

Purpose of Peer Observation

In a peer observation, colleagues observe each other's teaching and engage in a post-observation conversation and reflection. The main purpose of peer observation is professional development of the observed instructor, while the observer will gain insight into improving their teaching practices through the observation process.

It is important that the observer and observed are "critical friends". Friendship is important for a positive experience, free of power and control obstacles. Being critical is essential for peers to go beyond niceties and identify areas where development and growth will need to, and can happen.¹

Suggested Process

The following order of actions is recommended for an effective peer observation process.

- Pre-observation – Have a conversation (or a formal meeting) to establish rapport (if needed), set the focus for the observation, and agree on the logistics and timelines. Both instructors involved need to be clear on specific areas of teaching that should be the focus of observation, discussion and feedback. For example an observation can be focused on one or more of the these teaching practices: introduction to the lesson, organization and structure of the lesson, reinforcement of major concepts; pacing and scope, classroom management and environment, consideration of diversity, classroom assessment, etc..
- Observation – The observer attends the agreed-upon class and make note of their observations. These notes need to be factual rather than observers interpretation of what happened.
- Post-observation – Schedule a meeting time to have a conversation on what was observed. The observer should use the notes they have taken during the observation to guide a *critical reflective* conversation. The observer should ask non-judgmental, pointed questions and allow the observed instructor to reflect on their practice through responding to those questions. Allocate enough time at the end of this meeting to discuss the way forward and identify specific areas that the observed instructor would like/need to improve upon.

More Support & Resources

You can contact tle@bowvalleycollege.ca for an observation package (will all forms and detailed steps), more coaching, and/or information on effective peer observation.

¹ Shortland, S. (2010). Feedback within peer observation: Continuing professional development and unexpected consequences. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 47(3), 295-304.
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