagogical (new methods and knowledge) benefits. Various researchers (Bambino, 2002; Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000) use the term *critical friends group.* For example, Bambino (2002) states that the "process acknowledges the complexity of teaching and provides structures for teachers to improve their teaching by giving and receiving feedback" (p. 25), thus building an Academic Language and Learning (ALL) team's collective knowledge. Hargreaves (2003) argues that this collective knowledge should be shared within organisations to overcome challenges and build collegiality.

In addition to the benefits for teams, there is much research about the benefits of peer observation as reflection-based professional development for teachers (Brookfield, 1995; Chester, 2012). For example, Malthus (2013) reasons that self-reflection can "contribute to our ongoing professional development and strengthen discussion of our work with other academic colleagues" (p. 67). She also states that, importantly, "it may also be of value given the current lack of structured and specific training for one-to-one teaching" (p. 67). Furthermore, Carroll's (2009) discussion of levels of reflection and the reflection process informed the process we developed. He describes three stages of reflection: 'preparing for reflection', 'doing reflection' and 'transfer of reflective knowing into action' (pp. 44-45). As Girvan et al. (2016) points out, without structures in place these positive outcomes may be diminished. Therefore, there is a need to further examine the structures and mechanisms of critical reflection. For instance, Girvan et al. (2016) suggest that an effective structure could entail a discussion with peers based on prompts for refection that link to improvements in practice. Hence, critical reflection is a way of equipping ALL advisors and teams with tools and techniques to improve their work with students.

On the other hand, some traditional methods of self-reflection have been criticised by scholars. Methods such as journal writing can be "slow and cumbersome" (Malthus, 2013, p.66) along with the inherent risk of self-deception and a lack of action following the reflection. Brookfield (1995) and Carroll (2009) identify similar issues with self-reflection isolated from critical dialogue. For instance, Carroll (2009) states that when practitioners do not engage in effective reflection they are "condemned to repeat actions... and to live out received wisdom and learning" (p. 42). Thus, ALL teams, who want to use self-reflection as a means of improving and broadening their practice, need to embed critical and professional discourse paired with actionable steps into their processes.

While acknowledging these benefits and limitations, the Navitas ALL team had some additional concerns with the traditional peer observation process. These concerns included participants being located in different states, having variations in scheduled work hours or days, needing to satisfy management's requirements for annual performance evaluation and wanting low-cost professional development. Although many ALL teams would share similar circumstances, we found few articles about methods of overcoming them. One particularly insightful article about mentoring and reflective dialogue at a distance is Brockbank and McGill (2006), which uses the term 'e-mentoring' and looked at using email as a reflective tool. Brockbank and McGill's (2006) model fails to fully meet our needs as it uses limited and outdated technology. In addition, The British Council's (2012) *A Guide to Continuing Professional Development – Peer observations* mentions recorded observations, but suggests merely watching the recording later, alone or with a colleague.

Thus, we revised existing models to create our Peer Observation Process to take advantage of available technology, yet maintain the primary benefits of previous models. Through the inclusion of Zoom online conferencing software, Jing audio and screen capture software, and telecommunications, we created a process that could be done synchronously or asynchronously with interstate team members. This technology was already used by team, therefore creating no additional financial or training commitments. We undertook action research to develop our Peer Observation Process that met the Navitas ALL team's needs for effective professional development and performance review. Interestingly, McIntosh (2010) discusses how reflection and action research are similar. He also points out that there are different forms of action research, including participatory research which blurs the lines between researcher and subject, as was the case here. This paper reflects on various peer observation models and how our digital version was developed; it describes the small-scale pilot project, analyses feedback from the participants and manager, and speculates about future refinements to the process, next steps and possible further applications.

2. Background

The initial idea for implementing a peer observation process in the Navitas ALL team came from management. It was intended to be a process of reflection and part of annual performance evaluation. Initially, team members expressed concerns about the power imbalance of being observed by a manager or a peer who would report a critique of their work to management. It was perceived that this vulnerability could lead advisors to choose student consultations that would be favourable to positive performance evaluation, leading to inauthentic feedback and diminished professional growth. We saw the potential for digital peer observation to address the concerns and criteria of both parties.

