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## The Power of Observation: How Librarians can Benefit from the Peer Review of Teaching Even Without a Formal PROT Program

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# The Power of Observation:

How Librarians can Benefit from  
the Peer Review of Teaching

—Even Without a Formal Program

Jaena Alabi  
Auburn University

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Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

*Georgia International Conference on Information Literacy*  
August 23, 2013 | Savannah, Georgia



# Today...



# How did we get here?



“Peer review of teaching is informed colleague judgment about faculty teaching for either fostering improvement or making personnel decisions.”

(Chism, N.V.N., 2007, p. 3)



# Key concept

## Formative evaluation

“Within the context of teacher evaluation, the term *formative evaluation* describes activities that provide teachers with information that they can use to improve their teaching. The information is intended for their personal use, rather than for public inspection and thus is private and confidential” (Chism, p. 5).

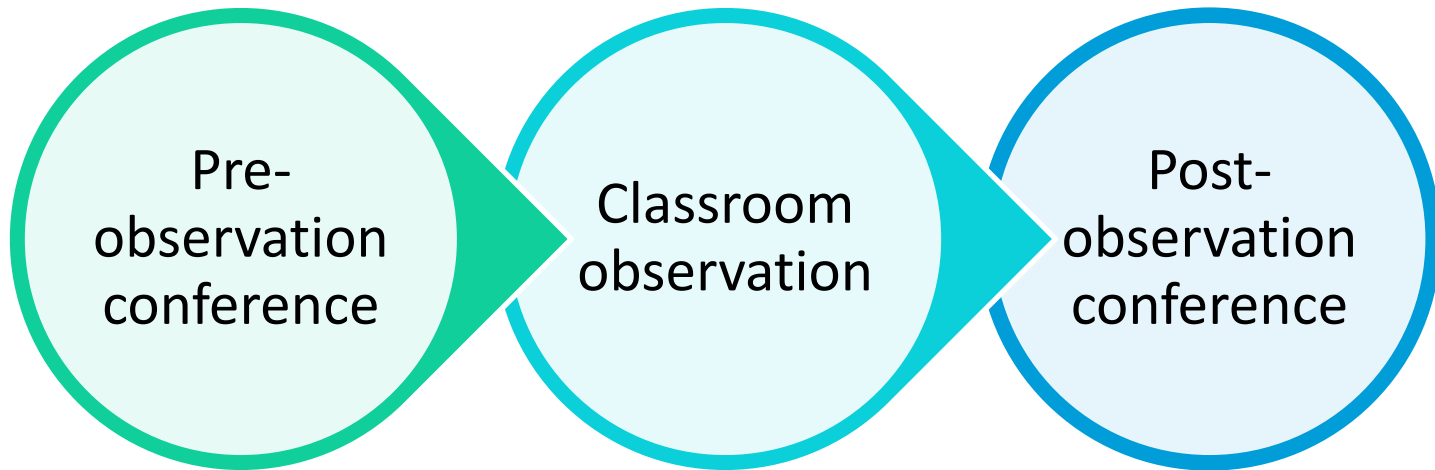
When PROT is formative, it is used to help improve teaching.

## Summative evaluation

“In contrast, summative evaluation of teaching focuses on information needed to make a personnel decision--for example, hiring, promotion, tenure, merit pay. Consequently, the information is for public inspection rather than for the individual faculty member” (Chism, p. 5).

When PROT is summative, it is used to assess the quality of teaching--and it may be part of the tenure and promotion process.

# Three-part process





# Cases in the library literature

Alabi, J., Huisman, R., Lacy, M., Miller, W., Snajdr, E., Trinoskey, J., & Weare, W. H., Jr. (2012). By and for us: The development of a program for peer review of teaching by and for pre-tenure librarians. *Collaborative Librarianship*, 4(4), 165-174.

Arbeeny, P., & Hartman, C. (2008). Empowering librarians to be better teachers: The value of peer coaching to library instruction. *Colorado Libraries*, 34(2), 39-45.

Brewerton, A. (2004). How I joined the Triads: the launch of a peer observation and review scheme at Oxford Brookes University Library. *SCONUL Newsletter*, 31, 35-44.

Burnam, P. (1993). Fine-Tuning classroom technique: A peer coaching experience. *Research Strategies* 11, 42-46.

Castle, S. (2009). Peer observation and information skills teaching: Feel the fear and do it anyway! *SCONUL Focus*, 45, 72-75.

