PEER OBSERVATION, FEEDBACK AND REFLECTION:
A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

Professional
Practice

VICTORIA
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Contents

We welcome your input. If you have any feedback on the peer observation guide, please share your feedback at professional.practice@edumail.vic.gov.au.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide has been developed to support teachers engaging in the process of peer observation, feedback and reflection. This guide is applicable to all school contexts.

Peer observation implemented under these guidelines is not to be used in any unsatisfactory performance procedure. Management of unsatisfactory performance is to be conducted under the Guidelines for Managing Complaints, Misconduct and Unsatisfactory Performance in the Teaching Service.

The use of this peer observation material is optional for schools. Where appropriate to the needs of the school, this guide can support the implementation and embedding of peer observation.

How these resources are structured

- A guide for principals and school leaders, which introduces peer observation, including feedback and reflection, as an improvement strategy to enhance student learning. This guide includes advice on the preconditions for successful peer observation and how to establish a culture that enables this practice to happen.
- A guide for teachers, which describes the stages and steps of peer observation. This includes information about what each phase involves, good techniques and practices, as well as advice for both the teacher being observed and the teacher who is observing. Examples and links to further resources are also included.
- Tools for peer observation: each phase in the cycle of peer observation includes an annotated template for teachers to inform their self reflection, pre observation conversation, observation, and post observation reflection and feedback.
  These tools are available on the Department's website at www.education. vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/Pages/ peerobservation.aspx.

INTRODUCTION TO PEER OBSERVATION

What is peer observation?

Peer observation involves teachers observing each other's practice and learning from one another, focusing on teachers' individual needs and the opportunity to both learn from others' practice and offer constructive feedback to peers. Peer observation aims to support the sharing of practice and builds self-awareness about the impact of one's teaching practice in order to affect change.[1]

Peer observation is a structured and negotiated way of teachers working together to refine and improve their practice, and can support teachers to enhance student learning when situated in a broader culture of collaboration, mutual trust and respect. To be successful, peer observations must have a specific focus, for example, lesson structure or the articulation of lesson objectives.[2]

Whole-school protocols and preconditions support peer observation to be structured and ensure that outcomes for staff and students are maximised. The Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2017 requires that arrangements for collaboration, peer observation including feedback and reflection, and coaching are the subject of consultation. To this end, school leaders should establish protocols, procedures and structures that support peer observation as a core part of school-based professional learning, using the school's agreed consultative arrangements.

Peer observation is a developmental opportunity for teachers.
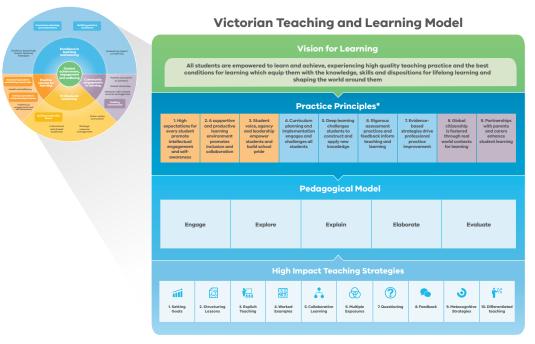
Why engage in peer observation?

Peer observation enables teachers to build their individual capability and develop a shared understanding of effective classroom practice. It also allows teachers to build their capability in giving and receiving feedback.

Research shows that when done well, peer observation, including feedback and reflection, has a high impact on improving professional practice and can be an important part of a teacher's professional development.[3] The Victorian Teaching and Learning Model (including the Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, the Pedagogical Model and the High Impact Teaching Strategies) can support teachers to determine the focus of peer observations. For example, areas of focus could include pedagogical approaches, curriculum planning, assessment strategies or opportunities for student voice and agency within the lesson.

Peer observation can benefit both the teacher being observed and the observer. Peer observation can:

- provide opportunities to discuss challenges and successes with trusted colleagues
- support the sharing of ideas and expertise among teachers
- build a community of trust through opening classroom practice to a wider audience
- support a focus on improving the impact of learning[4]
- contribute to the collective efficacy of the whole school.

Victorian Teaching and Learning Model

*The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) is an essential resource for primary school teachers. Abilities Based Learning and Education (ABLES) is an essential resource for specialist school teachers.

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[1]   Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) 'How-to Guide: Peer observation https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/peer-observation

[2]   Ibid.

[3]   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.