Therefore, we began to investigate how other institutions and ALL teams had implemented peer observation. The British Council (2012) offers *A Guide to Continuing Professional Development – Peer observations* with a variety of methods that teachers could use the observe each other, including pop-in classroom visits, unobserved observations, a series of observations, recorded observations and team teaching. Similarly, Chester (2012) evaluates the use of peer partnerships for professional development at an Australian university. Kato investigates (2012) "intentionally structured reflective dialogue with a colleague or senior advisor as part of the continuing PD program" (p. 78). Likewise, Girvan et al. (2016) focus on experiential learning through teachers observing their peers implementing new pedagogical approaches in the classroom coupled with self-reflection and interviews for professional development. Hamilton (2012) examines peer-to-peer observations between teachers for professional development. In the Navitas context, Hvall (2016) and Walters (2016) explore peer observation for professional development through face-to-face observations with teams of teachers across various Navitas schools.

In contrast, Berry et al. (2012) discuss the use of peer observation for accountability, professional development and staff training purposes at the University of Canberra. Similarly, McMahon, Barrett, and O'Neill (2007) examine various models for third-party observations, some with the focus on evaluation and some that use peer review for teacher development. This literature review showed that many teams and organisations use peer observation for professional development; a few use it for performance review and accountability; and none that we found integrated digital technology to allow geographically diverse teams to participate equitably. It seemed to us that by our Australia-wide team could participate in digital peer observation for professional development and performance evaluation.

In order to do this, boundaries would need to be put in place to protect the critical self-reflection and professional discourse from judgements about performance. We reconciled this need for confidential, open and honest self-reflection with management's desire for performance evaluation in two ways. Firstly, we made participation (or not) in the Peer Observation Process the only

metric delivered to management. This meant that, as long as team members participated, that key performance indicator would be considered met. Secondly, an implicit requirement was that all data belonged to the person being observed, who then chose whether to share or quote from it during the final showcase of learning and in their annual review process with management. Due to the team's geographical distance, it was decided that all observations would be viewed as recordings, even when partners were based in the same city.

3. Stages of development

When we began the pilot project, there were six ALL staff members in three states, overseen by a national manager. After the first cycle, an anonymous team SWOT analysis was compiled by the manager and discussed in a team meeting on video conferencing software. Two staff members left during the second cycle of the pilot project. Then two new members joined the team and undertook the Peer Observation Process in the first few weeks of employment; we called this the third cycle. After this third cycle, the six final participants and one team member, who had left, completed an anonymous online survey about their impressions before, during and after the cycles they took part in. The questions in this survey were derived from a number of sources: the original aims of the Peer Observation Process of professional development and performance review, the themes of two conferences where this project was going to be presented, and from concerns raised in the SWOT after the first cycle.

