## Module 13: Peer Observations

### Preview Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bias</td>
<td>An opinion about something—in this case related to teaching and learning—that influences how you deal with it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colleague</td>
<td>Peers; people you work with.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confidential</td>
<td>Spoken or written in secret and intended to be kept that way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Debriefing</td>
<td>Getting information about an observation shortly after it is completed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Advice or criticism about the degree of success of something observed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formative observation</td>
<td>Teachers observing each other to help improve their teaching and to help them develop professionally.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observation instruments</td>
<td>Guides, checklists, or other forms. Used during the observation process in order to have a reliable, systematic approach to observation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paraphrase</td>
<td>Use different words and phrasing to describe what someone else has said or written.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer observation</td>
<td>Teachers observing each other’s classes in order to improve their teaching ability and get new ideas about teaching.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre / post</td>
<td>Before / after (in this case, observing a class).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>An on-going effort and learning process undertaken by individuals (teachers) to improve their teaching and other professional skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summative observation</td>
<td>Observation to evaluate teachers for an administrative purpose such as employment, salary, or pay raises, promotion, etc.</td>
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Now start the video. Listen to the introduction. Complete the guided observation and reflection tasks for each of the video segments. The next part of the manual is for trainees and is available on separate pages for ease of copying.
Teacher Development

Module 13, Peer Observations

Introduction, Expanded Narrative

Classroom observation can take different forms and be done for different purposes. The two most commonly used forms of observation are summative observation and formative observation.

- **Summative observation.** This observation is an evaluation, which rates the teacher who is being observed. It can be done for administrative or supervisory reports for the purpose of job retention, promotion, salary increases, etc.

- **Formative observation.** The purpose of a formative review is to help teachers become better teachers and more knowledgeable professionals. With peer observation, teachers observe each other’s classes, give each other feedback, and share ideas.

There are some definite advantages to using peer observation. Observers are familiar with the teaching situation, both its goals and its limitations. Peer observation can also help individual teachers try to improve their skills without the fear of recorded evaluation. Such observation done well can help to create a strong supportive atmosphere among the faculty in a school.

There are also some potential problems with doing peer observations that must be guarded against. Data collection may be biased due to 1) an observer’s own belief systems about teaching and learning; and 2) personal relationships and peer pressure. Teachers may not be able to observe others’ teaching objectively, which could have a negative effect on peer relationships. For this reason, it is very important to train teachers well in the use of the peer observation process. The benefits can be well worth the effort.

Module Focus

In this module, we’ll focus on formative observation, specifically peer observation. Peer observation can be a particularly effective kind of formative observation because it provides the opportunity for faculty self-assessment and improvement, while at the same time allowing for the monitoring of teacher performance in a non-threatening way. It can benefit both the person being observed and the observer. Both can learn. The “peers” in this process can be either equal pairs or one can be in a mentoring relationship with the other. The most successful peer observation contains the following elements:

- Training for faculty to learn how to do peer observation.
- A set of agreed-upon instruments to allow for a systematic process of observation.
- An administrative system that allows teachers time to observe each other.
- A set of procedures that includes preparing for the observation, doing the observation, and a post-observation debriefing of the observation.
- Mutual respect and trust that the results of the observations will be confidential, shared only by the observer and the observed.

Successful peer observation brings these results:

- Teachers have the opportunity to see other’s teaching styles and techniques and reflect on their own teaching.
- Positive changes occur in classroom learning, which benefits the students.
- Teachers in the school develop stronger, more collegial relationships.
Module 13: Peer Observations

In this module, you will see the three steps listed above:
1. Preparing for the observation.
2. Observing in the classroom.
3. The post-observation debriefing.

As you watch, consider how you might adapt the techniques you see to your own situation.

**Video Segment #1, Preparing for the Observation: Observation Guide**
[Read before viewing.]

1. The observer (T1) in this segment is asking for information about the class she will be observing. List the points of information she asks for and receives from the teacher she is going to observe (T2).
2. Write down the two aspects of her class about which T2 wants information.
3. Notice the way the two teachers interact with each other: verbal behavior, non-verbal behavior, and affect (emotion).

**Reflection**
[Read and answer after viewing.]

1. Compare your answers with a partner or your group. Do you agree? What information about the class did the observer (T1) ask for? What else might you ask if you were the observer? If you were doing this in your situation, what might you need information about before you began an observation?
2. What are the advantages or disadvantages of observing a particular point in a teacher’s class? Explain. In your group, discuss aspects of your own classes about which you might want a peer to give you constructive feedback.
3. What did you notice about the way the two teachers interacted? Do you feel they were mutually supportive? Do you think they trusted each other? Give examples of verbal, non-verbal, or affective behavior that support your opinion. Would these behaviors fit your situation? If so, explain how. If not, what behaviors would be more effective in your situation?

**Video Segment #2, Observing in the Classroom: Observation Guide**
[Read before viewing.]

1. As you watch this video segment, list the behaviors of the observer. Notice where she is sitting, how she acts, what she is doing, classroom atmosphere, etc.
2. Watch a second time and focus on the behavior of the teacher. Notice how she reacts to being observed and her behavior with her students.