[4]   Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 'How-to Guide: Peer observation https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/peer-observation

The 'cycle of peer observation'

The 'cycle of peer observation' provides a basis for the implementation of peer observation, feedback and reflection.

The cycle includes the key phases for successful peer observation, which supports improvements in teaching practice and student learning.

The 'cycle of peer observation'

- Successful peer observation is built on a culture that is respectful, trusting and supportive.

- Peer observation should be focused on an agreed aspect of learning and teaching practice (such as the Practice Principles or the HITS) and be planned, scheduled and aligned with school improvement priorities.

- Protocols, procedures and structures that support peer observation should be established prior to observations taking place.

- Peer observation is a developmental opportunity for teachers.

- Peer observation should be implemented via a staged approach where teachers have opportunities to reflect and adjust processes over time.

- Peer observations can occur between two teachers, or within teams such as professional learning communities, if agreed by teachers.

THE STAGES OF THE PEER OBSERVATION CYCLE

Teacher self-reflection

Self-reflection is...

a valuable opportunity for the teacher being observed to consider areas of their practice that might be the focus of the observation. The self-reflection process provides opportunities for the teacher to consider how whole-school priorities might link with their selected focus, to maximise shared learning experiences and support student learning. Self-reflection supports the teacher being observed to consider influences which might restrict their experience of peer observation, reflection and feedback.

Self-reflection is not...

for other colleagues to influence or direct the teacher to focus on an aspect of their practice. Self-reflection is not a collaborative opportunity, unless the teacher requests input or feedback. Initial self-reflection may not necessarily align with whole-school improvement initiatives.

Example situation

Carolyn is an experienced teacher with 11 years of classroom teaching in primary schools. This year she started at a new school and is not familiar with their whole-school instructional model or the focus areas for improvement in the School Strategic Plan and Annual Implementation Plan. During the process of self-reflection, Carolyn used the Teacher Self-Reflection Tool and sought her Professional Learning Community team members' advice about how to access the school's strategic documents. Carolyn also sought her colleagues' views about how much progress had been made against the school's Key Improvement Strategies.

Carolyn referenced the third High Impact Teaching Strategy (explicit teaching) as a basis for reflection, which has been an area of focus at her previous school, and which she identified as having potential for continued improvement for student learning in her classroom. When reflecting on her hopes and fears for the peer observation in her self-reflection, she noted her lack of long-term relationships with colleagues as an area which she felt might impact on the peer observation.

Guidance for the teacher being observed	Guidance for the observer
Self-reflection is an opportunity to consider how to maximise the outcomes of the peer observation by tailoring your focus to be specific, and about an area of your practice that will benefit your students' learning through colleagues' reflection and feedback.	Your role in self-reflection may be limited, however, it is valuable to be available to your colleague to guide and provide access to resources they may not be familiar with or unable to access (e.g. the School Strategic Plan, Annual Implementation Plan).
It is an opportunity to undertake individual reflection before engaging with your observer(s), however, some teachers may find it beneficial to seek others' input during your self-reflection. There is no expectation for teachers to share their self-reflection material, if they do not wish to.	Suggestions about professional reading or linking up with other colleagues who might have some expertise in the area can be ways of supporting the teachers' self-reflection, if they seek out the advice.
Consider how your focus aligns with whole-school priorities, so that your work continues to benefit from school-based professional learning opportunities.	Encouraging the teacher to self-reflect prior to the pre observation conversation will ensure that the conversation is informed, and you can suitably engage with the teacher's reflection.
Take this opportunity to reflect on your hopes, fears and expectations when participating in peer observation.	

Artefacts and resources

- The Department of Education and Training (2017) High Impact Teaching Strategies: Excellence in Teaching and Learning www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/support/highimpactteachstrat.pdf
- The Department of Education and Training (2017) Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/Pages/principlesexcellence.aspx

- The Department of Education and Training (2017) The Framework for Improving Student Outcomes www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/improvement/Pages/FISO.aspx
- AITSL Teacher Self-Assessment Tool https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/improve-practice/teacher-self-assessment-tool

Pre observation conversation

Pre observation conversation is...

when the planning for the classroom observation occurs. It is critical to consolidate trust between colleagues before the classroom observation experience. It is about gaining agreement on the focus of the observation, the type of observation evidence, as well as the collection methodology.

Pre observation conversation is not...

about influencing the observation focus, or passing judgement.