Levene, L.-A., & Frank, P. (1993). Peer coaching: Professional growth and development for instruction librarians. *Reference Services Review*, 21(3), 35-42.

Middleton, C. (2002). Evolution of peer evaluation of library instruction at Oregon State University Libraries. *portal: Libraries & the Academy* 2(1), 69-78.

Norbury, L. (2001). Peer observation of teaching: A method for improving teaching quality. *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, 7(1), 87-99.

Özek, Y. H., Edgren, G., & Jandér, K. (2012). Implementing the critical friend method for peer feedback among teaching librarians in an academic setting. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 7(4), 68-81.

Samson, S., & McCrea, D. E. (2008). Using peer review to foster good teaching. *Reference Services Review*, 36(1), 61-70.

Sinkinson, C. (2011). An assessment of peer coaching to drive professional development and reflective teaching. *Communications in Information Literacy*, 5(1), 9-20.

Snively, L., & Dewald, N. (2011). Developing and implementing peer review of academic librarians' teaching: An overview and case report. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 37, 343-351.

# Levene & Frank

Levene, L.-A., & Frank, P. (1993). Peer coaching: Professional growth and development for instruction librarians. *Reference Services Review*, 21(3), 35-42.

Mankato State University (Minnesota)

“Noticing the informal coaching that exists among trusted colleagues, some libraries have given structure to this exchange through peer coaching programs” (p. 35).

# What is peer coaching?

“To coach one another, instruction librarians form pairs, select focus areas, and observe one another’s classes. The coaching process allows librarians to work together, refining, extending, and building new skills. This reciprocal arrangement, where librarians pair off to coach one another, helps establish one of the basic components of peer coaching—a mutually supportive environment.”

(Levene & Frank, 1993, p. 35)

# Levene & Frank

- Formative/developmental/non-evaluative
- Three-part process
- Librarians choose their own partner/relationship is reciprocal
- Mutually supportive environment
- Voluntary
- Confidential/respect for privacy
- Process must have administrative support

# Norbury

Norbury, L. (2001). Peer observation of teaching: A method for improving teaching quality. *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, 7(1), 87-99.

Aston University (UK)

Preconditions for a successful PROT program:

- A supportive environment
- An organizational culture open to new ideas
- Support from senior management
- Support from colleagues

# Middleton

Middleton, C. (2002). Evolution of peer evaluation of library instruction at Oregon State University Libraries. *portal: Libraries & the Academy* 2(1), 69-78.

Oregon State University

“This paper describes the development and implementation of a formal program of peer observation of library instruction, both to improve library instruction and to satisfy promotion and tenure requirements at Oregon State Universities Libraries” (p. 70).

# Snavely & Dewald

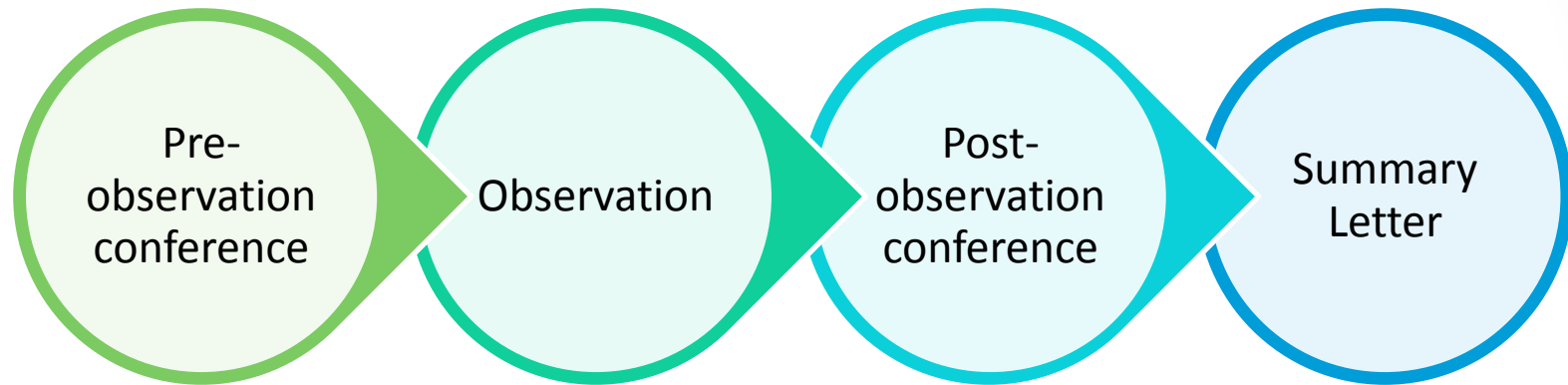
Snavely, L., & Dewald, N. (2011). Developing and implementing peer review of academic librarians' teaching: An overview and case report. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 37, 343-351.