In developing the Peer Observation Process, we went through a number of steps (see Figure 1) over two cycles. The first step undertaken in implementing Peer Observation with the Navitas ALL team was discussing the team's values and goals to establish a clear collective identity. This shared values exercise can be top-down or collaborative. Similar to Berry, Collins, Copeman, Harper, Li, & Prentice (2012), we did a mix of both: the national manager presented a draft document of values, goals and processes, then team members each reflected and offered feedback. This led to a shared understanding of the values and skills that underpin our ALL work, then to the creation of the Macro-skills Wheel (see Figure 2) based on Kato's (2009) and Kelly's (1996) work.
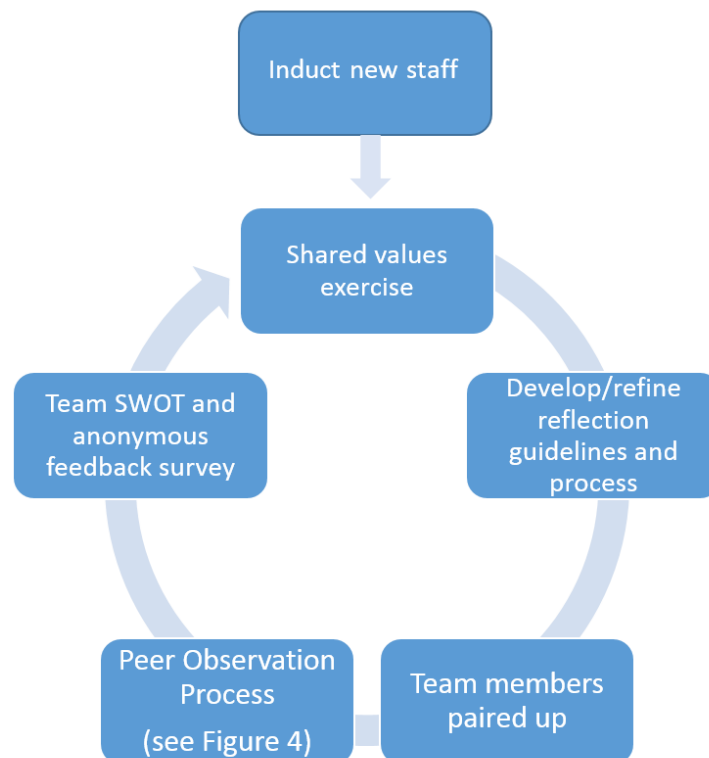

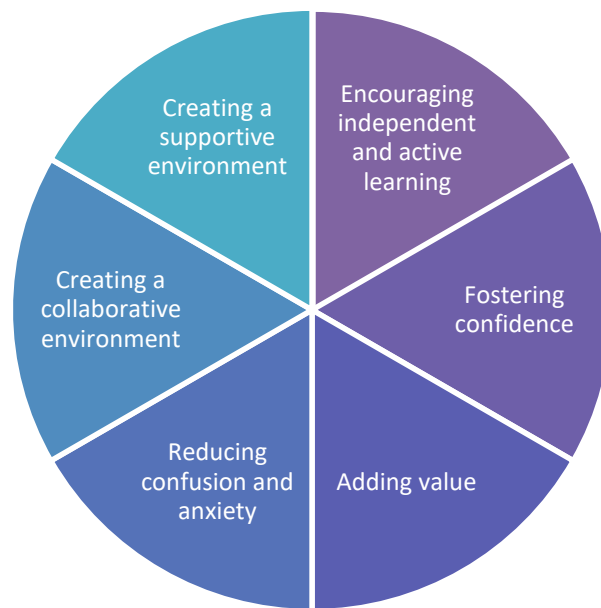**Figure 1.** Navitas ALL Peer Observation Development Process**.**

Figure 2. Navitas ALL Macro-skills Wheel**.**

Concurrent with the team values discussions, we developed a possible reflection guideline and note-taking form based on those found in various readings (ACU Learning & Teaching Centre, 2015; British Council, 2012; Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2009; The University at Albany Institute for Teaching, Learning & Academic Leadership, n.d.). Various formats were tested: some checklists, some with equals parts blank, note-taking space and desirable behaviours. We settled on the reflection guideline sheet (Appendix A), which links to the Macro-skills Wheel and has space for free-form notes or reflection questions to allow participants to further tailor the observation to their needs. The team contributed to the descriptions and examples of observable behaviours (see Table 1). Thus, shared ownership over the materials throughout the developmental stages of the Peer Observation enhanced team buy-in. These collaborative steps formed a key part of the initial training for the team members as well since it resulted in shared understandings about what was to be observed and commented on.

