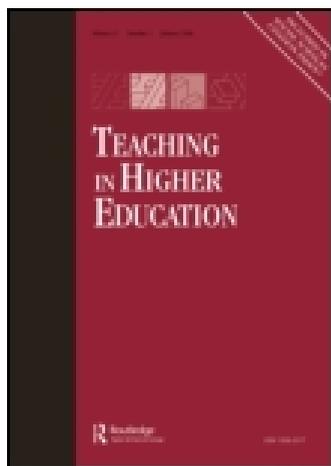


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Peer observation as a transformatory tool?¹

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This article is an account of my search for professional identity as a new university lecturer through the use of the peer observation of teaching (POT) techniques. Through a synthesis of selected theoretical literature, associated critical reflection, and my own experiences of professional development through POT, the paper presents a conceptual framework for POT that accommodates both technical development, critical know-how in the classroom, and personal growth and change. The paper argues that an instrumental interpretation of POT is not sufficient to enhance teacher performance in the classroom. Rather, learning about teaching, and heightening a sense of professionalism stems from a continuous process of transforming personal meaning. This demands an active engagement with pedagogical theory, purposeful critical reflection on classroom practice, and a challenging of assumptions through shared critical reflection.

Introduction

The context for this paper is the 1997 Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) which emphasized the requirement for academic staff to be ‘trained’. As a post-Dearing academic in a post-1992 university, and a ‘beginning teacher’ (McLeod, 1997), peer observation of teaching (POT) was therefore integral to my training. I both observed and was observed. I experienced Sartre’s *‘regard d’autrui’*; the gaze of the other was both confirming and threatening, at once undesirable yet essential, challenging and enlightening.

POT is used in a variety of contexts. It may be deployed as a critical reflective device for new teachers. Within continuing professional development, POT may, potentially, form ‘job-embedded’ activity (DeBlieu, 2002) through collaborative collegial support in the classroom. POT also forms part of quality monitoring processes. Though deployed in different ways, it is generally held that POT is about enabling change for the better. Change can occur in a number of different aspects—in one’s professional craft, in one’s profession, and ultimately, perhaps, in how one challenges accepted wisdoms and ‘self-concept’ (Burns, 1982). It is these changes that are the focus of this paper.

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In terms of what POT has meant for my development and my professional persona as an emergent practitioner, it has been my attempts to conceptualize POT, rather than its instrumental use, which proved to be the most constructive and rewarding learning experience. Reflecting on the raw mechanics of POT as a tool to enhance teaching practice helped me understand myself as a learner (Daly *et al.*, 2004). The intellectual endeavour of theorizing POT took me from a normative stance to understanding classroom behaviour to an interpretive paradigm that focused on my own and my colleagues' experiences, together with differentiated interpretations of classroom practice (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). I therefore 'journeyed' from an apprentice—using POT in a reductionist way—to a relatively mature critical learner and more confident teacher in an ongoing dynamic of change. For me, this sense of *becoming* a more critical practitioner is characterized by being more sensitive to individual freedom and choice (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994), and having a greater sense of moral and professional responsibility. Further, it has encouraged me to become sceptical of POT as an instrumental learning and measurement tool.

This article draws on my personal experiences as a 'student teacher'. This identity is one of creative tension, since I was simultaneously a student of teaching, a teacher of students, and a researcher of pedagogical practice (Peel, 2002). My Proustian journey to 'seeing with new eyes' began in an uncritical way. I accepted POT as a social tool to enhance teaching practice. POT also represented 'a means to an end' since it was integral to the satisfactory completion of my postgraduate in-training course. Essentially, it represented a performance test of my teaching competence. Yet, an important insight to emerge from seeking to understand classroom behaviour through POT was the sheer diversity in the individual and social constructions of the purpose, value and use of POT. A step change in my thinking stemmed from my personal reconstruction of POT.

