Grab your snacks, sunglasses, and sense of adventure because we’re going on a road trip to learn about peer observation of teaching!

Are you ready? On your marks! Get set! Go!

What is peer observation of teaching?

- A form of peer review that can provide a teacher with new insight and perspectives on their teaching, particularly on things they may not notice themselves 6, 7.
- Can be formative (determining what is done well and where improvement is needed) or summative (informing decisions relating to promotion and tenure) 7.

Who

- Teacher being observed should have input into the process 6.
- Choose equal colleagues to be observers as they tend to be good benchmarks of teaching 6, 7.
- Teacher being observed needs to trust and respect the person observing, and vice versa 3.
- Teacher should invite the observer, rather than the institution administration dropping in to a class unannounced 3.

What, how, when, why

- Pre-observation: observer reviews course materials (e.g., syllabus, course goals, and lesson goals) 5.
- Pre-observation: observer and teacher discuss and decide on evaluation criteria, procedures, expectations, and areas of focus 6, 7.
- At the start of observation: teacher curbs student curiosity by sharing who/why the observer is in the class 2.
- During: observer is a “fly on the wall” noting what happens 5, 6 and not intervening or participating in the lesson in any way, no matter what transpires 8.

What now

- Observation should complement other forms of evaluation (e.g., student ratings and self-assessments) 6, 7.
- Observer provides written feedback, as well as a verbal debrief within 24 hours of the observation 7.
- Feedback should be descriptive, specific, and behaviour-focused, taking into account the teacher’s needs and information processing capacity 1.
- Teacher who was observed should reflect on the feedback they received and come up with a plan to revise their teaching 9.
- Another observation session should be arranged to see if the implemented changes improved teaching 5.
- Having more than one observer at more than one point in time can help mitigate observer bias, improve objectivity, and improve reliability of the results 7.

Advantages

- Peer observation of teaching can provide context to student ratings, offering a more comprehensive evaluation of teaching than feedback collected by one method alone 7.
- It can provide new insights and perspectives on teaching, particularly on things the teacher may not notice themselves 6, 7.
- Colleagues are often well-poised to suggest ways to improve teaching 7.
- Observation can also be helpful to the observers as it can expose them to new teaching strategies and can lead their own teaching self-reflection 3.

CAUTION

- Observer bias can affect the quality of the feedback 7.
- It’s a time-consuming process to prepare for an observation, to observe someone teach, and to provide feedback 7, 9.
- Observers may not be experienced in providing constructive feedback, so the feedback isn’t as helpful or usable 7.

References