Example situation

Simon is a graduate teacher and is teaching VCE English and History in a rural P-12 college. Through the school network, he has been linked with a mentor, Julie, who is an experienced VCE History teacher from another school. They have agreed to schedule a peer observation session towards the end of Term 1 as part of the process for applying for full teacher registration. Simon's mentor visits him at his school and the colleagues share a little about themselves as teachers and begin to develop a professional relationship. Julie is mindful of how overwhelming the experience of beginning teaching can be and is cautious not to overload

Simon with new information. They review Simon's curriculum planning documents and draft School Assessed Coursework (SAC), as these were areas Simon identified as aspects of his practice on which to focus through his self-reflection. They agree that the focus of the peer observation will be questioning, and specifically how Simon uses questioning to check student understanding and evaluate the effectiveness of his teaching.

Simon and Julie discuss ways for Julie to collect evidence during the observation and they devise a simple measure for Julie to record instances of when questions elicit a response indicating student understanding, or lack of understanding. Julie has accessed Simon's schools' peer observation protocols prior to the meeting and they also work through this document together to ensure alignment with the school's approach. Simon notes his concern that students might interpret the observation as related to his inexperience as a teacher and they agree to discuss the observation with the students prior to Julie's visit so they understand Julie's role in the classroom.

Guidance for the teacher being observed

Self-reflection will ensure the pre observation conversation is informed and the agreed focus of the observation is related to an aspect of your practice on which you would value feedback.

Being honest about the context of the observation with your colleague will support them to understand the background to the lesson, any hesitations you might have and how they might best provide you with their reflections and feedback.

Guidance for the observer

The pre observation conversation is an opportunity to develop trust. The approach taken in this discussion can influence the impact of your reflections and feedback.

Prior to the discussion, it is worthwhile considering whole-school strategic documents (e.g. School Strategic Plan, Annual Implementation Plan) and be familiar with the supporting structures so that you can support the links between the observation focus and whole-school professional learning.

Familiarise yourself with any school protocols for peer observation.

Artefacts and resources

- The Department of Education and Training (2017) High Impact Teaching Strategies: Excellence in Teaching and Learning www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/support/highimpactteachstrat.pdf
- The Department of Education and Training (2017) Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/Pages/principlesexcellence.aspx
- The Department of Education and Training (2017) The Framework for Improving Student Outcomes www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/improvement/Pages/FISO.aspx
- The Victorian Institute of Teaching, Moving from Provision to Full Registration https://www.vit.vic.edu.au/registered-teacher/moving-to-full-registration

Peer observation

Peer observation is...

teachers observing each other's practice and learning from one another. It is focused on individual teachers' needs and aims to support the sharing of best practice and build awareness about the impact of their own teaching. Peer observation is structured, and a specific focus has been negotiated prior to the classroom visit. Evidence is gathered by the observer to inform reflection and feedback.

Peer observation is not...

ad-hoc or unstructured. It is not about making judgements about teacher effectiveness based on an individual opinion. It is not about performance management.

Example situation

Krystal teaches in a specialist school and all students have Individual Learning Plans with individualised goals. She has six students in her class and a full-time Education Support staff member. Her colleague Maria is from the neighbouring classroom, and chose to focus on observing peers as part of her professional practice day.

Arrangements have been made and confirmed for Maria to observe Krystal's instructional practice, with a focus on differentiated teaching in relation to the students' learning tasks. During the self-assessment process, Krystal referenced her school's strategic planning documents and the High Impact Teaching Strategies to identify an area of her practice that she was interested in developing further.

The colleagues agreed that the observations will be recorded in the observation tool, with the specific measure of evidence being the annotation of each students' individual task.

During the pre observation conversation, the colleagues agreed that it was not possible for Maria to have limited interactions with Krystal's students, due to the context. As a result, they enlisted the support of the Education Support staff member in Krystal's classroom to support the management of Krystal's students' needs in order to maximise Maria's ability to make and record her observations. During the observation, this strategy was helpful and allowed Maria to make detailed notes about what the students were doing during the classroom observation. This provided strong evidence that was then able to be reviewed in relation to the students' individual learning plans.

Guidance for the teacher being observed

Being prepared for the classroom visit will support you to have a positive experience, and be mindful that you want the observation to be based on your usual practices, not uncharacteristic ones. Don't alter your lesson planning significantly because of the observation.