In drawing together theory and biography, the following discussion seeks to flesh out Ashworth's (2004) 'inquirer' (p. 147) who approaches the world 'understandingly' but without a 'full discursive grasp' (p. 149). Hence, the paper examines POT through the 'voice' of experience (Rhodes, 1996). In particular, it explores the nature of POT which is simultaneously socially constructed as both a developmental tool and a performance measure.

It is held that hermeneutic phenomenology can 'transform the ways in which students, researchers, and practitioners relate to one another' (Perl, 1997). Taking this reflexive perspective, direct experience of phenomena is central to understanding and interpreting behaviour. Moreover, it requires individuals actively to engage with perspectives that challenge personal preconceptions. As a 'student' learning within my place of work this critical stance required a questioning of institutional norms. This represented a particular challenge for my identity as a student effectively seeking to observe and to learn from my peers.

The article begins by justifying the use of an autobiographical stance before critically examining the arguments for and against POT. Then the discussion focuses on the development of a conceptual framework which seeks to explain the dynamics and dilemmas of meaningful learning through the experience of POT.

Autobiography, agency, and a structuralist approach

One of the interesting developments of the expanding interest in reflective teaching practice is the diversity of perspectives emerging, and the debates about what might constitute a professional academy (Daly *et al.*, 2004). Indeed, there is considerable controversy as to what constitutes a scholarship of teaching (Kreber, 2002), and pedagogic research (Stierer & Antoniou, 2004). The stance taken in this article reflects the practice of ‘living educational theory’, since it seeks to theorize an individual educational praxis (McNiff *et al.*, 1996). Following Foucault (1991), it echoes the ‘experience-book’ or ‘experiment in self-transformation’, since the very acts of reflecting and writing are integral to a process of re-constructing the phenomenon of POT.

At the outset, it is important to acknowledge that the value of ‘autobiography’ in academic writing is disputed (Andresen, 1993). In support of the approach, Brookfield (1990) suggests one person’s autobiographical exploration of a dilemma may contain points of connection to others’ experience. Further, Giddens (1991) argues that interpretive self-history is at the core of self-identity in modern social life. Moreover, in opening up some ‘action spaces’ Usher *et al.* (1997, p. 212) upgrade the voice of ‘ordinary experience’ (p. 213). Importantly, then, it is a certain ordinariness that can be illuminating by ‘making the familiar strange’ (Delamont & Atkinson, 1995, p. v). Personal experience therefore has the potential to revise collective practice, ideas and lifeworlds, and to provide professional voice (Peel, 2005).

As a tool, POT raises important questions, however, about the inter-relationships between structure (system, context, institution) and agency (individual human capabilities, behaviour). The perspective taken in this discussion is framed following Giddens’ theories of structuration (Cloke *et al.*, 1991). The structuration thesis stems from a critique which argues that the structural and interpretive sociologies risk separately over-emphasizing either structure- or agency-orientated accounts of social life. In structuration theory, the duality of structure and agency are constructed as being mutually reinforcing and mutually reaffirming. In the context of POT, the ‘structure’ refers to the academic institution and its cultural framework, values and assumptions within which individuals (human agents) learn to discharge their working practices. As a new member of staff, I was keen to acculturate. Yet, my relationship with POT changed as I become more confident of my competence and performance in the classroom, and I was confronted with contested social constructions of POT.

Significantly, in processes of becoming ‘self’ aware, particular attention is paid in the literature to the debates around (the contested concepts of) critical reflection, reflective practice, reflective dialogue, and transformative learning. Reflection about professional practice is promoted as valuable, especially where it is through ‘reflective dialogue’ (Brockbank & McGill, 1998, pp. 5–6). Yet, much of the literature concerned with reflection highlights the contested and confused nature of the concepts (Schön, 1987, 1991; Biggs, 1999; Nicholls, 2001; McNiff, 2002; Mason, 2002). Following Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) the following definition is useful:

Reflective practice is viewed as a means by which practitioners can develop a greater self-awareness about the nature and impact of their performance, an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development. (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993, p. 19)

Critical reflection features as a necessary prerequisite to the developmental discourses, and related discussions associated with POT (Martin & Double, 1998; Biggs, 1999; Cosh, 2002). In this context, Shortland (2004, p. 227), for example, noted that ‘observation offers tremendous potential to promote self-knowledge and professional development, particularly when it is part of a continuing process’. In particular, the dynamic potential of POT and the professional-personal spectrum were highly significant for me. My interest turned on comprehending my identity as a professional teacher operating in the changing context of higher education (Taylor, 1999). Following Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle, my critical reflections were first stimulated by my classroom experiences, and then informed by pedagogical theory. This interplay opened new theoretical horizons, and provided the insights for further classroom experimentation.

