

## **PRoT - feedback on the review process: Narratives from the reviewee and the reviewers.**

**Dr. Trina Myers, Dr. Leo Foyle and Paul Kebble**

### **Introduction (Paul Kebble, TLD)**

Peer review of teaching (PRoT) will become mandatory for all staff teaching coursework at James Cook University from 1 January 2012. A/Prof Kay Martinez and A/Prof Stephen Naylor have been the driving force behind the introduction of PRoT at JCU and in this capacity have conducted a number of presentations introducing the concept to teaching staff. I attended a presentation in July 2011 representing Teaching and Learning Development (TLD). I was enthusiastic to become involved in PRoT, particularly as I had had very positive experiences of using peer reviewing for professional development in previous English language college management roles. The concepts of PRoT propounded by Kay and Stephen were practical and designed to enhance the quality of pedagogy for all involved. I agreed wholeheartedly that both the reviewee and the reviewer would benefit from the negotiated and documented exchange. The move away from the traditional critical observation by a superior to the format of a peer acting as a critical friend appeared fundamental to JCU's PRoT concept. The notion that PRoT was limited to observations of teaching was also dispelled, allowing participants to analyse and reflect upon any aspect of pedagogy that would ultimately enhance student learning.

After the presentation I was introduced by Kay to Dr. Trina Myers. Trina was very eager to initiate the newly introduced PRoT process as a reviewee by inviting an academic from TLD to become a reviewer. And I was very interested to become involved at an early stage of the PRoT roll-out, both through my own interest and as a representative of TLD. Trina discussed with me that she had attended a seminar in July of 2010 organised by TLD on Process Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning (POGIL) and wished to analyse and reflect upon its inclusion in her lecturing. At this point I suggested inviting Dr. Leo Foyle from Veterinary Science to join the PRoT process. I had worked with Leo on the Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching and knew he was interested in exploring less didactic pedagogic approaches to lecturing. Trina was enthusiastic that someone from a different academic discipline could be involved in the reviewing process, and Leo accepted the invitation.

Trina suggested producing a DVD of her teaching specific to the POGIL implementation in her subject curriculum. The DVD would cover weeks 1-5 with a selection of "POGIL moments", as she said her students referred to them. The selection would include the initial introduction of POGIL to the students where the aim was to start building the POGIL culture, and a number of subsequent short to complex POGIL exercises to demonstrate the concept. We planned that our PRoT process would require us to view the DVD of teaching collectively whilst entering into a three-way conversation. We felt that this would support the reviewers in the process of reporting when utilising the newly available PRoT template, and would give the reviewee the opportunity to reflect and discuss concurrently.

The following narratives are offered from each of us as insights and reflections on the PRoT process that we became engaged in.

**The Reviewee (Dr. Trina Myers):** I have recently taken part in a PRoT of my teaching methods. The review was one of the first of the new strategy in peer review at JCU. I was excited to be a part for a number of reasons, chiefly: 1) I could gather feedback on my teaching to indicate what I am doing right and how I could improve on areas that I do not do well, 2) I wanted to illustrate a new method of teaching to large classes that I have incorporated in my subjects over the past 4 semesters and get feedback on the methodology from experts in teaching and learning, and 3) I wanted to be reviewed by peers who were not in my discipline but who may be interested in the POGIL method (best practices and improvement works better if there is more than one implementation).

I decided to video the first 5 weeks as I wished to be reviewed on a specific detail that is interwoven within the curriculum and within the lectures and tutorials. The POGIL method is highly dependent on building a "culture" so how it is introduced to the students is a key detail I wanted to show the reviewers. Then, over the following weeks of lectures, to show the evolution in student behaviour and the added (some unexpected) benefits of POGIL, I produced a DVD of these "POGIL" moments which took snippets of each lecture with examples of POGIL exercises. The total viewing time was approximately 60 minutes (with some bonus footage if the reviewers could not get enough).

I found the review itself to be an incredibly positive experience! The review was conducted as an informal meeting with both reviewers and myself. I was able to discuss with them what

I wished to be reviewed on. I gave a short overview of the POGIL philosophy and what I had hoped to achieve using this method in class. The reviewers showed support and genuine interest in what I had been trying to achieve.

We then proceeded to watch the video snips where I was able to give small commentaries as they were playing. Some commentaries were simply to explain what I was thinking/planning at a specific stage.

As the review progressed both reviewers asked many questions and offered such positive feedback as they watched student actions and reactions. Their observations of my teaching allowed me to take a “birds-eye” view (a feeling of watching yourself in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person). I could view objectively what was actually happening in the classroom and the interactions that were going on from all facets of the room. One observation from the reviewer actually pointed to an interesting perspective (and benefit) that I had not even considered until being in this voyeuristic position. Specifically, not only was there interactivity between teacher and students but also between group team members and groups themselves – all working towards solving the problem at hand.

I feel the review was a total success, not only because of the positive questions, suggestions and feedback at the time but also the opportunity to look objectively at my teaching style while having expert teachers in the room to offer suggestions and encouragement.

Notably, I do not believe the total experience of the review would have been as successful if the reviewers had have been from my discipline or from a circle of friends. To hear positive comments and genuine enthusiasm from peers whom you do not know well and/or from different areas of expertise is very inspiring.

