

A Critical Review of “Situated Learning, Reflective Practice and Conceptual Expansion: Effective Peer Observation for Tutor Development”

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Abstract: Researchers and professors across the globe have acknowledged the significance of peer observation in recent decades. In tertiary institutions or universities, peer observation is compulsory for all professional teachers, tutors, even administrative staff. However, the growing importance of peer observation raises questions about whether peer observation is practical enough for improving teachers’ teaching quality and helping teachers who work on the front line receive advanced teaching pedagogy from the perspectives of situated learning, reflective practice and conceptual expansion. It is necessary to identify the development and limitations of this teaching practice through journals available through critical review. This essay will be discussed systematically and comprehensively. The peer-reviewed article about effective peer observation will be summarised and evaluated in this essay. This essay will be discussed systematically and comprehensively.

1. Introduction

In the process of tertiary education, tutors play essential roles both in students’ and colleges’ development. Therefore, apart from lectures and discussions about the effectiveness of peer observation, the universities implement the method of peer observation to help tutors get some improvements practically. According to Bell and Mladenovic (2015), there are mainly three elements in peer observation: situated learning, reflective practice and conceptual expansion ^[1]. Chism (2007) defines peer observation as an effective method to evaluate instructors’ ability of teaching. Although there are some detrimental effects on tutors, most of the researchers suggest that peer observation plays a positive part in the development of teachers. A number of research studies have provided empirical evidence that classroom observation of peer coaching has many advantages. Evidence can be seen from the following researchers’ opinions, Davis (2011) proposes that peer observation has mainly three advantages including the enhancement of teaching skills, the improvement of teaching efficiency and teacher’s ownership; Conor Carrol and Deirdre O’Loughlin

(2014) point out that effective peer observation of teaching can improve teaching and learning if appropriate approach adopted ^[2]. However, Tamra (2011) and John (2011) argue that peer observation not only has possibilities to bring anxiety to tutors and damage collegueship among them, but also simply a superficial activity without any practical meaning. Drawing on these opinions, it is reasonable to speculate that most of the studies recognise peer the positive function of peer observation.

This essay will review the article Situated Learning, Reflective Practice and Conceptual Expansion: Effective Peer Observation for Tutor Development by Amani Bella and Rosina Mladenovic. Firstly, the brief summary of the article will be presented in the following section. Apart from that, this essay will evaluate the findings and results of the mentioned essay. Finally, the methodology, coverage, writing style and the context of this article will be discussed critically.

2. Review

Bell and Mladenovic (2015), in their article, describe the influence of peer observation on the career development of tutors by using data over a four year period from 2005 to 2007. They analyse the data from mainly three aspects: situated learning, reflective practice and conceptual expansion respectively.

In the first part, Bell and Mladenovic (2015) propose the current marginalised status of tutors in universities and claim that self-improvement is crucial in their professional development ^[3]. Therefore, peer observation plays a significant role in their teaching practices. After that, a brief overview of this article was presented at the end of this part.

In the following part, Bell and Mladenovic (2015) analyse some previous studies about peer observation. After the detailed introduction and analysis, the article further states some advantages and disadvantages of peer observation in the second part of this essay.

In the next part, the original framework of the relationship between situated learning, reflective practice and conceptual expansion was discussed. They put forward the idea that peer observation may help tutors absorb some experiencing teachers' preminent teaching methods. By this way, they can achieve their self-improvement and teach better in their future classrooms by imitating and developing advanced teaching pedagogy and activities. Reflective practice, another vital factor of peer observation, allowing tutors to find out some points they can improve in their future teaching. Lastly, the conceptual expansion provides tutors an opportunity to think more broadly in their career development.

Furthermoew, previous research procedure by Bell and Mladenovic was introduced in the next section. In 2005, they invited one hundred casual tutors to observe the tutorial of other tutors and asked them to share their feelings after observing. The majority of the tutors acknowledged that this observation is useful and valuable for their career and teaching methods' development. Then in the next year, they analysed these tutors' self-reflective statements again and collected some information about whether they were influenced by the peer observation took place one year ago. Moreover, in 2007, Bell and Mladenovic (2015) conducted an interview about the influence of peer observation in their teaching. Also, the effect on their teaching methods was taken into consideration. According to these data, they were intended to create a holistic picture of the function of peer observation on the development of tutors.

The method and results of their analysis are explained in the subsequent part. Bell and Mladenovic (2015) analysed the data above from three aspects: situated learning, reflective practice, and conceptual expansion^[4]. The evidence leads to the results that peer review is beneficial to tutor's teaching practice and teaching concept both in the three themes they stated before.

In the next section, Bell and Mladenovic (2015) discuss some positive influence on tutor's

teaching in situated learning, reflective practice and conceptual expansion respectively. From this discussion, they revise their framework about the effect of peer observation. However, they realized that how to take these results and findings into practice is still an unsolved problem. Because different people hold different opinions on the influence of peer review, some opponents argue that peer observation is not a useful method for tutors to achieve their career improvement. While others believe there are some external factors, such as the low status of teacher, will affect the function of peer observation. They maintain that without some external factors, peer observation is beneficial for tutors teaching.

In the conclusion sector, Bell and Mladenovic (2015) conclude that peer observation is helpful to the teaching activity and career development of tutors. However, they acknowledged that there are some deficiencies in the practice after peer observation such as the lack of analyzing the influence towards students and supporting from unit coordinators. Therefore, they put forward some personal suggestions in the end.

To summarise, Bell and Mladenovic (2015) use various data-sets to prove that peer observation especially the situated learning after observing or observed is an effective way for tutors to improve their teaching.