Ensure that your students are aware of the observation, particularly if they are not accustomed to having other visitors in your classroom.

Remember that your observer is collecting evidence to inform collaborative reflection and feedback, and to support you to enhance your effectiveness as a teacher – they are not judging the quality of your performance.

Guidance for the observer

Reviewing the notes made during the pre observation conversation is a good strategy to ensure that you are mindful of the context, the focus and your role in collecting evidence during the observation.

Consider using the observation tool to record the evidence and what you see and hear, as well as queries, celebrations and opportunities. Remain impartial, factual and non-judgemental.

Be mindful of your mannerisms and body language during the observation as this can impact on teaching practice and on student learning.

Try and keep interactions with students at a minimum, unless alternative arrangements have been agreed prior to the observation.

Artefacts and resources

- AITSL Classroom observation strategies https://www.aitsl.edu.au/lead-develop/develop-others/ classroom-observation/classroom-observation-strategies
- AITSL, Effective Professional Conversations – Helen Timperley https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJrkAENKjzw
- AITSL, Enhance professional conversations https://www.aitsl.edu.au/lead-develop/develop-others/coach- others/professional-conversations

- AITSL, Literature review – Professional conversations and improvement-focused feedback https://www.aitsl.edu.au/ tools-resources/resource/literature-review---professional- conversations-and-improvement-focused-feedback
- Macklin, P and Zbar, V., Driving School Improvement; a practical guide, ACER Press, 2017, page 15
- Grimm, Kaufman & Doty, Educational Leadership, Vol. 71, Number 8 (2014) 'Rethinking Classroom Observation' including Teacher-driven observation protocols http://www.ascd.org/ publications/educational-leadership/may14/vol71/num08/ Rethinking-Classroom-Observation.aspx

Post observation conversation

Post observation conversation is...

an opportunity for teachers to discuss and reflect on the aspects of instructional practice which were agreed on as the focus of the observation (what the teacher and the students said, made, wrote, did with regard to...). It is a factual, evidence-based conversation. The conversation supports the sharing of practice and builds awareness about the impact of teaching strategies on student learning outcomes. The post observation conversation is where teachers learn from one another.

Post observation conversation is not...

judgemental, emotive, unstructured, superficial or lacking in an evidence-base.

Example situation

Brian is a teaching principal of a rural primary school with eight students. He has no other teaching staff at his school and his Senior Education Improvement Leader (SEIL) has suggested peer observation as a strategy to gain feedback about how to enhance student engagement, particularly in literacy. Brian's SEIL linked him up with a learning specialist named Sarah from a larger primary school in the closest regional centre.

They conducted their pre observation conversation via telephone with follow-up via email. Brian drew upon the *School Leaders' Guide to Improving Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes* and the detailed instructional guidance provided in the *Literacy Teaching Toolkit* as part of this conversation. The observation was conducted during the literacy block and the learning specialist reflected on the evidence and synthesised feedback while Brian moved into teaching the numeracy block.

The post observation conversation was scheduled for the afternoon, when the students had Physical Education with a specialist teacher. Sarah provided Brian with a range of feedback about his practice and was able to provide a number of new resources and ideas for continued professional learning in literacy instruction. These included the learning and teaching resources developed as part of the Department's Literacy and Numeracy Strategy[5], and the new mathematics sample programs. Sarah also introduced Brian to the literacy portal.[6] Brian and Sarah remained in contact after the observation, and as a result, Brian attended some of the professional learning opportunities at Sarah's school, which enhanced his understanding about how to use the resources and in particular, the numeracy portal. Subsequent observations by Sarah further added to the depth of Brian's learning.

Guidance for the teacher being observed

Reflect on the lesson before meeting with your observer. Reflecting on the classroom observation before the conversation might pre-empt some of the discussion and maximise learnings. This may be a journal entry, reflective note-taking or you might refer to the question prompts in the post observation tool.

During the post observation conversation, actively listen to your colleague's reflections and clarify any areas of feedback, if required. Ask for specific examples to enhance your understanding and note-take during the discussion to identify improvements to your practice and your students' learning.

Inquire about what your colleague has learnt as a feature of the discussion, as this is also a professional learning opportunity for the teacher that observed the lesson.

Guidance for the observer

Be prepared for the post observation conversation by reviewing and reflecting on your evidence notes from the observation tool, synthesising your findings and identifying the key areas for feedback.