Contextualizing the peer observation of teaching in higher education

The literature on the purposes, processes and principles of POT falls broadly into two camps. First, POT is presented as developmental; second, POT is used judgementally (Hopkins, 1993). The distinctions are important. Significantly, the issue of ‘performance’ lies very much at the heart of the developmental/judgemental debates around POT. For example, Bell (2002) maps the different purposes and processes associated with POT and puts forward a theoretical framework of POT using two continuums: performance–development and training purposes on the vertical axis, and formal-informal processes on the horizontal axis. Her analysis suggests that the relatively more formal approaches to POT activities are more prevalent. The significance is that POT is, in practice, presented as a top-down rather than a bottom-up process.

The developmental/performance distinction is crucial since, as D’Andrea (n.d.) explains, POT risks being ‘hijacked by university managers and used as a mechanism for staff evaluation and personnel decisions regarding tenure and promotion instead of a means to improve the student’s learning experience’ (p. 1). Evidence from the US, for example, indicates that POT has matured as a professional development activity to include triangulated methods of peer review of teaching, synthesizing multiple sources of data on teaching and learning, including student evaluations, analysis of curriculum design, and review (ibid.). In effect, POT may be an appropriate research tool for institutional and individual purposes.

The developmental/judgemental debate clearly has important implications for how academics engage with POT. Gosling (2002), for example, explains how POT has developed largely as a response to Subject Review and as an opportunity to ‘rehearse’ for quality assurance assessors (see also Martin & Double, 1998). Yet, this potentially minimizes a responsiveness to unique learning situations. Moreover, the judgemental

associations with respect to this tool have somewhat blighted POT, with staff defensive and anxious about the process, and sceptical of its developmental potential (Gosling, 2002). As a consequence, the emphasis on an institutional (rather than agency) construction of POT risks undermining it as a tool for personal growth and change.

Although considerable literature exists on the use of POT in compulsory education (see Wragg, 1999; Montgomery, 1999; Sullivan & Glanz, 2000; Marriott, 2001), there is less critical analysis available with respect to its purpose, use and value in higher education. Thus, Bell (2002), for example, observed that there are some formal approaches to documenting 'effective peer observation' (p. 8), but that it is difficult to find quantitative evidence due to its nature and context. Nonetheless, she reported 'anecdotal evidence' (p. 8), drawn largely from staff development practice, that suggests POT improves teaching and develops collegiality and reflective practice. Much of the available guidance provides methodological approaches and practical advice with respect to POT. Yet, there is limited critical theorizing.

There is a related body of critical literature with respect to improving performance (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004). This links to wider practices of professional accreditation, and the monitoring and control associated with requiring proof of (teaching) competence. Yet, as Watkins and Mortimore (1999) point out, offering prescriptions about how to teach potentially undermines the professional teacher's ability to select and adapt their teaching to fit the context. It risks casting teachers as 'functionaries'. Prescribing 'how to teach' does not send out a message, or invitation, for continued (self-directed) learning, and may damage morale. The idea that practices are sanctioned reflects Foucault's (1979) concept of the 'mentality' of 'governmentality'. Here, the current emphasis upon performance reinforces processes of self-policing, rather than constructing a more developmental narrative. This is a particular social construction of POT.