Pennsylvania State University

The Curricular and Instructional Affairs committee of the Library Faculty Organization “felt it was important to include both formative and summative assessments, so that librarians could receive constructive feedback through which they might improve their teaching before receiving an evaluation that would affect their annual review and eventually their tenure and promotion” (p. 346).



# Four-part process



(Snively & Dewald, 2011, p. 347)

# Özek, Edgren, & Jandér

Özek, Y. H., Edgren, G., & Jandér, K. (2012). Implementing the critical friend method for peer feedback among teaching librarians in an academic setting. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* 7(4), 68-81.

Lund University (Sweden)

“The aim of this study was to implement the critical friend method and explore the perceptions of the participants in an academic library setting”  
(p. 70)

# What is the critical friend method?

“... a powerful tool to facilitate the process of continuous improvement in teaching.”

“... involves observing and giving friendly criticism on a colleague's teaching, and it is based on integrity and mutual trust between colleagues.”

“For the academic librarian as a teacher, the critical friend method can aid self-reflection”

(Özek, Edgren, & Jandér, 2012, p.70)

# Alabi et al

Alabi, J., Huisman, R., Lacy, M., Miller, W., Snajdr, E., Trinoskey, J., & Weare, W. H., Jr. (2012). By and for us: The development of a program for peer review of teaching by and for pre-tenure librarians. *Collaborative Librarianship*, 4(4), 165-174.

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

“The IUPUI peer group did not establish dedicated partners or triads; members were free to invite any other member to observe a class. . . This approach allowed us to observe a wide variety of classes, to be exposed to multiple instructional styles, and to receive feedback from several peers with different perspectives” (p. 168).

# Related publications

Vidmar, D. J. (2005). Reflective peer coaching: Crafting collaborative self-assessment in teaching. *Research Strategies*, 20(3), 135-148.

## **Reflective Peer Coaching**

“Reflective peer coaching is a formative model that examines intentions prior to teaching and reflections afterwards. The purpose of reflective peer coaching is to promote self-assessment in a non-threatening, supportive arena. Colleagues engage in ten-minute planning conversations and ten-minute reflective conversations. These conversations happen regularly and frequently and are intended to promote change and profound thinking about an instructor’s personal craft of teaching.” (Vidmar, p. 146).

# Related publications

Alabi, J., & Weare, W. H., Jr. (in press). Criticism is not a four-letter word: Best practices for constructive feedback in the peer review of teaching. In B. Sietz (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Fortieth National LOEX Library Instruction Conference, Columbus, Ohio*. Ypsilanti, Michigan: University Library, Eastern Michigan University, LOEX Press.

“Suppose a colleague has asked you to observe a library instruction session and provide feedback. You have agreed. Unfortunately, your colleague was poorly prepared, technical difficulties forced her to improvise, and the students did not pay attention—much less participate. In essence, things went wrong. Your colleague has asked for your opinion, but you are not sure how to respond. Should you tell her what you really think? What obligation do you have to her? Can you provide honest feedback without causing her to become defensive or hurt?”

# Other publications addressing PROT

Isbell, D., & Kammerlocher, L. (1994). A formative, collegial approach to evaluating course-integrated instruction. *Research Strategies*, 12, 24-32.

Peacock, J. (2001). Teaching skills for teaching librarians: postcards from the edge of the educational paradigm. *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*, 32(1), 26-42.

Aldridge, E. R. (2012). What they didn't tell me in library school is that my colleagues would be my biggest asset. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 52(1), 28-29.



# A note about terminology

Language Used	Author(s)
peer review of teaching	Samson & McCrea, 2008 Snively & Dewald, 2011 Aldridge, 2012 Alabi, et al, 2012 Alabi & Weare, in press
peer appraisal	Peacock, 2001
peer coaching	Burnam, 1993 Levene & Frank, 1993 Vidmar, 2005 Arbeeny & Hartman, 2008 Sinkerson, 2011
peer evaluation of instruction	Middleton, 2002
peer feedback	Ozek, Edgren, & Jander, 2012
peer observation	Norbury, 2001 Castle, 2009
peer observation and review	Brewerton, 2004
informal, reciprocal colleague observation	Isbell & Kammerlocher, 1994

# Not PROT

Finley, P., Skarl, S., & Cox, J. (2005). Enhancing library instruction with peer planning. *Reference Services Review*, 33(1), 112-122.

