

# PEER OBSERVATION, FEEDBACK AND REFLECTION

## OVERVIEW

- Peer observation, including feedback and reflection, is a core component of creating a professional community and building collective efficacy.<sup>1</sup>
- Effective peer observation can help teachers to continue to improve their practice in ways that better promote student learning.
- Peer observation is a developmental opportunity for teachers.

## PURPOSE

This Professional Practice Note provides guidance to school leaders and teachers on implementing peer observation, including feedback and reflection, to improve teacher professional practice.

Many schools already use peer observation and feedback. This Professional Practice Note can be a useful reference point for future planning and improvement. This note and accompanying guide can support schools at all stages of implementing peer observation.

**Research shows observation of classroom teaching, linked to timely and useful feedback that focuses on improvement, is a particularly useful tool for teacher development<sup>2</sup>**

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)

## BUILDING CAPABILITY THROUGH PEER OBSERVATION, FEEDBACK AND REFLECTION

Evidence shows that when done well, peer observation, including feedback and reflection, is a high impact approach to improving professional practice and can be an important part of a teacher's professional development.<sup>3</sup>

Peer observation is supported by the Performance and Development whole-of-practice approach, and focusses on

practice improvement, not assessment. The *Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning* and the *High Impact Teaching Strategies* also provide an opportunity for teachers to focus on improving their knowledge and skills using evidence-based strategies that enhance the precision and impact of their practice.<sup>4</sup>

Peer observation enables teachers to access feedback on their practice, build their individual capability and develop a shared understanding of effective practice.

The MET Project study has identified that classroom observation is one of the key measures of great teaching when combined with student surveys and student achievement gains.<sup>5</sup>

Peer observation benefits teachers through a structured feedback dialogue against a set of agreed criteria with a focus on progressing student learning. Using an inquiry cycle, teachers can evaluate the impact of their practice on student learning growth and identify areas for improvement.

Peer observation can also be a professional learning opportunity within the context of professional learning teams, as it allows teachers to build their capacity in giving and receiving feedback and creates opportunities to learn new strategies, modelled by experienced colleagues.

Whole-of-school implementation of peer observation and feedback should meet the needs of staff and further the school's priorities.

## LINKS TO THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE ELEMENTS

The Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2017 (VGSA 2017) provides opportunities for teachers to engage in peer observation through the professional practice elements.

The professional practice elements include the new learning specialist classification and the four professional practice days per annum for teachers.

Teachers can nominate to use their professional practice days for peer observation, including feedback and reflection, should they choose this as their focus.

<sup>1</sup> Goddard, R. D., Skrla, L., & Salloum, S. J. (2017). The Role of Collective Efficacy in Closing Student Achievement Gaps: A Mixed Methods Study of School Leadership for Excellence and Equity. *Journal Of Education For Students Placed At Risk*, 22(4), 220-236. doi:10.1080/10824669.2017.1348900

<sup>2</sup> AITSL, Teacher Performance and Development Framework, [https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/australian-teacher-performance-and-development-framework-august-2012.pdf?svrns=e7c2ec3c\\_0](https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/australian-teacher-performance-and-development-framework-august-2012.pdf?svrns=e7c2ec3c_0)

<sup>3</sup> DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. E. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, Ind.: National Education Service; Alexandria, Va. ASCD, c1998.

<sup>4</sup> DET, Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/Pages/principles/excellence.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013, *Measures of Effective Teaching Project Releases Final Research Report*, <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/media-center/press-releases/2013/01/measures-of-effective-teaching-project-releases-final-research-report>

The learning specialist role provides increased capacity within schools for highly skilled classroom practitioners to support their colleagues to improve their practice, including through demonstration lessons and seeking feedback.

### PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND PEER OBSERVATION, FEEDBACK AND REFLECTION

Peer observation is best implemented within the context of a supportive, collaborative team structure, such as within professional learning communities,

Members of a team may identify an area of teaching practice that they would like to focus on. In preparation, team members can develop a shared understanding of effective teaching in that area and use this understanding to inform the feedback provided following an observation. The feedback should be constructive, developmental and actionable.

Alternatively, a teacher might identify an area of their practice on which to focus, and engage peers in observing a lesson related to that area of practice. The teacher should engage with the observer beforehand to ensure that all parties are aware of the focus areas of the lesson, how observations will be recorded and determine the opportunities to reflect and provide feedback.

### ADVICE FOR TEACHERS

- Peers need to be engaged in establishing observation arrangements including nominating who will conduct the observation and the timing of the observation prior to any observations occurring.
- Schools' agreed consultation arrangements will be used in discussions regarding the organisation of teachers' work, which includes peer observation.
- Observations could involve observing a research-based teaching strategy, or focusing on an area of practice as identified by the teacher, such as lesson pace or student participation.
- Reflection and related professional conversations are a critical part of the peer observation process — and can be considered as work directly related to the teaching and learning program of a teacher's class(es).<sup>6</sup>
- Teachers can choose to include peer observation in their Performance and Development Plan as a source of evidence of improved teacher practice.

### ADVICE FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

- School leaders are encouraged to focus on building a culture that is respectful, trusting and supportive, and establishing the preconditions for success in peer observation. Professional learning in schools has a greater impact and benefit for school staff when teachers and school leaders agree on the protocols and processes required for effective learning.
- School leaders should engage collaboratively with staff to establish protocols, procedures and structures that support peer observation, feedback and reflection as a core part of school-based professional learning.
- School leaders should ensure that peer observation is planned, scheduled and aligned with School Strategic Plans and Annual Implementation Plans so that school priorities are clearly articulated, and described as a developmental opportunity for teachers.
- When implementing peer observation for the first time, consider a staged approach, where there are opportunities to reflect, adjust and improve processes over time.
- Consider how peer observation can support establishing and embedding a professional learning community within the school.
- Consider how peer observation can support graduate teachers in observing and learning from experienced teachers and in undertaking an evidence-based process to describe their development of practice to meet the proficient level of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

### USEFUL LINKS

- [Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning](#)
- [High Impact Teaching Strategies](#)
- ['How to' Guide: Introducing classroom observation, AITSL](#)
- [Improve Your Classroom Practice, AITSL](#)
- [Supporting Provisionally Registered Teachers](#)

### CONTACT

If you have any queries related to the professional practice elements of the VGSA 2017, please contact [professional.practice@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:professional.practice@education.vic.gov.au).

<sup>6</sup> Clause 22 Sub Clause 8 (a) of the VGSA 2017