The practice of POT is also discussed in the press and professional trade literature. In the late 1980s, there was union opposition to observation when it was constructed as part of the appraisal process. Context, however, is all important. During this period, observation was seen as 'managerialist and punitive in intent' (Allen, 2002a, p. 1). It reflected wider public policy thinking in line with a neo-liberal approach to state-market relations (Giddens, 1998). There has been a change of attitude. In 1999, national guidance from one union supported observation, provided it was holistic, took account of the totality of a lecturer's job, did not over-emphasize 'direct teaching', and was essentially 'developmental and supportive' (Allen, 2002a, p. 1). Although much of the discourse associated with POT emphasizes teaching quality enhancement, rather than quality assurance, it is clear that those who are 'subject' to or the 'object' of observation are nonetheless suspicious of the 'real' intent. Indeed, POT finds itself under observation (Allen, 2002b). In contrast, Sullivan and Glanz (2000), for example, offer a more optimistic interpretation of 'supervision' which has evolved from a 'crude, unsophisticated bureaucratic inspectional approach' to 'more refined democratic participatory techniques and methodologies' more appropriate to a post-industrial society (p. 21). This suggests a potential route for POT.

The critical literature draws attention, then, to the distinction between teaching ‘competence’, which is based on an *operational* view of teaching, and which emphasizes efficiency and effectiveness (Nicholls, 2001), and *cognitive* understanding, or ‘academic competence’ (Barnett, 1994). The significance of the efficiency and effectiveness model, Nicholls (2001) argues, is that lecturers may be expected to ‘conform’ to a national (or institutional) view of what constitutes the ‘effective teacher’. This may result in teachers ‘playing the game’ or ‘performing’ in a way which allows them to obtain recognition for ‘competence’ in teaching and learning, and, thereby, to legitimize their teaching status so as to free them up to concentrate on their research activities. She suggests:

Meaningful learning and reflective practice are more likely to occur when new and experienced academics engage with the pedagogic practice of their disciplines for its own sake, not for that of external demand. (Nicholls, 2001, p. 51)

The insights that can be drawn from this literature are informative in a number of ways. My enthusiasm for POT was not always shared by colleagues. My interest in observing the dynamics of the classroom could not be isolated from concerns about things not quite going to plan (Peel & Shortland, 2004). Further, in terms of my own understanding, the arguments that turn on whether POT is developmental or performance-based prove rather sterile, and reductionist. In my experience, POT serves agency means and ends as well as structure ends and means. Moreover, an instrumental interpretation of POT is not sufficient to enhance teacher performance in the classroom. Rather, learning about teaching, and heightening a sense of professionalism stems from a continuous process of transforming and constructing personal meaning in a variety of related ways. This demands an active engagement with abstract pedagogical theory, purposeful critical reflection on classroom practice, and a challenging of assumptions through shared critical reflection with colleagues, during both formal and informal conversations about teaching. In the next section, I reflect on my experiences of POT as part of my probationary period and in-service training.

A meaningful process? POT as a potentially transformatory tool

Following Kreber *et al.*'s (2003) analysis of Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory, this section describes what makes POT meaningful to me. Given its use during my postgraduate degree as both a tool for personal critical reflection, and an external device for appraisal of competence, I had a particular stake in the efficacy of POT, and certain important questions concerning the extent to which POT would affect my performance and turn me into an ‘expert’ teacher. I was nonetheless naïve in terms of how I thought POT would work in practice. As an ‘apprentice teacher’, I was certain that POT could help me to modify my classroom behaviour through imitation. By watching others, I could gain new or fresh insights.

But it proved not to be that simple. If observation was going to work for me it was clearly critical for me to notice ‘good’ teaching in others, and to be critically

reflective. First, one has to (be able to) distinguish desirable practice, similarities or differences. Second, however, observation may be an unthinking, mechanical process that does not necessarily modify intentions. I needed to be clear about how what I had learned translated into practice—my practice. Then again, and third, behaviour that is modified through observation is not necessarily modified for the better. Fourth, when we observe, what we see is overlain with our theoretical baggage, and I found that challenging my preconceptions ‘set me back’ as I went through an uncomfortable recognizing of my own conceptions of teaching practice. I often had a sense then of ‘overdosing on reflection’.

