

# Teaching Squares: Non-Evaluative and Supportive Peer Observation

Tonya Buchan & Jennifer Todd

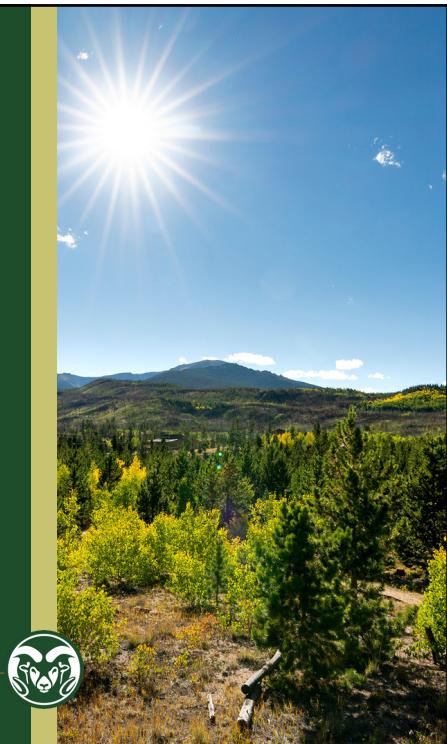
The Institute for Learning & Teaching  
Colorado State University



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## Outcomes

- Describe the Teaching Squares program philosophy
- Explain the structure of Teaching Squares
- Discuss the benefits of peer observation and personal reflection
- Recognize how the Teaching Effectiveness Framework is used for observation and reflection
- Implement Teaching Squares at your home institution



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## Six Main Aims of Peer Observation

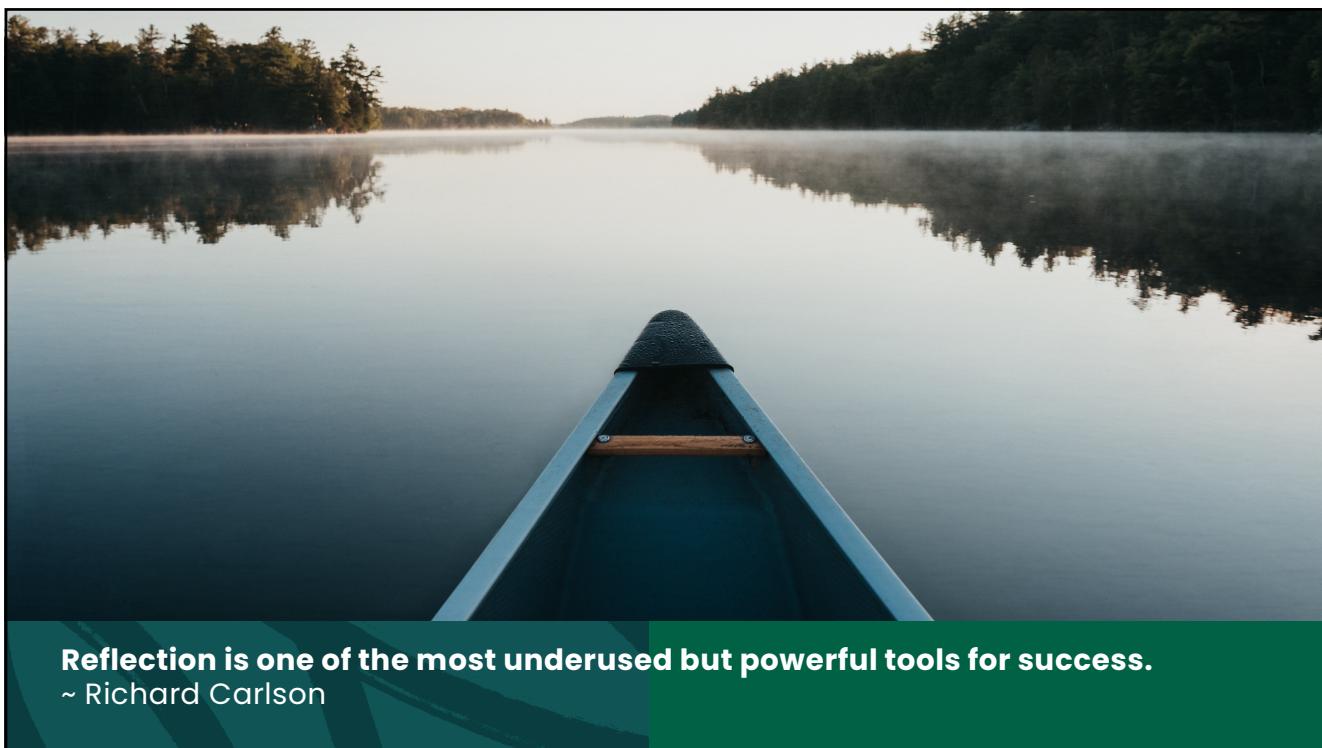
Martin and Double (1998)

