

THE ROLE OF THE PEER OBSERVATION PARTNER

Being a peer-observation partner can be difficult but it should be considered a privilege. It requires trust and care to maintain a professional relationship where you may need to highlight to an experienced teaching colleague an area for improvement.

- Before committing to the partnership you must be confident that you can provide the time and energy necessary to achieve what is required
- Make sure you understand what your colleague desires from the peer observation partnership. Make clear any aspects you are either unable or unwilling to undertake.
- Use the pre-observation meeting to clarify any aspect of the teaching or tutorial plan that you do not understand
- To ensure your feedback is structured in some way – your partner has most likely provided you with a template to assist you with collating your observations. Clarify any aspect you are not sure about.
- When observing the film footage, resist the urge to compare what you are observing with your own teaching style. Listen to what your colleague is saying, observe what your colleague is doing and observe how the learners respond. Allow for interpretation to occur during the post-observation meeting as you will be better informed by first listening to your colleague.
- Develop an approach of observing carefully rather than judging
- Give feedback in a timely manner. Ideally this should occur within a couple of days of you having viewed the film footage and within a week of the actual learning activity. It will therefore be fresh in both of your minds.
- At the post observation meeting - allow your colleague to reflect about the observed teaching activity first before you provide your feedback; allow them to identify problems and possible solutions. Respond to these and be supportive. Empower your colleague to develop their own solutions rather than be told how, or what, to improve.
- After your colleague has reflected, commence by providing positive feedback first. It is important to comment on both the positive aspects of what you observed and those aspects that could be improved.
- When expressing the more negative comments, try to do this in a manner that will not be confronting e.g. 'I observed that the students... ..did you notice that?' Rather than 'The students clearly had no idea- yet you kept...'"
- Focus on areas that your colleague can change or control and constructively address areas for development. Limit feedback to a few key areas that your colleague can digest. Focus on those areas for development you consider to be most important.
- When the process is completed, take time to reflect on how your colleague has responded to your observations and on the peer-observation partnership as a whole. Consider how you might improve your role as an observer of teaching and learning and reflect on your own teaching/tutoring.
- This process is not only about the teaching and learning you observe, you will find that you will gain much from the process in terms of self-reflection and witnessing teaching strategies and activities that you may not have thought of yourself.