It subsequently became clear to me that observation of teaching is not sufficient to enhance teacher performance in the classroom. Other factors influence teaching competence. More than a behaviouristic learning process, learning depends upon individual perceptions, individual reflective capacity, and the potential creative use of personal insights. Further, these may need to be developed through cognitive strategies. Engaging with the wider literature and policy documentation thus became critical for me in order to enhance my teaching practices in the classroom.

My personal experience was that relying solely on what I could observe happening in the classroom as evidence of effective performance was often a chimera. I could not with my skills, knowledge, personality, classroom, and group of students repeat or imitate what I had observed. Did this make my teaching any less effective? The use of peer and classroom observation served to sensitize my ability to observe, and to critically reflect on the dynamics and changing social context of learning. In part, these benefits stemmed from making the time and space to observe the teaching context and students engaged in the learning process. This is rare. Yet, taking the time to watch the dynamics of classroom learning was for me a precious learning experience. Through actively engaging with POT, I have *witnessed* the value of preparation, structure, organization, timing, interaction and inclusivity in the classroom. But it was much more than techniques, teaching aids, or tricks of the trade. These are insufficient for enhancing teaching. This requires a synthesis of substantive knowledge, a critically reflective engagement with teaching practice, and a confidence in one’s self. But my experience of POT heightened my alertness, and stimulated my sensory perceptions of my own physical presence in the classroom, and the human value of the teacher as the principal ‘teaching aid’.

It seems to me that, despite potentially generic approaches to ‘teaching teaching’, professional growth is very much a personal odyssey, grounded in experiential learning from which personal meaning is derived. Following Kolb (1984), it is abstract theories and concrete experiences together that help to develop and refine one’s personal action theories. Reading, reflecting and testing out strategies in the classroom slowly helped to improve my teaching craft. As an apprentice of the art and science of teaching, much of my initial understanding of the *métier* was initially founded on my own entrenched views of teaching, based on earlier experiences of school and university learning. As a beginning teacher, I drew on informal approaches, principally my own experiences as a learner (where my attention was on content); trial and error; and informal chatting with colleagues. Initially, then my

approach was based on imitation without reflection, a desire to transmit a body of knowledge, rather than to facilitate processes of learning.

This bounded learning, however, was insufficient to enhance my practice. Whilst my engagement with codified knowledge in the form of a range of academic guidance on teaching raised my awareness, this knowledge of teaching was only useful when it made sense to me though subsequent reflection over time and through numerous situated contexts, including watching others. I needed these multiple experiences, different theoretical insights, and contrasting peer reviews to interpret my practice and develop my own discursive understanding. Moreover, it was the interplay between the professional and the personal as part of a holistic learning process that was critical to the development of my sense of self in both its public and private facets.

It was less the use of POT that led to change in my practice and sense of self, but my confidence in challenging the purposes, uses and value frameworks of POT. I thus went from an instrumental use of POT as a tool for critiquing performance in the classroom to question the societal and institutional uses of POT. It was the critical reflective thinking about POT that deeply changed me and my practice, rather than the processes of change that came about through the use of POT. My sense of awakening stemmed from my questioning of my assumptions about how and why POT 'should' work. Effectively, I was questioning my espoused theories about POT and its normative status. The transformatory dimension of my learning derived then from having the confidence to challenge my own—and society's practice. This is what makes the challenges of the peer observation of teaching or the observation of learning in the classroom meaningful and exciting. This has been my transformatory understanding.

Towards a conceptual framework for POT?

This final section seeks to make my own experience and critical reflections functionally useful (Kreber *et al.*, 2000) for the wider academic community. In so doing, this section offers a conceptual framework for considering POT in higher education. The debates around training and performance highlight the structural dimensions of the institution moulding my skills base to be 'fit for purpose' in line with the literature on teacher effectiveness and the (contested) notion of competency (Barnett, 1997; McLeod, 2001). Such a take on POT potentially undermines, or conflicts with my own sense of professional empowerment through the ownership and development of my own teaching craft, and the validity of my lived experiences.