“The enhancement team applied a version of peer coaching to the planning phase of the library instruction sessions. The team schedule brainstorming sessions with instruction librarians who wanted to experiment with new teaching techniques or modification in their classes. . .”

(Finley, Skarl, & Cox, 2005, p. 113)

# Themes and commonalities

Most programs were

- formative, not evaluative
- voluntary
- confidential

In many programs, participants

- worked in pairs or groups of three
- selected their own partners
- used an observation checklist or form

Some programs

- were initiated by the library administration
- included a report or summary of the observation
- required training
- were conducted with a high degree of autonomy

# Additional themes

“The word ‘peer’ in peer coaching is significant because it distinguishes the practice from mentoring, emphasizing an equal relationship between two educators in which each party coaches the other”  
(Arbeeny & Hartman, 2008, p. 40)

“ . . . the simple act of taking time to think about teaching in pre- and post-observation conferences promoted critical reflection. . . ”  
(Arbeeny & Hartman, 2008, p. 44)

# Outcomes

“Perhaps the most unexpected result of peer observation is that the observer gets as much out of the process as the person being observed” (Castle, 2009, p. 74)

“Certainly new teaching faculty garnered ideas and pedagogy from their more experienced colleagues, but experience librarians were also inspired by the fresh perspectives and insights of newer teachers”  
(Samson & McCrea, 2008, pp. 66-67)

# Outcomes

“The peer review program assists in fostering a culture of teaching with the libraries. . .”  
(Snively & Dewald, 2011, p. 350)

“In the discussions that took place both before and after teaching sessions, the participants had opportunities to exchange knowledge and ideas about teaching” (Özek, 2012, p. 76)

“Peer coaching also has the potential to address the feelings of alienation and isolation that teachers can face”  
(Arbeeny & Hartman, 2008, p. 44)

“Peer review can provide valuable criticism and praise to emerging professionals, as well as bring fresh ideas and energy to seasoned team members.”

(Aldridge, 2012, p. 29)



# You can't do it alone.

Find somebody else.

# Communication is key.

Talk about it.

# Focus on something.

One thing. Not everything.

# Scripting/Mirroring



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# Videotaping



Peer Observer: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Class: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Mode of Delivery: \_\_\_\_\_

# Checklists

<p><b>Individual Style</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vocal delivery (volume, pace, articulation, modulation)</li> <li>- Shows enthusiasm, humor</li> <li>- Uses gestures appropriately</li> <li>- Makes eye contact with audience</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear introduction</li> <li>- Organized</li> <li>- Minimizes use of jargon</li> <li>- Explains terms &amp; concepts</li> <li>- Incorporates examples relevant to students (and to course content)</li> <li>- Matches stated objectives of the session to the course assignment</li> <li>- Clear conclusion</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Active learning strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appropriate</li> <li>- Clearly explains objective of activity</li> <li>- Allows time for completion &amp; debriefing</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Visual aids (e.g. handouts, web guides, Presentation slides)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relevant, used appropriately</li> <li>- Used effectively             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Organized, legible, not text-dense</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<p><b>Rapport/Interaction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Asks for feedback</li> <li>- Responds to changes in student engagement</li> <li>- Listens carefully and responds appropriately to comments &amp; questions</li> </ul>	







# Checklists

## Peer Review of Teaching Worksheet

Teaching Librarian: \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewing Librarian: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Number/Title of Session: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Session: \_\_\_\_\_

Audience: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of students: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Undergraduate Students    \_\_\_\_ Graduate/Professional Students

\_\_\_\_ Faculty/Staff                    \_\_\_\_ Other

Rate the teaching librarian on the following scale:    5= Excellent  
4 = Good  
3 = Neutral  
2 = Marginal  
1 = Poor

### Organization:

Goals and Objectives well developed.                    5    4    3    2    1

Content of class consistent with stated goals and objectives.    5    4    3    2    1

Material worth knowing and presented accurately, logically, creatively, thoroughly.    5    4    3    2    1