Identify resources, such as readings or opportunities, that you might be able to provide to the teacher for extending the professional learning as they relate to your feedback, if appropriate.

During the dialogue, ensure that you remain impartial, your feedback is based on factual evidence collected during the observation and be specific by providing examples to enhance understanding. Ask clarifying questions and provide opportunities for the teacher you observed to explain their thinking, and their understanding.

Share the professional learning you experienced as a feature of the observation, if appropriate.

Artefacts and resources

- AITSL Classroom observation strategies https://www.aitsl.edu.au/lead-develop/develop-others/classroom-observation/classroom-observation-strategies
- AITSL, Effective Professional Conversations – Helen Timperley https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJrkAENKjzw
- AITSL, Enhance professional conversations https://www.aitsl.edu.au/lead-develop/develop-others/coach-others/professional-conversations

- AITSL, Literature review – Professional conversations and improvement-focused feedback https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/literature-review---professional-conversations-and-improvement-focused-feedback
- Macklin, P and Zbar, V., Driving School Improvement; a practical guide, ACER Press, 2017, page 15
- Grimm, Kaufman & Doty, Educational Leadership, Vol. 71, Number 8 (2014) 'Rethinking Classroom Observation' including Teacher-driven observation protocols http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may14/vol71/num08/Rethinking-Classroom-Observation.aspx

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5   http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/literacynumeracy/Pages/litnumstrategy.aspx 1
6   http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/literacynumeracy/Pages/literacyportal.aspx

REFERENCES

Links to other tools

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AITSL, 'Effective Professional Conversations – Helen Timperley' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJrkAENKjzw

AITSL, 'Enhancing Professional Conversations' https://www.aitsl.edu.au/lead-develop/develop-others/coach-others/professional-conversations

AITSL 'How-to Guide: Peer observation' https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/peer-observation

AITSL, Improving Your Classroom Practice https://www.aitsl.edu.au/lead-develop/develop-others/classroom-observation/classroom-practice

Teachers Observing Teachers: A Professional Development Tool for Every School http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin297.shtml

Victorian Institute of Teaching, 'Moving from Provision to Full Registration' https://www.vit.vic.edu.au/registered-teacher/moving-to-full-registration

Professional reading

AITSL, Literature review – Professional conversations and improvement-focused feedback https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/literature-review---professional-conversations-and-improvement-focused-feedback

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Macklin P and Zbar V, (2017) Driving School Improvement: a practical guide ACER Press, Camberwell

Hattie (2017) Video 'Collaborative Impact' at Cognitive Education "Collaborative Impact: Research and Practice Conference 2017" https://visible-learning.org/2017/05/video-john-hattie-collaborative-impact/

Hattie, John, (2003) Teachers Make a Difference, What is the Research Evidence? ACER Conference Paper.

Hattie, John (2009) Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement, Milton Park, Abingdon, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Publishers

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Smith Ruth and Starmer Lisa, Building Adaptive expertise: Professional learning that works with teachers, not on them, Australian Educational Leader, Vol 39., No 4 2017

Departmental resources

Victorian Government Schools Agreement, 2017 http://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/Documents/VGSA-2017.pdf

The Department of Education and Training (2017) The Framework for Improving Student Outcomes www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/improvement/Pages/FISO.aspx

The Department of Education and Training (2017) Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/Pages/principlesexcellence.aspx

The Department of Education and Training (2017) High Impact Teaching Strategies: Excellence in Teaching and Learning www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/support/highimpactteachstrat.pdf

The Department of Education and Training, Professional Learning Communities http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/improvement/Pages/proflearncommunities.aspx#link56

The Department of Education and Training (2017) Professional Learning Communities Maturity Matrix www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/management/plcmaturitymatrix.pdf

The Department of Education and Training (2017) Improving School Governance: Strategic Planning http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/governance/strategicplanningph.PDF

The Department of Education and Training (2018) Victorian Teaching and Learning Model. http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/improve/Pages/pedagogical-model.aspx

Templates for use during the peer observation cycle

Templates to support teachers in undertaking peer observation, including feedback and reflection, are designed to be populated electronically or printed for use in hardcopy during the peer observation process. They can be found on the Department's website at: www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/Pages/peerobservation.aspx

Teachers are encouraged to refer to the annotated notes and advice online within the guide as they work through each stage of the process.