Learning by doing

The experiential learning cycle is widely used in discussions of adult learning (Lewin, 1946; Kolb, 1984). Importantly, my personal experience was one of progressive revision of my teaching practices through classroom observation and an ongoing

oscillation (Cowan, 1998) between theory, action, and reflection. Here the fact that my learning was grounded and 'situated' (Lave & Wenger, 2001) in experience was critical. Significantly, it was when I was 'unsettled' (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993) by the apparent mismatch between theory and practice that a more meaningful insight shone through.

The act of observation is essentially a sensory experience. Hergenhahn (1982) notes that Bandura's theory of observational learning suggests that: 'anything that can be learned by direct experience can also be learned from observation' (p. 405)—although the teacher must also take into account a range of attentional, retentional, motor and motivational processes (p. 406). More than simply a behaviouristic learning process, learning depends upon one's perceptions, and the potential creative use of insights that can be developed through 'cognitive strategies'. In POT, it is surely the higher level thinking skills which support and reinforce the critical analysis associated with the acts of observation—and of being observed—which are the potential sources of rich learning?

My engagement with POT provided a leap of understanding about what makes learning personally meaningful. This personal epiphany was, however, quickly confirmed in a wealth of established literature. Kolb's (1984) model makes the critical linkages between education, work and personal development, and these ideas chime with Barnett's (1997) 'domains' of knowledge, action in the world and self. This line of thinking asserts that meaningful work and career-development complement formal education and lifelong personal development. Indeed, Kolb (1984) argues that it is the continuous, dynamic interplay between these aspects of life that support individuals in achieving their full potential as citizens, family members and human beings. Zuber-Skerritt (1996) contends that Kolb's (1984) interpretation provides a useful way to conceptualize staff development. Importantly, however, she asserts that 'a critical, enquiring professional attitude is necessary so that people are not only products (and victims) of their social environment, but also active producers of their own situations and work conditions' (p. 22). The distinction between product and producer is key since this challenges the tensions in the structure and agency dichotomy inherent to POT. Indeed, it was that astonishing step to critical enquirer that for me was so powerful.

A transformatory experience?

According to Brockbank and McGill (1998), it is the layering of reflective activities that can contribute to 'transformatory' learning which involves reflection about knowledge, action and self, together with reflection on that learning. Following Kolb (1984), transformation is part of a progressive process personally to construct meaning. Enhanced meaning is therefore continuously recreated through the interplay of social and personal knowledge, and experiential and conceptual insights. At one level, POT provided a range of opportunities for critical discussion and feedback on performance. More importantly, the university became my observatory

for critically reflecting on the richness of teaching practice. Moreover, the structure of the course provided for discussion and debate with colleagues. Following Brockbank and McGill's (1998) development of the double-loop learning concept, the role of the 'other' in transforming understanding and enhancing self-awareness is critical. Colleagues were the 'helpers' (Brookfield, 1987, p. 29) who provided the 'critical energy' (Barnett, 1997, p. 172) for my personal reconstruction of knowledge.

This emphasis on the 'other' is, perhaps, unsurprising. There is a concern that teachers' practices alone are not necessarily the best sources for reflective analysis (Montgomery, 1999). Moreover, it is generally agreed that only by generating 'awareness' can one challenge ingrained behaviours and the theories that underpin them (Mason, 2002). The idea of reflection as social formation (Barnett, 1997) in the context of POT is useful since this perspective suggests that the reflective self cannot bring about self-realization alone, but needs to draw on others. Three important issues arise. First, there is the identity and capacity of the 'peer' in the observation process. Second, there is a risk of bounded thinking by disciplines or departments. Third, and crucially, what exactly is being observed?

Significantly, the role of the other in stimulating opportunities for reflection is pivotal. Critical thinking can be arduous and, although we may flirt privately with new ways of thinking or action, we often lack the impetus to implement change (Brookfield, 1987). Peer support may be vital in legitimating new ways of interpretation and supporting change. Brookfield's (1987) description of the 'critical helper' who can offer a mirror onto our actions from an 'unfamiliar psychological vantage point' (p. 29) usefully emphasizes the 'peering' role of the other who can help us to interpret and to question our ideas and actions.