After consultation with the team and the national manager, it was decided that someone outside the team would pair participants up. This allayed people's fears about being vulnerable and seeking feedback from potentially untrusted colleagues. Participants were told who had been chosen to observe them and they were given the opportunity to confidentially request a different observer. Fortunately, through all rounds of the pilot Peer Observation project, no team members exercised this right. In the initial round, team members put into practice the proposed Peer Observation Process, noting not only their learnings and self-reflections about the observed consultation but also strengths, weaknesses, challenges and threats of the process itself in a team SWOT. Upon completion of the three cycles, an anonymous feedback survey was used to evaluate the pilot project's effectiveness.

We used experiential learning to refine the materials and train staff simultaneously. Rather than a stand-alone training workshop, we decided to immerse team members in the process to give them a feeling of control and buy-in. In addition, the time commitment was a concern for many staff so it seemed more efficient to hand the process over to the staff to trial rather than spending time explicitly training them. Finally, since a large part of our job is giving constructive feedback

on performance, we anticipated that staff already had skills that would allow them to take part effectively in the Peer Observation Process using the digital tools.

Table 1. Navitas ALL Peer Observation Reflection Guidelines (full sheet, see Appendix A)**.**

Macro-skill	Description	Examples of observable behaviours
Encouraging independent and active learning	Student is encouraged to take responsibility for their learning	• models skills and processes • uses scaffold • directs students to resources • student directs the pace and content of the session
Fostering confidence	Student is provided with opportunities to succeed	• affirms student's current skills and knowledge • acknowledges progress & effort • uses scaffolds • negotiates realistic and achievable goals

4. Navitas peer observation process

The five steps in our Digital Peer Observation Process (see Figure 3) were designed to prime participants for rich self-reflection, mirroring Carroll's (2009) process. The pre-observation discussion, digital recording process and post-observation discussion took participants through Carroll's 'preparing for reflection' stage. This meant arranging the emotional, physical, psychological and cultural environment, setting up the reflective relationship and preparing the participants for 'wide reflection' (Carroll, 2009, p. 44). Carroll's 'doing reflection' stage occurred throughout as participants reflected on their needs and guiding questions for their observer. It was hoped that during the post-observation discussion and showcase there would be a "transfer of reflective knowing into action" (Carroll, 2009, p. 45). Measuring this transfer and the impact on other stakeholders was not within the scope of this pilot project.

Pre-observation Discussion → Observation of a student consultation → Post-observation Discussion → Critical self-reflection → Showcase of Learning

Figure 3. Participant Journey (Peer Observation Process).

During the pilot phases, various ALL services were recorded via Jing, Zoom and webcam, then observed using the reflection guidelines form for note-taking. In the first cycle, five out of six participants recorded an individual student consultation, either in the form of email feedback or an online face-to-face consultation. One team member recorded a whole class workshop. It was found that recording individual face-to-face student consultations – either a Word file with a short explanatory video, an online consultation recording or a recorded phone consultation – was much

more effective than recording an entire in-class workshop. This was mainly the result of the recording equipment being inadequate for the large classroom space rather than a flaw in the process. Since this is not an insurmountable obstacle, whole class recording can be revisited in the future as the digital equipment is updated. Therefore, in subsequent cycles, participants used only individual consultations. The use of recorded sessions had a number of benefits. It removed the potential impact of having an extra advisor in the room. The recording allowed for asynchronous observation, which made the process more flexible and less time consuming. As many of our feedback consultations are already recorded or online, it also allowed participants to have more choice about which consultation was observed. They could retrieve old files or select a recent session that focused on an element that they wanted feedback on. In addition, advisors could re-watch their recording with the reflection guidelines and participate in self-reflection in conjunction with their peer observation.

At the start of the process, each participant selected a digital student consultation – either text and audio or audio and video – to receive feedback about.

Stage 1 – Pre-observation discussion: This was a 10-15 minute conversation done on video conferencing software or phone. Participants chose an area of focus for their observation session and relayed relevant context to the observer. The guidelines form was the basis for staff choosing what macro-skills the observer would focus on. Chester (2012), among others (Bambino, 2002; McMahon et al., 2007), advocates for staff choosing their own focus for the observation and making sure it is specific and observable.