I look forward to the follow-up meeting and the final reports.

**Reviewer 1 (Paul Kebble):** On Thursday, 13 October 2011 between 10:00 am and 12 noon Dr. Trina Myers, Dr. Leo Foyle and I convened in a small lecture room in building 17, JCU Townsville, where Trina had set up the showing of the DVD of her lectures. Trina also provided us with copies of the PRoT forms she had downloaded, with initial comments and commentary. I had prepared for the session by reading information from the POGIL website

(<http://pogil.org/about>) and watching the video presentations on the website of POGIL in action. I also brought to the meeting JCU's document 'Core Principles of Learning, Teaching and Assessment' to assess and discuss alignment of the presented pedagogical technique with the relevant principles.

At the meeting Trina initially provided background information on the POGIL technique. POGIL, Trina explained, is a highly structured group-work teaching/learning technique that can be implemented in a lecture situation to invoke a tutorial (2 way learning) style into the simplex learning environment. According to Trina, the groups are peer reliant, i.e. students have roles within the groups that make them each responsible for a separate part of a task and hence the success of the team. Trina also stated that she had decided to undertake the implementation of POGIL in the discipline of IT and that she was adapting the model from an IT and personal perspective.

The meeting was conducted in an affable and respectful manner with all involved stating that they believed they would learn from the exchange. Trina initially explained the background to the project, as well as the POGIL principles, and how she had inculcated these into her pedagogy. We watched a number of POGIL sessions from Trina's lecturing sessions videoed over a five week period. Throughout the presentation we continually questioned Trina on the lecture content presented, discussed interactions between all participants and the elements of the teaching/learning processes that we observed. The video presentation allowed all three of us to become observers, which I felt was highly appropriate in promoting reflective practice in teaching and learning, allowing all to engage in the conversation supporting the analytical process.

I learnt much from the watching the video of Trina's lecturing and the oral exchange with my peers. However, whilst referring to the supplied PRoT reviewing form, I felt that there was no avenue for me to describe what I was able to take away from the exchange. I wanted to be able to record what I believed would enhance my pedagogy through engaging in this multi-dimensional exchange process with my peers.

As a group we decided that a follow-up session over coffee would be of benefit to all, and organised to do this some three weeks later.

**Reviewer 2 (Dr. Leo Foyle):** Dr. Trina Myers, lecturer in Information Technology in the School of Business, submitted some of her experiences with Process Orientated Guided Inquiry Learning (POGIL) during her first year computer science class for review under the new PRoT format.

I was invited to review Dr. Myers' teaching by Mr. Paul Kebble of the Teaching and Learning Development Department, JCU and we met on the 13<sup>th</sup> October for a two-hour session. I am currently engaged in ED5300 Learning and Teaching in Tertiary Education, a Certificate in Tertiary Teaching, being run by TLD.

Apart from Trina Myers, only Paul Kebble and I were present. Following the invitation to attend, Paul gave me a link to the POGIL website to allow me to do some background reading to familiarise myself with the concept. The review session comprised of Trina introducing the finer details of POGIL, and why she chose to explore this method as a teaching option: the idea arose subsequent to a teaching seminar with an invited North American guest speaker the year previous.

Following an informal few minutes of questions and answers, Trina started a presentation showing clips of video files taken from her lectures involving POGIL teaching sessions. Each of five clips was between 5-10 minutes and a DVD with the clips plus two additional ('optional') teaching sessions was provided to each reviewer to peruse afterwards if required. The clips showed how Trina introduced the idea of POGIL to her class, and how she organised the groups, the time spent doing so, and how the 'answers' were reported subsequently on the blackboard. During the clips, we progressively saw how students formed into groups more quickly when they became more familiar with the idea and how they took to the process readily. There seemed to be some vibrancy associated with the process which certainly demonstrated student engagement.

At all times, the session was informal and allowed for a free flow of questions, queries and explanations. The video files demonstrated the POGIL sessions reasonably well – but were hindered by a static viewpoint and distance to the blackboard preventing viewing of any opinions written up by the students: qualities that could only be improved upon with a second person filming the session. The static camera prevented us being able to see peripheral interaction with the students around the class but we could hear this occurring and could deduce from the footage reasonably well. Nor were we able to accurately gauge such things as eye contact and student reaction to voice cues and other stimuli around the room. Trina's voice came across well, but the unpractised students were much less clear.

The amount of student interaction and reaction that we did see appeared to be positive and enthusiasm was apparent in most students. Given that Trina had just the one camera to utilise by herself, the recordings were a fair representation of the sessions.

The video files cannot replace being present in the lecture theatre, and they are not appropriate for reviewing all teaching methods. Practically though, one cannot reasonably sit through five lectures to assess the POGIL method. In that respect this review session was a pragmatic way of assessing this particular teaching method and I consider the review session that I attended was worthwhile and of benefit.

Within the context of staff review, it is important for the reviewee to feel comfortable.

Professional, positive, constructive conduct at all times and a relaxed friendly manner is essential (as per JCU Code of Conduct) and within this POGIL review specifically, I feel this was achieved.