

Coordinators Leading Advancement of Sessional Staff (CLASS) Project

Exemplars of Good Practice Initiatives

Psychology – Tutoring Skills

EXEMPLAR: Psychology – Tutoring Skills

Title: Psychology – Tutoring Skills Peer Observation

University : University of Tasmania

Discipline Area: Psychology

**Subject/Unit
Coordinator (optional)** Andrea Carr (Practical Coordinator)

Level of Unit First Year

Number of Students: 350 students

**Number of Sessional
Staff** Up to 7 tutors

Delivery Mode: Face to face

Profile: Often tutors in first year Psychology practicals are teaching for the first time. Very few have a teaching background, but for the most part are completing or have completed post-graduate studies.

Background/Context: Teaching 2-hour practicals to first year psychology undergraduates. Material covered may include, academic and scientific writing, an introduction to scientific experimentation, data gathering and analysis, and scientific report writing.

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Good Practice Initiative:

Peer Observation:

The emphasis on this initiative is collaboration. Peer observation is discussed in tutor training sessions before semester. An initial observation session is conducted by the Practical Coordinator with further observations sessions conducted by tutors.

1. Initial peer observation is completed by the Practical Coordinator.
 2. A template is used to guide feedback in a range of areas including rapport and interaction with students, facilitating discussion, and management and leadership within the practical session.
 3. Written feedback is discussed in a one-on-one meeting between the Practical Coordinator and each tutor.
 4. Further observation sessions are arranged between individual tutors.
 5. Ideas, findings, reflections are further discussed at end of semester meetings.
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Tips for Implementation:

Initial discussion is vital. This ensures that an understanding is gained of the role peer observation plays in professional development. This also serves to allay any anxiety tutors may have regarding the observation sessions.

Evaluation:

Tutors have engaged in this process and have indicated that it is positive.

Reflection:

As Practical Coordinator one of my responsibilities is to ensure that new tutors are adequately trained and experienced tutors are adequately supported in their professional development. I take this role very seriously and consider peer observation good practice and a very useful, positive process.

Care is always needed in terms of the anxiety that might be experienced by the tutors and observers. There will always be an inherent power imbalance between tutors and observers and this must be recognised. I believe that by giving over the responsibility of peer observations to tutors as an ongoing professional development initiative in some way serves to address this.

It has become clear that attempting to give feedback on too many aspects of teaching is difficult. We have found it useful, in the ongoing process of peer observation; for tutors identify particular areas they on which they would like to receive feedback. This then acts to focus the sessions.
