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Collaborating Through Collective Efficacy Cycles.

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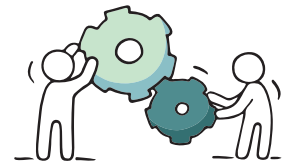
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ACT 1: WORK HARDER, NOT SMARTER

Kara, a new tenth-grade biology teacher at Hyatt High, hasn't participated in any type of peer observation before. She's nervous about it because she was evaluated by the administrator at her previous site and expects the peer observation step of the Collective Efficacy Cycle to be a similar experience where she'll feel judged. Kara also feels concerned that her new colleagues might think less of her if they observed in her classroom, especially during third period. She's new to this team, after all, and she wants her science department colleagues Joy and Jason to see her as an equal.

The thought of having colleagues observe in her class stresses out Kara, but she doesn't articulate this fear to anyone. Instead, she secretly hopes there's a scheduling problem or other unforeseen issue that will prevent the peer observation from actually happening. Kara tells herself that there's just too much other stuff going on right now.

Observations involve each team member being observed and observing (see Figure 5.2). We shouldn't worry that our amount of experience may preclude our ability to provide coaching and support to peers. A new teacher, or any teacher for that matter, doesn't have to have all the answers, nor should they. Instead, it works best when we ask questions that mediate others' thinking by helping them to unpack what it is they already know. Through careful preparation, each educator poses questions that cause colleagues to generate enhanced thinking that solves their own problems. All educators, even those new to the profession, can ask reflective questions, provide insights, and supply useful feedback that improves practice.



Many opportunities for validation and growth are missed because classroom doors are shut to colleagues.

FIGURE 5.2 WHAT IS PEER OBSERVATION?

PEER OBSERVATION IS . . .

- Structured
- Focused on a single element selected by the teacher being observed
- Observing each other's practice
- Learning with and from a colleague
- Sharing best practices
- Factual

PEER OBSERVATION ISN'T . . .

- Unstructured
- Unscheduled
- About making judgments
- Evaluative
- Shared with a principal or used for evaluation purposes

THE THREE COMPONENTS OF PEER OBSERVATIONS

Peer observations involve educators observing each other's practice and providing feedback that refines their instructional practices and improves students' learning. The purpose is to engage with colleagues in a job-embedded, collaborative professional learning experience in real time. The observation itself is one-third of the equation, as a pre-observation conference and post-observation conference structure are required. There is an emphasis on reflection and feedback on instruction that results in greater student learning. In this way, planning, instruction, and reflective processes are made visible to teams. The structure of a peer-to-peer observation has three components:

A new teacher, or any teacher for that matter, doesn't have to have all the answers, nor should they.

1. Pre-conference observation
2. Observation
3. Post-observation conference

Careful planning of all three components of the peer observation process is crucial to its success. Your team should collaboratively discuss and set ground rules before the process begins. Ground rules may include a defined amount of time that you will observe, such as allotting 10 to 15 minutes per peer observation. Teams may also find it useful to decide how to handle challenges that arise in advance of observation cycles. For instance, following an observation, a teacher might persevere on a thought such as, "If you had just come in 10 minutes ago, the kids were ____." Instead, a ground rule can be established that observation feedback will only address what was directly observed. Adhering to an established ground rule, such as "No excuses, just the facts," may prevent conversations between your team members from spiraling in nonproductive ways.

Another essential planning element is allowing teachers to make choices. Successful peer observations are more likely when teachers have control of the timing. Teachers working in peer observation cycles often get creative to find time in their schedules to observe and be observed. For example, some teachers have an open planning period. Others use 10 minutes while their students are in the library with another credentialed teacher. Being creative reduces the need for substitutes and minimizes other scheduling challenges.

In addition to teachers scheduling their observations, it's also beneficial for teachers to decide who is observing, who is being observed, and the related logistics. Since there's a degree of vulnerability that comes with opening up practice, it's important that the teacher being observed is comfortable with the peer who will observe. In addition, there needs to be a discussion about if and how the observing teacher will take notes. Decisions about feedback and how information is conveyed to each other could involve designing or selecting forms that are collaboratively decided upon. It's useful to ask in advance how another colleague prefers to receive feedback. Having input into this process builds trust and credibility, especially when the person observing adheres to the team's ground rules and honors the wishes of the teacher who is being observed.

HOW DOES A PEER OBSERVATION WORK?