**Reflection**
[Read and answer after viewing.]

1. Compare your list of observer behaviors with a partner or others in your group. Where did the observer sit? What did she express with her non-verbal behavior? Did she interact with the teacher or the students? How did she record her notes on the observation? Compare this observer’s behavior with the behavior of an observer in your class. Was it the same? If so, describe your visitor’s behavior. If not, explain how they were different and whether the difference was better for your situation.
2. Does the teacher’s behavior appear to be what you might expect in a formal observation? Explain your answer with examples. Does she interact with the observer in any way? If so, how? What do you notice about her behavior with her students? How does her interaction with the observer compare with a normal observation in your situation? Discuss anything you might do differently if a peer observer came to your class.
Video Segment #3, Post-observation Debriefing: Observation Guide
[Read before viewing.]

Before this debriefing session, the teachers observed each other’s classes, so during the session they take turns giving feedback. Before you watch the next video segment, divide a piece of paper in half. On one half, write Positive Feedback and on the other write Suggestions for Improvement. Use it to take notes for #2 and #3 below as you watch the video.

1. The first time you watch the video segment, list the types of information the teachers exchange in this debriefing.
   2. Watch the video segment again. On your paper, note the things each teacher liked about the other’s class. Pay attention also to the observed teachers’ reactions to the positive feedback.
   3. At the same time, note any suggestions for improvement they make. Pay special attention to the language and manner that is used to make suggestions.
   4. Listen for language that the teachers use at the end of the session.

Reflection
[Read and answer after viewing.]

1. Again, compare your lists of types of information. What do you think about the type of information exchanged? If you were the observer, what comments might you make on the brief part of the lesson you saw?
   2. Look at column one on your sheet. How many different things are noted? What did the teacher in the second observation say in response to the comment, “That was a really wonderful class!” Did she agree? Disagree? Why do you think she responded the way she did? How would you respond to such a comment about your teaching? Would you feel pleased or uncomfortable? Or both? Discuss giving compliments with your group. In your situation, what is an acceptable way to express to a peer that you liked the class you observed?
   3. Look at the second column on your sheet. How many items are noted there? Compare it to the first column. What observation do you make about this debriefing session? Did the debriefing cover the focus items requested by the first teacher observed? (Refer back to the Video #1, Preparing for the Observation section of this module, as needed.)
   4. In your opinion, was this a helpful session for the two teachers? Did it give them some useful feedback for improving their teaching? If yes, in what way? If no, what suggestions would you give them to improve the process?

Summary Discussion

1. Do you, personally, think peer observation could be effective in your teaching situation? Explain.
   2. Review your lists and the ideas above. In your group, think about the advantages and disadvantages of trying to initiate a peer observation process in your unit or school. Consider these aspects:
      • Areas that could benefit from such a process.
      • Reaction and possible support from your administration.
      • Teacher reaction, both positive and negative.
      • Available resources.
      • Ways to overcome limitations or areas of difficulty.

Now You Try It—An Action Plan
Step 1
You can read some of the articles on the topic of contextualizing language (see Module 13 Readings plus the List of Additional Readings and Resources below). Using the video, you have seen a few examples and ideas from other teachers’ classes.

Now, choose a partner (a peer). Together, prepare for a formative peer observation. Use the Peer Observation Guide for Formative Review that follows, as needed. Decide on the focus for an observation.

Step 2
Role play (practice) being both the observer and the observed. Your questions might ask for:
- Information about the class.
- Information about the purpose of the lesson.
- How the lesson fits into the overall curriculum.
- What you want the observer to focus on.
- Time and place of the observation.

Step 3
Share your plan with others in this training group. Change your plan, as needed.

Step 4
If you are currently teaching, schedule times when you can observe each other’s classes and afterwards debrief.

If you are not teaching, you can fill out the observation instrument as if you had observed the class and role play a post-observation debriefing session.
Peer Observation Guide for Formative Review

Reminder

1. Observations should consist of the following:
   a. Pre-observation meeting at which agreement is established about what is being observed.
   b. Observation.
   c. Post-observation meeting at which results are discussed.

2. Videotaping is recommended. It facilitates a lively post-observation discussion.

3. A second observation can be planned to follow-up on any changes instructor wants to implement as a result of the initial observation.

4. Both parties should be in agreement that this observation process is confidential unless otherwise stated and agreed on in advance.

Pre-observation Discussion Guide

Use the following questions as a guide to better understand the context in which the observation will take place.

1. What class is it?
2. What is the teaching point of your lesson?
3. What is your reason for choosing this lesson or teaching point? (What is the observation focus?)
4. What has led up to this lesson (if it’s part of a larger sequence)? What comes afterwards?
5. What are your perceptions about this group of students?

Post-Observation Discussion Guide

Use the following as a guide for debriefing the observation afterwards.

1. Ask the person who taught how s/he felt the lesson went.
2. Reconfirm the observation focus points (what the teacher asked you to observe).
3. Offer positive comments on what you think went well; the strengths of the lesson.
4. Offer tactfully worded suggestions for improvement. These should be limited to the area(s) you were asked to observe. Ask questions for clarification, as needed.
5. End on a courteous note.

Reflection

Ask yourself the following after the observation process is complete.

1. How do I feel about the process as a whole?
2. What will I do in the same way next time? What will I do differently?
3. Is there other information I’d like to have about this kind of review? If yes, where will I get it?