3. Evaluation

After analysing the article in a detailed manner, in the evaluation section, I prefer to discuss the positives and limitation of the essay relating to peer observation from the perspective of structure, context, and other aspects.

In the first place, some merits are worthy of being discussed. This article organized logically. Staples (1960) explains that subtitles can reflect the structure of an essay^[5]. The structure is arranged clearly mainly because Bell and Mladenovic (2015) use eight subtitles to divide this article. In the second place, this article has adequately referenced literature. Sufficient reference enables this article becomes more persuasive. Apart from that, there is another positive aspect of this article, the content and the information are laid out effectively. This article mainly proposed that peer observation is beneficial to the development of tutors in their teaching career. In the process of peer review, tutors will be influenced from three aspects: situated learning, reflective practice and conceptual expansion. The analysis and understanding of peer observation in this article are memorable because Bell and Mladenovic (2015) revise their original framework of how the three themes influence the development of tutors. Therefore, the content of this article successfully filled in the gap in peer observation. Another positive feature could be the writing style, and in particular, they use formal expressions in the whole article. In addition, this article is obviously targeted to tutors in educational institutions or universities. Hence, it is especially worthy of being learned by some tutors.

With regard to the context of this article, it is true that the context given is sufficiently explored. Bell and Mladenovic (2015) reasonably demonstrate their ideas by referencing literature, applying appropriate theories, then reaching to the result that peer observation will lead tutors, teachers, and professors to a vaster stage in their teaching careers. Therefore, the audience can grasp the main idea and the complete process of this article smoothly. Yang (2010) point out self-correction is one's problem-solving process^[6]. It means that reflection and self-correction are beneficial to the validity of the article. In this article, Bell and Mladenovic (2015) revise their framework in the last part of the article. Therefore, this article becomes increasingly reliable and convincing after the revision.

Having discussed the positive side of the article by Bell and Mladenovic (2015), it cannot be denied that there are some deficiencies lying in this article. As for the methodology, the first

disappointment is the data in this article is based on ten-year-old research. The article published in 2015, however, the research is conducted in 2005. Therefore, the results and findings are relatively untenable for the statistic has been not updated in the past ten years. Evidence can be seen from the opinion of Cosh, Cosh (2018) maintains that peer observation is focusing on being developed instead of self-awareness and self-development. While in this article, based on ten-year-old data, Bell and Mladenovic (2015) content that peer review improves tutors' self-reflection ability, expands their conceptions of teaching and generates long-lasting changes in their teaching career. It is obvious that the opinion of Cosh is more reliable to readers for he adopts more updated information rather than based on data in 2005. The second problem is Bell and Mladenovic (2015) simply use two paragraphs to introduce the method of their research. In this case, the method of this article has not been elaborated clearly. For example, in the part of the method, Bell and Mladenovic (2015) only present a table. However, some more specific statistics and figures are more persuasive to readers ^[7].

Another problem with the methodology is that the sample is not sufficient enough. To be specific, during the research, the participants are one hundred tutors in the Business School in their university. However, they overlooked the diversity of samples such as gender differences and department differences. They simply give readers an unprecise research sample and the results and findings of this article are based on this unscientific research. It is evident that the method in this article is not supportive enough. Also, Bell and Mladenovic (2015) maintain that they analyse the data in their research, but the questionnaire and interview materials cannot be found in the article or appendix.

The coverage is another defect of the article, which means the coverage given is inadequately explored. In the first place, in this article, Bell and Mladenovic (2015) overlooked tutors' own situation, such as whether peer observation will influence an experienced teacher and a new teacher in the same way. 'I content that for experienced teachers peer observation is not the case since genuine development comes about through self-awareness, reflection, and open-mindedness to other approaches and styles' (Cosh, 2018, p25). From Cosh's explanation, experienced or inexperienced is an essential factor which will affect the validity of peer observation. However, Bell and Mladenovic (2015) fail to take these circumstances and background information into consideration. In the second place, the limitation section of this research or article has not been explored sufficiently. In this article, Bell and Mladenovic (2015) acknowledged that peer observation is likely to change teachers' teaching methods, teaching practice or other important aspects, while the effect of peer observation on students' learning has not been explored in the final part of the article. Therefore, it is true that the coverage of this article is not comprehensive enough. Also, the study by Bell and Mladenovic mainly explained how peer observation influence tutors in three aspects step by step positively. It is true that peer observation is beneficial to tutors in their teaching, while there are also some disadvantages. For example, Cosh (2018) demonstrated that some staffs regard peer observation as threatening, and this appraisal is harmful to the confidence of a teacher because they have probably to receive negative feedback about their teaching. However, 'giving constructive feedback is a very demanding skill.' (Cosh, 2018. p24). Therefore, these comments not only may not effective and correct enough, but also may hurt the self-confidence of a tutor.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, the present study is limited in a number of aspects. In the first place, as for the methodology, the statistics is not updated enough and the information about the research is insufficient, which are two main defects of this article. Furthermore, the diversity of samples has

not been taken into consideration and the lack of sufficient methodology also led this article to a relatively unreliable direction. Second, inadequate coverage is another significant disadvantage of this article. All of these, of course, areas which deserve further research in the future.

These limitations notwithstanding, some general recommendations can be made. Applying more updated data would make this article more persuasive, reliable and valid. In addition, Bell and Mladenovic (2015) should attach more importance to discuss the research process, findings and results. Apart from that, participants should not be confined to a certain department or a university, but a larger scope in a wide range of higher education institutions or organizations. Only in this way can the audience have a clearer understanding of the benefits, influence, and strategies of peer observation.

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