- 01 | Improving or developing an understanding of personal approaches to curriculum delivery
- 02 | Enhancing and extending teaching techniques through collaboration
- 03 | Exchanging insights relating to the review of teaching performance
- 04 | Expanding personal skills of self-reflection and evaluation
- 05 | Developing curriculum planning skills in collaboration with peers and colleagues and,
- 06 | Identifying areas in teaching practice with particular merit or in need of development.





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**Reflection is one of the most underused but powerful tools for success.**

~ Richard Carlson

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## A Powerful Combination for Faculty Development

### Peer Observation

- Opportunity to:
  - watch other faculty in action
  - observe different ways of teaching
  - gain insight to different class environments (class size, content discipline, delivery method)
- Collaborate with peers and engage in collegial conversations about teaching
- Engage in a productive and supportive feedback environment

### Self-Reflection

- Opportunity to:
  - identify areas for growth
  - acknowledge, celebrate, and learn from personal successes
  - step back and consider if/how students are benefitting from the learning experience
- Enhance innovation
- Empowers change
- Continually improve one's own efficacy and abilities as an educator

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## Foundation of Teaching Squares



Helpful to be in a "student" role again and think about how teaching strategies land.

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## Teaching Squares is a team sport!

Mutual Respect  
Reciprocity & Shared Responsibility

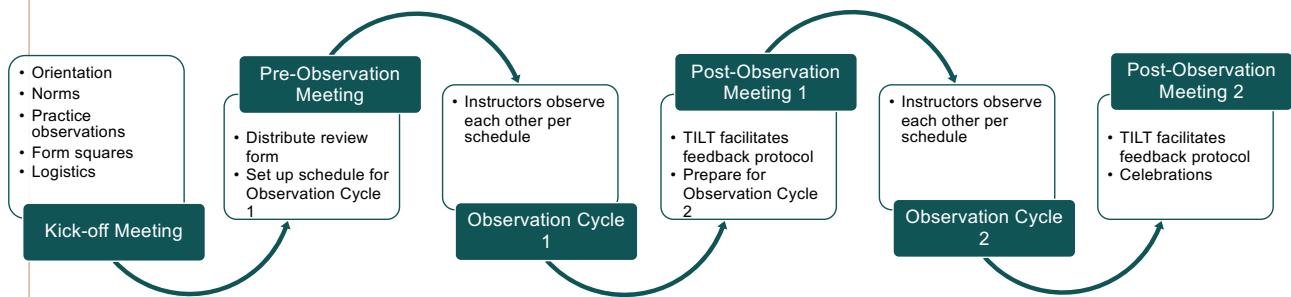
I found it really challenging that only 2 colleagues came to my class the first round and only 1 (a different from the first) came the second round. It didn't motivate me to rearrange my schedule to come to everyone else's classes. Participation in our square was an issue.

I was also frustrated that some of my colleagues would tell me several times they were coming to class but then never showed up. I feel like I missed out on helpful feedback and it added extra stress to prepare my (small) class for an observer over several days.

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## Logistics & Timeline



Teaching Squares Workbook  
<https://col.st/orjQ3>



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# Community Agreement

In order to create a safe space for us to practice teaching and feel supported while doing so, we agree to the following ground rules for the duration of our work together:



"I just want to say midway through this program, that I have already gotten so much out of the experience! Thank you so much to you and everyone else involved with putting this together. This is my first semester teaching fully in-person and being a part of Teaching Squares is really adding to that experience."

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## Supportive Feedback

- Guided observation forms aligned with Teaching Effectiveness Framework
- Observation forms integrate self-reflection
- Facilitated feedback session with supportive discussion protocol

**Teaching Squares - Evidence-Based Practices**

**CREATE AN INCLUSIVE AND WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT**

**INSTRUCTION - STUDENT SUPPORT**

**What's So What? Now What? Post Observation Protocol**

This should be an exercise required within a certain amount of time teaching at CSU.  
(It's) AWESOME to watch and learn from my colleagues across the university.

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# Teaching Effectiveness Framework at a Glance

## Teaching Effectiveness Framework at a Glance



**Pedagogical content knowledge** combines content and pedagogical expertise within a content area to employ appropriate instructional strategies that successfully address the most common misconceptions of students; the most difficult concepts for students; the most effective sequencing of concepts; important relevant connections; and the most crucial knowledge and skills students should master by the end of a course.

