

Peer Observation/Peer Mentoring

Peer observation/Peer mentoring is a useful strategy through which a team can deepen its support for each member's practice. In the ideal situation, every member of a team would have the opportunity to be observed, and to observe others several times during the course of the year. The goal of the observations, and the meetings to frame and discuss them, is to address particular issues and questions about teaching, offering specific feedback and support.

Steps:

1. Pre-Observation Conference (approx. 20 minutes): The visitors meet with the teacher who gives context for the visit and frames the issue or question s/he wants them to consider.
2. Classroom Visit: Visitors spend at least 30-40 minutes making observations and taking notes related to the issue identified by the teacher.
3. Debriefing Conference (approx. 45-60 minutes): Visitors share their observations, asking questions and making constructive suggestions. Below are some broad guidelines for this conversation, and a specific protocol.

Protocol for the Debriefing Conference:

- The teacher speaks first and gives a brief account of how she felt the class went and inviting the team's feedback on specific issues or questions. (5-10 minutes)
- The visitors discuss their impressions, following the guidelines above, and the teacher listens and takes notes. (15-20 minutes)
- The teacher responds to as many of the observations and questions as s/he chooses, and the visitors listen. (15-20 minutes)
- There is an open discussion which includes identifying strategies and next steps for the teacher. (15-20 minutes)

Guidelines:

- Begin with positive impressions that are specific and concrete.
- Focus on the teacher's identified issue. It's ok to bring up other things, but remember the goal of the conference.
- Frame critical observations constructively. Avoid language that is judgmental or overly negative.
- If suggestions are appropriate, consider making them in the form of questions (I wonder if you've thought of ____, etc.).
- Involve the teacher in creating solutions and determining what kinds of suggestions would be most helpful.