

Teaching Squares

What are Teaching Squares?

Teaching Squares provide a form of peer observation. A Teaching Square consists of four teaching colleagues who:

- visit at least one session taught by each Square partner (a total of three observations each)
- reflect on their observation experience
- share reflections with their Square partners
- share their experiences as a group and reflect on the overall experience.

Those involved can be from the same curriculum area or from different areas. Visiting a colleague from a different area can provide a richer experience but might be logistically more difficult to organise.

Teaching Squares provide an opportunity, in a safe and mutually supportive environment, for you to:

- observe, reflect on and celebrate good teaching and learning
- increase your understanding and appreciation of the work of colleagues
- gather ideas for developing your teaching and learning 'repertoire'
- formulate a plan for trying out and developing new approaches.

The focus is on what you as a visitor learns from observing your Square partners, not on giving feedback to improve their teaching.

Planning for your Teaching Square

Each Square can set its own ground rules and procedures. You may want to consider:

- how much notice you want to give of a visit
- the role of the visiting teacher
- what information is useful in advance of the visit
- how long the visit should last
- Square share time and location – that is, time for each pair to share their reflections on the visit that has taken place
- all Squares share – where the whole group reflects on the experience.

Some participants have found that the Squares work best when paperwork is kept to a minimum, although it is useful to make informal notes as a prompt for reflection and sharing. You may want to use **Sheet 1: Teaching Squares visit record and reflections** for this; your notes could form part of your professional development portfolio.

It will take several weeks to complete a Teaching Square so some planning is needed. A timetable may look like this:

Week	Activity	
Week 1	All Squares kick-off	Meet as group, agree Square partners, ground rules and arrangements for visits.
Week 2	Visit 1	Organise materials and information needed, carry out visit, note observations and reflections.
Week 3	Visit 2	
Week 4	Visit 3	
Week 5	Reflection and Square share	Review your notes and share positive reflections with Square partner. *
Week 6	All Squares review and celebration	All four participants review and share their experience. Some suggested prompts are given below.

* Your group may prefer Square partners to share reflections immediately or soon after the visit if this can be timetabled.

Your Squares visit schedule may look like this:

A visits B	B visits C	C visits D	D visits A
A visits C	B visits D	C visits A	D visits B
A visits D	B visits A	C visits B	D visits C

Suggested prompts for All Squares review session

- What did you observe that you might use to make your teaching more effective?
- What have you tried out as a result of your visit(s) and how did your learners respond?
- How did the experience give you a greater appreciation of:
 - your learners?
 - your colleagues?
 - What are some specific things you liked about the Teaching Squares experience and why?
- How could we improve the process?

Variations

Some teams have adapted the approach to form Teaching Triangles. This can help resolve logistical problems but, of course, reduces the range of observations.

References

Further details on Teaching Squares can be found in:

Moore, R. and Moore, P. (2006) *Little acorns taking root: systematic approaches to good practice transfer within organisations (Appendix 10)*. Learning and Skills Network

Teaching Squares visit record and reflections

During visit

Examples of good teaching and learning practice I've seen in this session.

What I have learned from observing this session.

Things I might try out as a result of observing this session.

Follow up to visit

Things I have tried since observing the session.

What worked well (including details of learner response).

What I might do differently.

Comments on the Teaching Squares experience

What I liked about the experience.

How it might be improved.