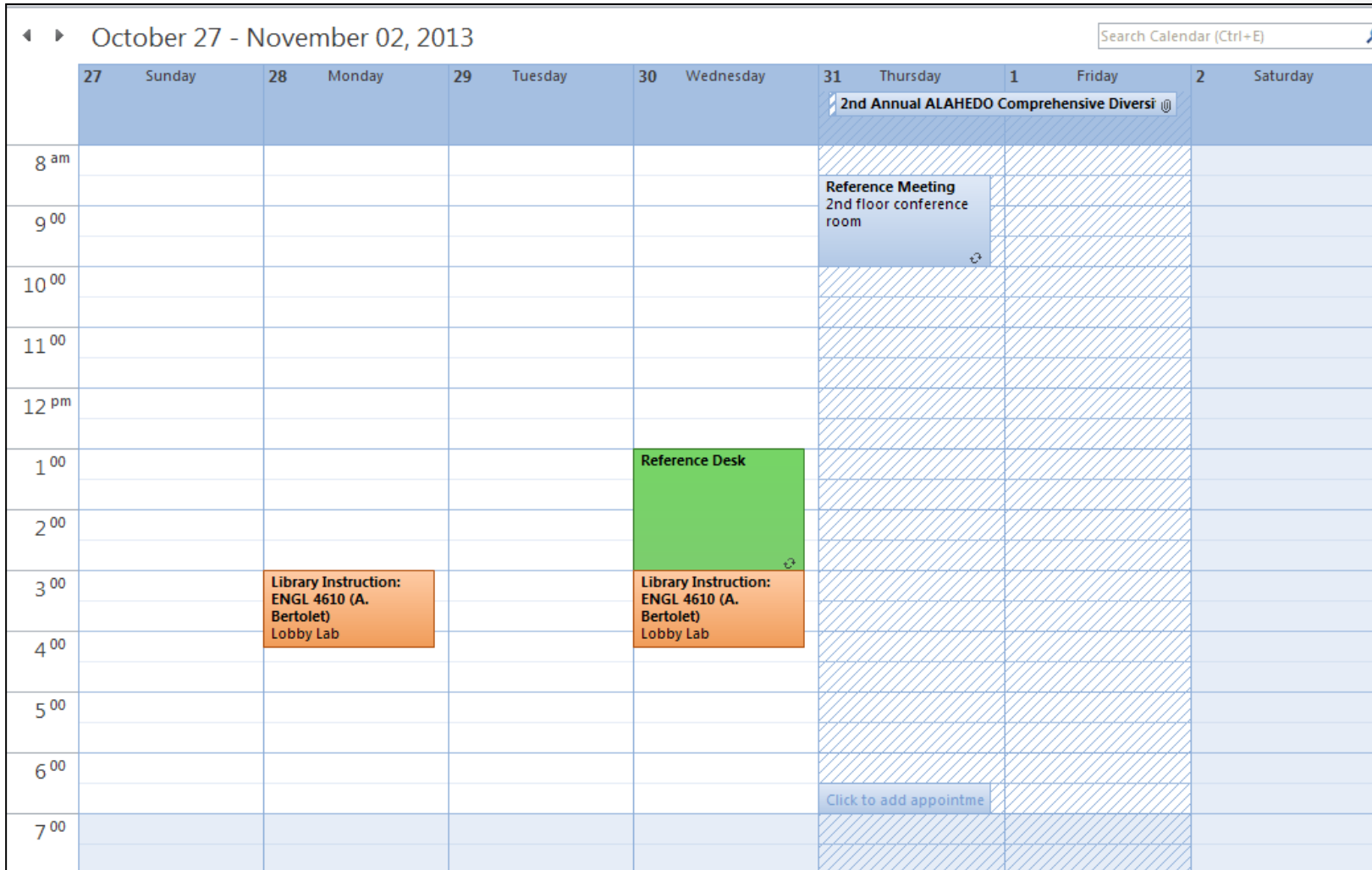
Content appropriate to level of students.                    5    4    3    2    1

Instructional method appropriate for students and subject of session.    5    4    3    2    1

Well-designed handouts and/or teaching aids (if developed by the teaching librarian).    5    4    3    2    1

Good division of labor (for team-taught sessions)                    5    4    3    2    1

# Calendars & Scheduling



# Trust. Respect. Confidentiality.

Don't start PROT without them.

Investing time, energy, and care into the peer review of teaching can lead to significant gains, including individual improvement, cross-pollination of ideas, and an increased sense of community.

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- Alabi, J., Huisman, R., Lacy, M., Miller, W., Snajdr, E., Trinoskey, J., & Weare, W. H., Jr. (2012). By and for us: The development of a program for peer review of teaching by and for pre-tenure librarians. *Collaborative Librarianship*, 4(4), 165-174.
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Questions, Comments, Discussion



# Contact us

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