Nevertheless, the potential discomfort of POT should not be underestimated. Discomfort, however, can be productive; and there are a variety of metaphors used in the literature to describe these unsettling dimensions. Nicholls (2001), for example, states that 'perturbance is an essential ingredient to activate reflective learning' (p. 118); Mason (2002) talks about 'disturbance'; and Brookfield (1987) describes the laying down of 'psychological dynamite' (p. 30). Nonetheless, he also urges sensitivity by the 'psychological demolition experts' (p. 30). Further, Daley (1997), for example, examines the use of uncomfortable situations in order to apply transformative learning theory, and to foster Mezirow's (1990) transformative dimensions of content, process and premise reflection. In seeking to support reflection in an ethical way, Daley (1997) discusses the use by students of autobiographical records that set out 'disorienting dilemmas' (Mezirow, 1991) or 'paradigm cases' (Benner, 1984) as a device to reflect on practice.

If the purpose of POT is to help others engage in learning that transforms essential beliefs, however, then it is clear that immense care is required. In addition to the rationale and socio-cultural institutional context for POT, the learning opportunities will be affected by the status and 'competency' of the peer. In terms of the 'supervision' available, teachers may be 'new' or 'experienced' (Nicholls, 2001). A note of caution is important; experienced or seasoned teacher may bring a variety of

experience, baggage and competence into the classroom. Experience does not guarantee quality performance.

Eureka!

The distinction between individuality and empowerment, and processes of socialization are important aspects of organizational learning (Rhodes, 1996). Significantly, then, POT may be deployed to facilitate the transmission of institutional norms and values, or it may be used to support more individually grounded transformatory processes. Nonetheless, Barnett (1997), for example, contended that systems of monitoring and developmental control are increasingly being valued over processes of growth and change. A critical concern then is whether POT is used principally for instrumental purposes or to foster an individual's sense of self. What was significant in my enlightenment through POT was that it enabled me to challenge both my self-concept and the institutional thinking and practice.

POT: towards a conceptual framework?

Through my earthy experiences in the classroom, the theoretical literature became less abstract. One of the themes running through the literature associated with growth, development and change are the different dimensions and layers relating to knowledge, content, and education; work, process and action in the world; and self, premise and personal development. Van Manen (1991), for example, identifies three dimensions: technical rationality, practical action and critical reflection. At the first level, the learning emphasis is the technical application of knowledge. This related to my classroom practice. At the second level, attention is paid to clarifying assumptions and predispositions. This occurred in conversation and through critical engagement with the literature. The third level is concerned with the worth of knowledge. This is the level of critical self analysis. It is here that the self becomes the focus of interrogation.

The theoretical and practical insights from this study are presented as a conceptual framework (Table 1) that brings together aspects of change and growth in three dimensions. This provides a way of conceptualizing and interrogating the various dynamics of POT. The framework is not intended to be read as hierarchical or linear because, in practice, change is amorphous and iterative, varying across place and time. Moreover, the dimensions may be developed in parallel and are mutually reinforcing. Although it is not the intention that interpretation be read along the dimensions, since a more fluid interaction is likely, it is the integrity of the horizontal set of ideas corresponding to D^3 that was significant for me. This is the plane concerned with change and growth in self and which is associated with ideas of human potential, meaningful learning and enhanced performance.