Stage 2 – Observation of a student consultation: After seeking permission from the student, the advisor recorded the consultation, then sent it to their peer observer. After the recording had been viewed and notes had been made, which usually took 30-60 minutes, the post-observation discussion took place.

Stage 3 – Post-observation discussion: In this stage, the two participants met to reflect on the session for 30-60 minutes. Ideally, this would happen off campus, in a neutral, comfortable environment like a café or over lunch to emphasise the importance of this stage (Chester, 2012); however, with our geographically diverse team, often these discussions took place using the video conferencing software. This proved an effective way to offer constructive feedback and encourage critical reflection sensitively and confidentially.

Stage 4 – Critical self-reflection: Staff members were encouraged to record their thoughts and goals after the post-observation discussion, which could take up to 15 minutes. As Girvan et al. (2016) point out, "to scaffold the reflection, teachers are asked to individually reflect on their experience and how it relates to their own professional practice, before discussing the experience from their own perspective within their team" (p. 133). Team members used various methods for reflecting on their observations, which in turn prepared them for the final stage.

Stage 5 – Showcase of Learning: Finally, participants chose some of their learnings and reflections to share via video conference with the team and the national manager. This stage required a short talk (no more than five minutes) by each participant. This allowed for further consolidation and alignment of shared team goals and values as well as broadening the scope of the professional development from individuals to the team as a whole. As Hampton et al. (2004) point out "engagement theory is based upon the idea that learning activities occur in a collaborative group context, are project based and have an authentic focus" (p. 51). It was also a way to illustrate individual and team growth to management. Since the national manager was present in this online showcase of learning, team members' stated goals and actions could be tracked and followed up on. Participants also used these learnings and goals in their annual performance review documentation.

These stages, particularly the post-observation discussion and the showcase of learning, address the concerns presented previously about self-reflection. For example, Malthus (2013) raises several challenges to self-reflection, namely the possibility of self-deception, the low likelihood of action resulting from the reflection and fearing that "others [in their institution] do not see it [critical reflection] as a valid component of their accountability as learning advisors" (p. 64). By having explicit discussions with a team member about reflections, goals and plans for future consultations, this could reduce the likelihood of self-deception and inaction. Furthermore, sharing one's self-reflection is a highly effective method of solidifying one's developing understanding and adding accountability to future goals (Berry et al., 2012; Brookfield, 1995). This critical dialogue was so effective that despite having built-in team reflection time, often staff would refer to their observation sessions in other conversations with staff, making connections to strategies they had observed or students with similar concerns.

5. Benefits of the new process

The new digital process built on and added value to the existing models of peer observation in three main ways: team collegiality, clarity of the team's vision and identity, and performance evaluation. Firstly, using technology helped to bring together a geographically diverse team, fostering a culture of collaboration and strengthening individuals' identities as ALL advisors and as a team. The Navitas ALL team is spread across three states and face-to-face observations were not an option. It can be difficult for team members to have an idea of how other ALL advisors approach consultations and what tools and techniques they use. Using recordings of consultations allowed advisors to have an insight into their colleagues' methods. It allowed for team members to get to know each other better and fostered conversations about effective tools, approaches and general tips as well as advice related to the position. It also set a precedent for reaching out to other ALL team members for ideas and support.

In the SWOT analysis and final survey, participants identified strengths of the Peer Observation Process as: enhancing professional relationships, benefiting the team, workshopping challenging situations and reaching out to colleagues for advice or feedback, all of which we grouped together under the theme of collegiality. In the survey six participants out of the seven surveyed reported enhanced collegiality after the peer observation and six also reported they were more likely to reach out to colleagues for advice and feebdack. This was captured in one of the comments in the survey: "It is great to know that you're not alone and that you can share with your colleagues what goes on in a consultation and how you can each approach it differently."

