Why Use Peer Observation?

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Please note: I will gladly share a copy of these slides with you after today’s workshop. Just email me at bfranchini@albany.edu.
By the end of this session, you will be able to

* describe different types and purposes of peer observation
* explain when and why peer observation should be used
* describe some best practices for peer observation processes
What do we mean by Peer Observation
The strips of paper in the envelopes you’ve been given list some criteria we might consider when assessing an instructor’s teaching. In a small group, decide which of those characteristics could be appropriately assessed through observation of a live class meeting. You have 4 minutes to make your selections. Be prepared to share and defend your choices.
From your initial selections, choose the two items you think would be BEST assessed through classroom observation. You have 1 minute to make your choices.
Warm-up Task:
What can we measure through classroom observation?

Send someone from your group to the whiteboard to write your top two choices.
Organizing what you measure by sources of evidence

**Observable by looking at actual live classes**

* Engagement of students
* Classroom management
* Course organization
* Effectiveness of instructional materials
* Accessibility to students
* Appropriateness of evaluation practices
Organizing what you measure by sources of evidence

Observable by looking at syllabus, assignments/tests, and other documents
* Clarity and appropriateness of course objectives
* Selection of course content
* Course organization
* Appropriateness of evaluation practices

Observable by looking at student work
* Appropriateness of evaluation practices
* Students’ mastery of course content

Observable by looking at student feedback
* Accessibility to students
* Classroom management and engagement of students
A classroom observation is one element of a peer review

The rest of the story is filled in with other “observations” like:

* review and discussion of course materials (syllabi, assignments, print materials, etc.)
* review and discussion of student work (including graded work with instructor comments)
* review and discussion of student feedback (may be informal surveys at mid-semester or “official” end-of-semester)
* other…
Defining your Culture of Teaching

- “Closed door” classrooms
- Teaching as a private, independent enterprise
- Teaching as a set of practices developed through trial and error

or

- Classrooms as public spaces
- Teaching as a communal enterprise
- Teaching as scholarly activity (Boyer)
Purposes of Peer Observation
Why Peer Observation?
Some Contexts

- Seeking the opportunity to reflect on and improve teaching
- Developing network of mentors and peers
- Documenting teaching successes
- Creating a culture around teaching
Think-Pair-Share: What’s the difference between...

**Formative Assessment**

and

**Summative Assessment (Evaluation)**

Take a minute to write down some ideas in response to this question.
Think-Pair-Share: What’s the difference between...

Formative Assessment
and
Summative Assessment (Evaluation)

Share your ideas with the person sitting next to you.
Think-Pair-Share: What’s the difference between...

**Formative Assessment**
and

**Summative Assessment (Evaluation)**

Let’s hear your ideas!
A key distinction to keep in mind...

- **Formative Assessment**: to inform and improve practice
  - confidential, non-judgmental
  - aligned with specific needs/values of individual
  - focused on process (how could you do it differently?)
  - can be used to prepare for summative evaluations

- **Summative Assessment (Evaluation)**: to inform personnel decisions
  - “public” (i.e., visible in the review process)
  - aligned with publicly expressed values of the department
  - focused on output, results, outcome (how effective are you compared to departmental standards and expectations?)
Why is this Distinction so Important?
Best Practices for Conducting a Peer Observation
Conducting ANY effective peer observation requires that the observer know

1. her/his own values as a teacher
BEFORE you Observe, Reflect...

* What do I value? What principles guide my teaching?

* What do I do, and why?

* What do I expect to see students doing?

* What does my teaching look like when it’s going well?
Conducting ANY effective peer observation requires that the observer know

1. her/his own values as a teacher
2. the context and purpose for the observation (formative vs. summative)
3. the instructor’s objectives for the session observed (what the students are supposed to do and learn).
4. how the instructor has defined his/her role for the session observed.
5. the instructor’s expectations for what will actually happen in the session observed.
Peer Observation Process

1. Observer and observee meet/communicate to plan visit.

2. Observation occurs, using pre-determined instrument, guide and/or questions.

3. Observer and observee meet/communicate to exchange observations and feedback.

(4. If requested or required: creation of a written record.)
A. The Course Context

* What are you trying to accomplish in this course?

* How would you characterize your teaching strategy/method in the course overall?
The Pre-Observation Meeting

B. The class session being observed

* What are you trying to accomplish in this class meeting?

* What is the specific plan of this class meeting?
  * What will instructor do?
  * What will students do?

* What happened in the previous class meeting?

* What have the students done to prepare for this class?
C. Getting feedback

* What would the instructor like for the observer to focus on?

* How would the instructor like to receive feedback?
  * What kind of observation instrument/form will be used?
  * Will the observer prepare a written report, or will feedback only be given verbally?
The Observation:
Some principles guiding the process

* Think of yourself as an ethnographer, not a judge.
* Don’t get so caught up in the content that you forget to observe pedagogy/method.
* Take enough notes to be able to reconstruct the experience of the class.
* Make sure what you’re looking for is appropriate to the observee’s approach to teaching.
The Observation:
What should an observer be looking for?

Approach to teaching
Lecture, Information Transfer

Elements to be evaluated
* Organization of material to help student understanding & memory
* Aids to understanding and memory (handouts, support materials)
* Transitions between abstract concepts and concrete examples
* Engagement of students directly (pair-work; clickers; questions)
* Enthusiasm, energy, encouragement of student interest
* Clarity, accuracy of presentation
The Observation: What should an observer be looking for?

Approach to teaching
  Problem-solving or case analysis

Elements to be evaluated
  • Selection/Design of Problem or Case
  • Structure/sequencing of the activity
  • Management of the classroom process and environment
  • Interactions (student-student and student-instructor)
  • Debrief or follow-up: confirming relevance
Post-Observation Meeting (Face to Face)

Key best practice: Don’t meet to discuss your feedback immediately after the class meeting—take time to reflect on what you saw.

Some first questions from observer to observee
* Was this a typical class?
* How do you think it went?
* Talk me through what you did: where it went well; where it went differently from how you planned.
Observer’s report to observee

• Here’s what I saw (Describe the class meeting.)
• Here are examples of things (moments) that were effective.
• Here are examples of times where I did not understand what you were doing. Please explain it to me.
• Here are some ideas for what you might change.
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* describe some best practices for peer observation processes

Questions?
Resources for the Peer Observation Process

A brief, practical guide
ITLAL’s (UAlbany) Peer Observation Resources and Guidelines:
http://www.itlal.org/index.php?q=node/90

A more comprehensive guide
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