D^1 is concerned with pedagogical knowledge, the 'know that', of the discipline of teaching. Here, the approach to knowledge may be instrumental in the sense that one

Table 1. A conceptual framework for understanding POT

	Dimension	Theoretical perspective				
		Individual	Level	Domain	Level	Peer
Change and Personal Growth	D ³	Personal development	Premise	Self	Critical reflection, moral and ethical criteria	Self-directed
	D ²	Work	Process	Action in the World	Practical action relating to different pedagogical goals	Collaborative
	D ¹	Education Kolb (1984)	Content Mezirow (1991)	Knowledge Barnett (1997)	Technical rationality Van Manen (1991)	Informational Sullivan and Glanz (2000)

Note. Derived from Peel, 2002.

needs a degree of basic ‘fact’ in order to begin to engage with practice. The beginning teacher is being educated and instructed in the subject and the peer, often a ‘more experienced’ colleague, acts in an informational (directing) approach. D¹ corresponds to a technical rational approach to performance, and is principally concerned with the efficient and effective application of pedagogical knowledge. Reflection is relatively limited, focusing on content.

D² represents the dimension that focuses on praxis, that is, it is more concerned with the world of work and processes of teaching. In this dimension, the beginning teacher is engaging with pedagogical issues in practice. Whereas D¹ relates to ‘know that’, D² is concerned with ‘know how’ in the world. Here, reflection is more concerned with assessing and considering the consequences of different pedagogical actions. The relationship with knowledge is changed in that this is now based on a relatively more communicative approach based on (shared) experiential learning. Following Sullivan and Glanz (2000), the role of the peer in D² is collaborative in that decisions about teaching practice are discussed with an emphasis on the student-teacher taking the lead. There is potentially more opportunity for reflective learning drawing on a synergy of D¹ and D².

D³ is the dimension that offers the most challenge and potential reward to the individual and the institution. The aspect of self is arguably the least attended to in much of the POT literature. In this dimension, the individual is engaging with the underlying premises informing pedagogical theory and the construction of learning programmes at the level of the curriculum. D³ also corresponds to the personal development of the emergent teacher, as evidenced, for example, by the fact that a self-directed approach is advocated. This is the dimension that promotes

challenging ideologies and self-concepts. It is potentially more empowering in terms of the individual's relationship with, and use of, knowledge, learning and knowing. By virtue of being personally meaningful, the individual is more likely to be intrinsically motivated to change, hence there are deeper implications for professional identity.

POT as a transformatory tool?

Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) warn against the technocratic 'fix it' approach to educational reform which depends on conceiving of organizations and the people who work in them as rational and mechanistic. If universities require staff to use POT, without fostering a personal questioning of beliefs, assumptions, habits and acculturated practices, reform will be difficult to achieve. Without POT becoming internalized by staff, generative (creative) learning (Kolb *et al.*, 1995) is unlikely to occur. POT is therefore unlikely to challenge underlying 'theories in action', challenge 'old programming' or encourage the redrawing of 'obsolete mental maps'. Following Kolb *et al.*'s (1995) adaptive learning (single-loop learning) theory, POT may simply offer a coping strategy and maintain the *status quo*. How might change be fostered?

This paper has drawn together ideas from the literature on staff development and reflective practice in order to derive a conceptual framework with which to consider POT. It has argued that the emphasis on POT as a performance tool underplays the role of reflection in POT that may facilitate the personal change and growth of the teacher. Understanding the performance-development nexus is critical since how society and individuals construct performance differs. Development, however, is perceived differently from a structure or an agency perspective. Kolb (1984), for example, represents performance as lying at one end of what he calls a 'continuum of adaptive postures' (p. 34) comprising performance, learning and development. Performance refers to a limited and short-term adaptation in practice. He contrasts this with learning as a longer-term mastery of situations; and development as lifelong adaptation. According to Kolb (1984), 'performance' is the least interpretive. This conceptualization of performance suggests that POT would fall short of its anticipated benefits for longer term change and development as a critical practitioner.

Crudely put, one can teach rubbish well. Teaching is contingent on a multiplicity of factors. It is vital, therefore, that institutions are explicit about what POT is intended to achieve, responsible about how it is resourced, and articulate clearly how staff and students may engage with and benefit from the process. There is evidence that POT is an important tool for developing understanding of teaching practices. Yet, here's the rub: the normative aspect of POT raises a raft of philosophical issues about whether making POT compulsory would reduce its potential for supporting individuality and empowerment. For me, it was its potential to foster self-awareness and a more critical disposition that was its transformatory legacy.

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