All but one of our peer observations were of one-to-one sessions as this makes up the majority of the teams' workload and was the best place to trial the technology. It also allowed us to focus on giving feedback on feedback and to induct new staff. Although not a focus of our process, observing each other's one-to-one consultations enabled us to identify as a team what Chanock (2007) desribes as "the benefits and insights gained from listening to students one-to-one, which [can] then inform advisors' thinking about the kinds of classes and materials needed to raise awareness more widely of the problems and misconceptions that come to light during individual consultations" (p. A2). This was not formally measured in the survey and is an area that should be measured in future rounds. However, we did find in the learning showcase that particpants reported sharing pre-existing reources with each other and also that they had engaged in informal peer observations outside of the offical process by seeking out feedback from one another using recorded sessions, which links back to the theme of collegiality. Since the peer observation, interstate colleagues have started collaborating on new resources for English langue support and the collegiality developed during the peer review may have had a positive impact on this project. The use of recorded sessions also removed the potential impact of having an extra advisor in the room. Five participants reported they preferred using recordings compared to having someone sit it on a session.

Secondly, the process led to the development of a concrete framework of the goals, values and mission of our team, strengthening the team's collective identity. In order to develop the reflection guidelines for observation sessions, the team had to review our consultation guidelines and flesh out the aims and goals of consultations as well as our team values. This led to discussions about what these big picture ideas look like in practice. This then resulted in the creation of lists of observable behaviours and the macro-skills wheel. Not only was this exercise valuable for the Peer Observation, it also provided an effective training package for new staff and sparked the process of reflection. As a team, we were forced to evaluate the theories and evidence that informed our practice. Much discussion was had about how values were interpreted and how people felt this could be observed in a consultation. Management reported that the process "has grown the team towards more clarity around their mission and goals and shared values and there are tangible outcomes to this" (E. Cooper, personal communication, 16 August, 2017). The Peer Observation Process provided a solid foundation for further conceptualisation of the ALL team identity and goals.

Finally, the new model allowed for the Peer Observation to service the needs of performance evaluation while protecting the openness and vulnerability needed for authentic professional development. It enabled individuals to use critical self-reflection to identify areas for development and highlight strengths for performance evaluation. Giving participants control over information shared in observations enabled candid and open exchanges, free from the pressure of managerial reporting. This encouraged participants to share tough examples and focus on skill development as opposed to sharing a session they felt went well. In the final survey, six of seven participants agreed (four agreed, two somewhat agreed) that the Peer Observation Process gave them the opportunity to workshop challenging situations. This was evident in feedback from management who reported that "the level of reflection has been at a high level: critical, professionally respectful, progressive and really developmental for the team" (E. Cooper, personal communication, 16 August, 2017). In addition to this professional development element, there was now a process for inclusion in annual performance evaluation. Most participants (three agreed, three somewhat agreed) that the Peer Observation was useful for their annual performance evaluation. Management described the process as being all about the participants "reflecting on their own practice and being aware of what their role is … To me that is evidence – it's just qualitative and reflective, which is just as valid as quantitative" (E. Cooper, personal communication, 16 August, 2017). Moreover, the showcase provided a positive space for participants to share what they had learned through the process, showing evidence to management of growth whilst still allowing for participants to control the information. The showcase turned into a positive experience of sharing best practice and further contributed to the critical reflection and pedagogical development of the team. Chanock (2007) points out how vital it is to highlight the value of individual consultations and the importance of showing accountability and developing creative tools for evaluation. This model provides one method of doing this and is a way of building managerial support for one-on-one consultations.

6. Challenges

After the initial rounds of observations, three main themes emerged from staff feedback about potential challenges: time, misunderstanding of the process and materials, and concerns around giving colleagues 'negative feedback'.

Firstly, similar to findings in the literature from other teams that have engaged in peer observation (Chester, 2012; Hampton et al. 2004; Malthus, 2013) participants reported in the SWOT analysis concerns about having enough time. Interestingly, the underlying reason identified for this concern was that participants took longer to select a recording because they wanted feedback on a demanding consultation. The team decided the process would become an ongoing project and that team members should schedule periods to make sure time remained available for the Peer Observation. As participants became more familiar with the process it became quicker to complete.