A defining aspect of peer observations is the educator being observed leads the process and co-determines the logistics with the teacher who will observe during the pre-conference. An observation is a vehicle for professional growth, not a performance evaluation, and the teacher being observed should feel confident about every step in the process. Because the process has been co-designed, there should not be any surprises for either person. The observation centers on the evidence-based practice the team selected and implemented during Safe Practice. Through self-reflection and feedback from the observation, both teachers enhance their effectiveness and impact on students.

Because teaching is complex, it's essential that we regularly reflect on how student learning has increased as a result of our instruction. It's not sufficient to believe that if we "taught it, they got it." Instead, successful educators collaborate with peers and students about conceptions of progress and impact (Hattie & Zierer, 2017). This means reflecting on what occurs in our classrooms each day, not at the end of the year or when a summative assessment is released. The first step of reflection is self-awareness, which is often deepened through dialogue with others. Thoughtfully posed questions by a trusted colleague often trigger thinking that may not have occurred without a thinking partner.

The insights gleaned from the peer observation process have the potential to transform learning for both teachers and students. This is because when engaged in peer observations, we are in the driver's seat. We are directing our own learning in ways that are meaningful to us, while often solving problems that are occurring in our classrooms. Effective peer observations are job-embedded professional learning opportunities that support problem solving, the sharing of ideas, and contribute to building collective teacher efficacy.



◀ **GIULIA AND BEVERLY
DISCUSS THE BENEFITS
OF PEER OBSERVATION**
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**it's important
that the teacher
being observed
is comfortable
with the peer
who will
observe.**

THE PRE-CONFERENCE OBSERVATION

The criteria for observation are determined during a pre-conference that occurs prior to the observation. The educator being observed identifies the aspect of the evidence-based practice they would like feedback about from the observer. The coach agrees to focus and provide feedback only on the area the educator has identified, not on other things happening or not happening in the classroom. This shared agreement of the expectations lowers the stress of the volunteer educator.

The teacher being observed also determines the day and time of the observation, as it is not necessary for the coach to observe an entire lesson; it may be that the volunteer educator wants feedback about their modeling or the guided practice component of the lesson. There is also discussion about when the observer will enter the classroom, for how long they will observe, and where they will be positioned. Will the observer sit in the back? In the front? Should the observer interact with students? Each of these questions is discussed and agreed upon prior to the observation.



◀ **SCHEDULING A PEER OBSERVATION**
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Since understanding the implementation of an evidence-based strategy on student learning is the point of the observation, it's important the observer and teacher being observed jointly determine how this information will be captured and recorded. Will the observer take notes on a laptop or a notebook? Will the coach script what the volunteer teacher says? Will the coach take note of student responses? Will the coach ask questions of students? Again, the person being observed leads these decisions because they are putting themselves, and their practice, on display. Giving the reins to the teacher being observed and allowing them to be the driver often eliminates some of the nervousness that may accompany an observation.

Another important point to discuss during the pre-observation conference is the type and scope of feedback the volunteer teacher prefers. It's crucial that the coach listens to the volunteer teacher so they can capture this information and provide it to the volunteer teacher in a way that will be received. For instance, a volunteer teacher may ask that the coach provide feedback verbally, or perhaps visual notes will be more useful to the volunteer teacher. Again, the teacher being observed calls the shots. Both teachers can prepare for this conference by considering the questions in Figure 5.3. At the conclusion of the pre-conference, there are shared agreements and expectations between the teacher being observed and the observer.

FIGURE 5.3 PRE-OBSERVATION CONFERENCE SAMPLE QUESTIONS

LOGISTICS

The agreed observation focus is:

The scheduled date and time is:

PERSONAL FEELINGS

What do you hope to learn from this experience?

How are you feeling about presenting this?

LEARNING CONSIDERATIONS

What are your learning intentions?
What are indicators of success?

What knowledge do students already have? What other assets do they have?

<p>What are the student demographics?</p>	
<p>What might be challenging during your lesson?</p>	
<p>How might this challenge be overcome?</p>	
<p>OBSERVATION DATA</p>	
<p>How would you like data to be collected and organized?</p>	
<p>How would you like the data to be shared with you during the post-conference?</p>	
<p>PEER OBSERVATION PROCESS</p>	
<p>Have you participated in a peer observation in the past? What worked well? What could have been more effective?</p>	
<p>Where would you like me to sit/stand when I enter the room?</p>	
<p>Would you like me to interact with students? If so, what is the purpose for these interactions?</p>	
<p>POST-OBSERVATION CONFERENCE</p>	
<p>When will we meet to discuss the observation?</p>	