

## University academics' experiences of participating in collaborative peer observation learning circles

**Puspha Sinnayah**<sup>1,2</sup>, Trudy Ambler<sup>3</sup>, John Weldon<sup>1</sup>, Loretta Konjarski<sup>1</sup>, Kathy Tangalakis<sup>1,4</sup> and Andrew Smallridge<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>First Year College, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

<sup>2</sup>Institute for Health and Sport, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

<sup>3</sup>Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

<sup>4</sup>Institute for Sustainable Industries & Liveable Cities, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

The literature affirms that peer observation of teaching in higher education (HE) is effective as an approach to the professional learning of academics (Johnston et al., 2022; Sutherland et al., 2020) and an important factor in institutional quality assurance and evaluation (Zeng, 2020). Despite this, peer observation is rarely systematically sustained and supported in HE due to limited policy requirements, administrative support, financial and time provisions (Johnston et al., 2022). The aim of this study was to encourage academics' professional learning by understanding the key factors impacting their engagement in 'collaborative peer observation learning circles' (CPO/LCs) (Sinnayah et al., 2023). Located at one metropolitan university in Australia, an online survey and one-on-one interviews were used to explore academics' experiences of participating in CPO/LCs. Thematic analysis of the data revealed that mentorship, leadership, a community of practice and open mindset supported academics' involvement in CPO/LC. Academics also benefited from purposeful observation of teaching, opportunities for feedback and self-reflection, ideas regarding curriculum design and collaborative learning. Positive engagement in the peer observation cycle has the potential to improve teaching and the student learning experience. The study highlights that sustaining CPO/LCs in HE may be enhanced and encouraged by supportive university leadership within a collegial community.

### References

- Johnston, A. L., Baik, C., & Chester, A. (2022). Peer review of teaching in Australian higher education: a systematic review. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 41(2), 390–404. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07294360.2020.1845124>
- Sinnayah, P., Ambler, T., Kelly, K., Konjarski, L., Tangalakis, K., & Smallridge, A. (2023). Reviewing the literature: Collaborative professional learning for academics in higher education. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 1–15. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14703297.2023.2227614>
- Sutherland, K., Elgort, I., & Tennent, E. (2020). Teaching and learning circles: Developing reflective practice and enhancing teaching culture. <https://ako.ac.nz/knowledge-centre/developing-teaching-and-learning-circles>
- Zeng, L. M. (2020). Peer review of teaching in higher education: A systematic review of its impact on the professional development of university teachers from the teaching expertise perspective. *Educational Research Review*, 31, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2020.100333>