The overall time commitment for a participant was up to about three hours per round, this did not include the time it took to complete training and develop the materials. This was significantly less than other models and may be due to embedding training in team meetings, starting with low-risk and experiential training, and using technology familiar to the team to allow for asynchronous observations.

A second concern was confusion about the process. In the initial round of observations there were misunderstandings about the steps. The steps were clarified in a meeting and a simplified Peer Observation procedure and document was developed. It was also discovered that we needed to clarify the practice of confidentiality as some information from observation sessions had been shared with other staff members. It is important to note that participants were sharing positive examples of practices they had observed, rather than negative ones. Although at this stage all participants were happy with the sharing, it was highlighted that this was an ambiguous area. The team decided one way to deal with this was in the post-observation discussion. It could be clearly identified if either party would like to share ideas or resources with others. In the final survey four team members still reported feeling only somewhat in control of the data. This could be due to a misunderstanding of or a lack of trust in the process. Also, some felt there should be an option to opt-out of the Peer Observation, and one participant identified wanting an informal approach of conversation and sharing of experiences. Management recognised that some issues were still emerging and that individuals responded differently to the sensitive areas of confidentiality, interpersonal dynamics, and issues of power and workload (E. Cooper, personal communication, 16 August, 2017).

In addition to clarity around the procedure of the observation, we needed clearer reflection guidelines. Through team consultation, we simplified the form to one page and added observable behaviours as brainstormed by the team. We also re-iterated that the guidelines could be discussed, tailored and personalised in the pre-observation discussion, with key feedback areas highlighted. Despite this, one participant still reported that the reflection form felt like a 'tick box' list and three participants reported feeling only somewhat able to tailor the peer observation to their needs.

The final concern that came up was about giving 'negative feedback'. In the anonymous SWOT analysis after the initial cycle, participants reported feeling anxious about giving negative feedback. This concern is captured in a comment from the SWOT "Giving people negative feedback – didn't happen this time, but I worry/wonder how it'll go if I/we do need to". This suggests that early on in the process there may have been a misunderstanding or lack of trust in the process or a misunderstanding of what critical reflection is. Ironically, giving critical feedback to students is one of the main roles of an ALL advisor and participants should be confident and competent in giving sensitive and effective feedback. The process for round two was refined and we emphasised that the person being observed chose the focus of the critical reflection for their session. In addition to this, the post-observation discussion included suggestions for how the consultation could be done differently. This was designed so that options and questions could be posed, rather than judgements made. Interestingly, in the second round of observation participant's confidence in critical dialogue grew. In the follow-up survey four agreed and three somewhat agreed that they felt comfortable receiving feedback. On the other hand, only one survey participant indicated that they did not feel comfortable giving feedback and suggested a need for further training in establishing the types of relationship and trust needed for this. This overall growth in confidence could be due to the reiteration of the process and simplification of the documents as well as participants being more experienced and comfortable with the process. However, this is an area that may need to be further explored in the future because if we have a process where participants have a misunderstanding of critical reflection or lack of trust in the process and only provide 'pats on the back' to peers, it undermines the aims and legitimacy of the process.

7. Limitations

This was a small pilot project with a small team of ALL professionals. There were a total of eight advisors involved and one was unable to report in the final survey. A larger sample size is needed for future study. In addition to this, we, the authors of this paper, also took part in the peer observation and despite the SWOT analysis and survey being anonymous this may have influenced participants' responses. As acknowledged earlier in the paper there are limitations in blurring the lines between researcher and subject. In addition, there was no data collection of the learning showcase.

