

PEER OBSERVATION OF TEACHING

CATL WORKSHOP, OCT. 8, 2015

SOME BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

- **Peer observation** should be voluntary, scheduled at mutually convenient dates, and undertaken by colleagues who respect one another.
- Before an observation, both parties should have a shared understanding of the goals and focus for the observation and the type of feedback that will be provided.
- There isn't only one good way to teach – and teachers need feedback about their own style of teaching, not the preferred methods of the observer.
- It can make an instructor anxious to be observed.
- Reciprocal (non-hierarchical) observation is a good practice.
- Ideally peer observation leads to exploration of what works and reflection on the assumptions under-pinning practices rather than simply focusing narrowly on one class meeting, which is just one “snapshot.”

PEER OBSERVATION SHOULD BE 3-STEP PROCESS

BEFORE THE OBSERVATION

- Understand why the instructor wants an observation.
- Discuss where the class meeting fits into the goals of the course, the specific objectives and methods for that class meeting, how the students prepared.
- Discuss exactly what the instructor wants feedback on. (Consider the options.)
- Discuss the observation tool observer will use. (See examples.)

DURING THE OBSERVATION

- Observer should arrive early and be as unobtrusive as possible.
- Observer should use some systematic method for focusing on the agreed upon areas and recording specific observations.
- Decide which specific moments in the class and/or behaviors by students or instructor illustrate what works effectively and which few things might be improved.

AFTER THE OBSERVATION

- Schedule a conversation as soon as possible after both have had a chance to reflect.
- Observer should begin by asking the instructor how s/he felt about the class meeting (to what degree met goals, what worked well and why, what was disappointing, what s/he would change next time, and whether the class meeting was typical).
- Reinforce positive behaviors – with specific examples.
- Make sure feedback is aligned with what was agreed upon.
- Target just a few areas for improvement.

ABOUT FEEDBACK

- Where possible, provide specific observed information. For example, instead of just saying “You’re very clear,” explain “When you said/did _____, I saw numerous students nodding.”
- Feedback should be both candid and tactful.
- Feedback should be descriptive, not judgmental.
- Provide a balance between praise and constructive criticism; it’s crucial to give positive reinforcement for things going well.
- Results should be strictly confidential and apart from summative evaluation.

SOME OPTIONS FOR WHAT AN OBSERVER COULD FOCUS ON

- Content
- Use of materials
- Class organization
- Presentation forms
- Teacher-student interactions
- Student participation/engagement
- Assessment practice

RESOURCES

Bandy, Joe. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching Peer Review of Teaching guide.

<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/peer-review-of-teaching/>

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Chism, Nancy V. 2007. *Peer Review of Teaching: A Sourcebook*. 2nd Edition. Anker.

College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Life Sciences, University of Illinois. "Peer Observation for Teaching Assessment."

http://academics.aces.illinois.edu/sites/academics.aces.illinois.edu/files/peerob_0.pdf

DeZure, Deborah. "Evaluating Teaching Through Peer Classroom Observation." In Seldin, *Changing Practices for Evaluating Teaching*.

Flanagan, Michael. "Observing Teaching: Discovering and developing the individual's teaching style." *Writing Program Administration* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1979).

Hutchings, Pat. 1996. *Making Teaching Community Property: A Menu for Peer Collaboration and Peer Review*. Stylus.

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Franchini, Billie. 2008. University of Albany Institute for Teaching, Learning, and Academic Leadership. "Peer Observation and Assessment of Teaching." Adapted from original guide by Bill Roberson for the *University of Texas El Paso*.

http://www.albany.edu/teachingandlearning/tlr/peer_obs/Peer%20Observation%20Resource%20Book%20for%20UAlbany.pdf

see also <https://www.itlal.org/index.php?q=node/90>

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University of Texas Austin Learning Sciences, "Peer Review of Teaching."

<https://learningsciences.utexas.edu/teaching/professional-development/peer-review-teaching>

Utah Valley University Faculty Center, "Rubric for Classroom Observation of Teaching."

http://www.uvu.edu/facultycenter/docs/Evaluating%20Teaching_Classroom%20Observation%20Rubric.docx