**Inclusive pedagogy** is a student-centered teaching approach that considers all students' backgrounds, experiences, and learning variabilities in the planning and implementation of student engagement activities, equitable access to content, mutual respect, and a more robust learning experience for all learners.



**Motivation** is triggered by the perceived value or benefit of the academic content or task. Student involvement and commitment to learning increases when an instructor uses a variety of researched motivation techniques.

**Classroom climate** refers to the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical environment in which students learn. The instructor has the greatest influence on classroom climate, and therefore can make intentional decisions to foster a community of diverse learners.

**Student assessment** exists in two forms: summative and formative. Summative assessment occurs at the end of a unit or assignment and evaluates students' learning against a benchmark or standard. Formative assessments and low-stakes assignments inform instructors and students of how much, and to what extent, content or skills are mastered; they are frequent and ongoing. Teaching strategies can then be adjusted to meet students' needs. Integrating a variety of assessment strategies provides all students with multiple opportunities to succeed.

The classroom, whether it be on campus or virtual, draws students from different backgrounds with various experiences and abilities. Using a variety of **instructional strategies** increases student engagement, critical thinking, connections to learning outcomes, and student success for all learners. Being an effective teacher requires the implementation of creative and innovative teaching strategies that work best for your course, your students, and your teaching style.

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Introductory Biology for non-majors  
*The immune system & HIV*

Classroom Climate



Introductory Biology for non-majors  
*Genes & alleles*

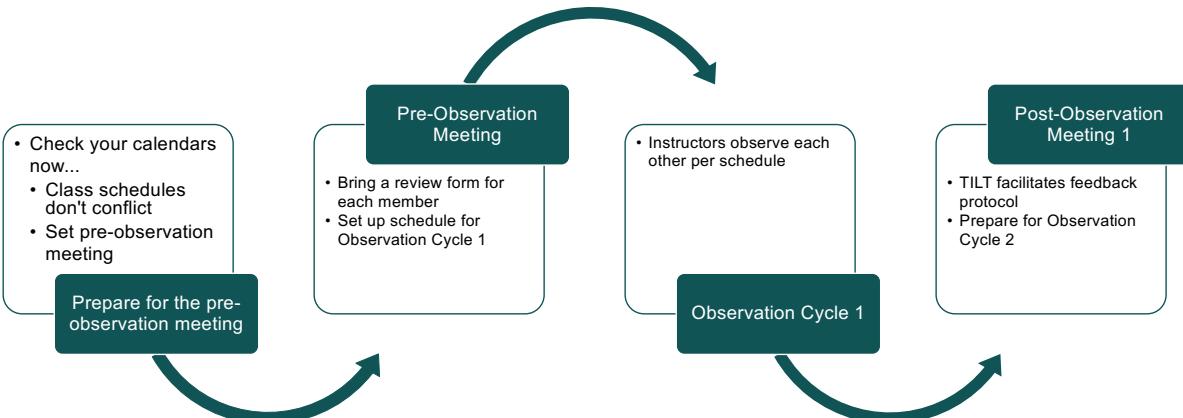
Instructional Strategies

Let's Practice...

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## Next Steps



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## Our Community Agreement...

In order to create a safe space for us to practice teaching and feel supported while doing so, we agree to the following ground rules for the duration of our work together:

- Maintain confidentiality
- Be kind to myself
- Provide feedback that is meaningful and clear
- Respect each other's time by meeting deadlines and commitments
- Keep an open mind about approaches to teaching and help each other become the best version of ourselves

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## Unexpected Outcomes of the Program

- Departments use program materials and run their own squares
- Colleagues ask each other to conduct observations and write letters of recommendation outside of the program
- Continued informal meetings and long-term friendships
- A job

Thanks so much for this fantastic experience. I learned a lot that has already benefited me and my students. After a year or two of absorbing/implementing this material and pursuing complementary professional development opportunities, I'd love to do it again!

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# Resources

Berenson, C. Teaching Squares: Observe and Reflect On Teaching and Learning. Calgary, AB: Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning at the University of Calgary, June 2017.

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Durham College & University of Ontario Institute of Technology. Teaching Squares Handbook.

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Martin, G. A., & Double, J. M. (1998). Developing Higher Education Teaching Skills Through Peer Observation and Collaborative Reflection. *Innovations in Education and Training International*, 35(2), 161–170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1355800980350210>

Pacific Lutheran University, Teaching Squares Participant Handbook

Stonehill College. Teaching Squares: Participant Handbook.