8. Future opportunities

After completing three cycles of the Digital Peer Observation Process in this pilot project, there are a variety of future opportunities for refinement and development. One way to address some of the challenges could be allowing participation in one or two cycles of the Observation per year. Participants could opt-out of some rounds, giving more flexibility and control around the process. Furthermore, it may be more empowering to allow participants to suggest a person they would like to observe them. However, this could have implications for bias and sought-after team members' workload. Moreover, there is potential to further explore uses of technology and data in peer- and self-reflection. For example, it would be interesting to investigate technology such as *Visible Classroom*, a tool that captions lessons and provides teachers with data and feedback on teacher talk time, the nature of student and teacher questions, and deep and surface learning (Visible Classroom, 2015). There could also be a role for annotation software, such as *Thinglink* or *VoiceThread*, to take the place of notes written on the reflection guideline form. In addition to this, the Navitas ALL team is currently developing an online tool for gathering student reflections on consultations and feedback. It would be valuable, in the post-observation discussion, if we could access students' final piece of work to analyse the uptake of feedback. In future rounds it would be beneficial to measure the impacts of The Digital Peer Observation Process on resource and curriculum development.

Finally, this Peer Observation Process will be shared with other teams. It could be used for teachers and ALL advisors moderating feedback and student work or in classroom teaching. This process is not for the exclusive use of ALL advisors. When teaching geographically diverse and time-poor students, this model could be utilised by students for peer-assisted learning. The principles of collaboratively developed tools for critical self-reflection and the application of technology could be adapted to a variety of other contexts, for example giving feedback on customer service, counselling sessions, role plays or presentations. We have used it to train and induct new team members into the Navitas ALL team. This Digital Peer Observation model of training could be further built upon and adapted by other teams.

9. Conclusion

We set out to determine if technologies could help our diverse team participate in critical reflection for professional development and performance evaluation. Although there were a variety of challenges and future opportunities, the feedback collected showed that it was possible for our team. Balancing the expectations, wants and needs of advisors and management is always going to be challenging. However, this model provides a strong starting point. Although all individual participants were not satisfied with every step of the journey, all reported significant benefits. It is fair to ask what changed in our team as a result of the Digital Peer Observation pilot project. The team and individual advisors' identity has changed with this new framework for collegial discourse and ongoing, critical self-reflection. The clarified team values and goals have improved the consistency and rigour of individual consultations and it is hoped this will enhance the quality of guidance given in student consultations. In addition, the Peer Observation has also revamped our induction process for new team members, providing them with our values, aims and goals and

giving them low-risk opportunities for early feedback. The process as a whole has resulted in a more unified team that engages in synchronous and asynchronous professional development and performance review.

Appendix A

Peer Observation Guidelines

Pre-observation notes:
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Macro-skill category	Description	Examples of observable behaviours	Notes
Encouraging independent and active learning	Student is encouraged to take responsibility for their learning	• models skills and processes • uses scaffold • directs students to resources • student directs the pace and content of the session	•
Fostering confidence	Student is provided with opportunities to succeed	• affirms student's current skills and knowledge • acknowledges progress & effort • uses scaffolds • negotiates realistic and achievable goals	•
Adding value	Student is provided with the learning resources necessary to develop skills	• uses scaffolds • models skills and processes • introduces resources such as APA/SLS website	•
Reducing confusion and anxiety	The student's goals and needs are identified and considered; ideas are elicited from the student	• develops resources specifically for the student's learning needs • questions for understanding • employs a variety of teaching and learning strategies • listens to student • asks for student's ideas, views, and insights	•
Creates a supportive	The student is encouraged to participate,	• consults student about goals and purpose	•

and collabo-rative envi-ronment	and their con-tributions are sought, acknowl-edged, and valued	• questions for under-standing • develops strategies • open, attentive body language and tone	
Utilises best practice in teaching and learning	Advisers are LLN profes-sionals who strategically and knowl-edgeably use pedagogical theories and learning ac-tivities	• provides necessary LLN content • employs a range of strategies, some spe-cific to LLN • offers a variety of strat-egies/tool/resources to meet students' needs	•
Post-observation notes:			

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