Teaching Squares as a Tool for Transformative Teaching and Reflective Practice

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Activity #1: Pair-Share

- How long have you been teaching?
- How do you keep your teaching fresh?
- Have you ever shared resources with colleagues?
- Have you ever done a non-evaluative teaching observation of a colleague or vice versa?
Teaching Squares Defined

- A non-threatening, non-judgmental, and non-evaluative method of teaching observation

- Formations in pairs, threes, fours, same discipline or interdisciplinary, or observing online

Definitions obtained from Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Oakland University in 2016
Background / Framing

- Origins of Teaching Squares
  - The Teaching Professor
  - Other Centers doing Teaching Squares
  - Oakland University’s CETL

- Reflective Practice
Origins of Teaching Squares

Difficult to pinpoint...

- The Teaching Professor, *Teaching Squares: A Teaching Development Tool*, December 2014
- MANY centers for teaching in higher ed now feature a program
- Our introduction: Oakland University Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) October 2015 Workshop
Teaching Squares as Reflective Practice

- DEFINED: Reflective practice was defined as reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action by Donald Schon (1983).

- According to Reece & Walker (2006), experiences should be interspersed by periods of reflection (p. 33).

- Institute For Learning (2008) observes that continuing professional development is most effective when practitioners reflect of their professional practice.
Malthouse & Roffey-Barentsen (2009) name four steps of professional reflective practice:

- experience, reflection, professional practice, and action plan (p. 27).
Teaching Squares as Reflection Practice (continued)

- Malthouse & Roffey-Barentsen (2009) also name peer observation of other teachers as an example of continuing professional development, “You can learn from observing the teaching of your colleagues or peers” (p. 61).

- Sounds a lot like teaching squares!
Activity #2: Teaching Squares Simulation

- How would you teach a class of 20 to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, assuming they have no prior sandwich making experience/skills in a 45 min session? What teaching tools/methods would you employ and in what order?

- Create a brief lesson plan (10 minutes)
Activity #2: Teaching Squares Simulation

- Now, take five minutes to compare your lesson plans in small groups with those around you.
- Prepare to report back to the room
Activity #2: Debrief

- What was similar and different in your lesson plans?
- Did anything surprise you?
- Based on this, what do you think are some potential benefits/challenges of non-evaluative observation?
Pilot Study

Research Question: What are the benefits and challenges of doing teaching squares?
Methods

- Planning Sheet (from CETL)
- Pre-Observation Reflection (our addition)
- Observation (from CETL)
- Post-Observation Reflection (from CETL)
- Debrief (from CETL)
- Follow-Up (our addition)
Teaching Squares - Planning Sheet

Name:

Name of Faculty Member you will observe:

Department:

Contact information:

Course you will be observing:

Date of Observation: Time of Observation:

Location of Observation:

Class Format: Class Size:

Debriefing Date/Time/Location:

Comments:
Pre-Observation Reflection

- Individually, we reflected on the following questions...
  - How do I feel about being observed?
  - What am I hoping to get out of the observation?
  - What is my teaching philosophy?
  - Do I have any other expectations about the experience?
Teaching Squares - Observation Notes

Name of Faculty Member you are observing: Katie Jostock

Course: WRT 160

Date/Time/Location: 8am 376 SFH

1. Describe teaching techniques/activities that this faculty member does that are new/different than what you do
   - Use of agenda at start
   - Collage to define oneself as a writer
   - "Accountability"
   - Addresses more "emotional" things (than I do in 160)

2. Describe new/different ways the faculty member deals with any disruptive or challenging student situations
   - Student challenged answer to quiz question, instructor explained/reviewed point of last week's lesson (I would have probably done similar)

3. Describe ways in which the faculty member engages with their students in ways that are new/different than you do
   - Shared a really personal, vulnerable moment to create empathy
   - Empathized a lot more from personal life and when instructor was a student

4. Other Comments
Teaching Squares - Reflection Notes
(to be completed following observation)

1. What you feel you could try in your class that you have observed from your colleagues
   - Showing an agenda at the beginning with the class
   - Using more mixed-media/creative activities
   - Giving personal examples from my life to empathize with students/address more emotional things/quiz (low-stakes)

2. Are there techniques/activities that you observed that you feel would not be appropriate/possible to do in your own class? Why?
   - I'm not confident in reading/my students' handwriting for quizzes
   - I'm nervous about sharing an agenda until
   - I'm more confident in timing/response of my lesson plans for my current classes

3. What techniques/activities/engagement you currently do that you want to continue to do
   - Freewrites, Think/Pair/Share, videos, group activities, mini-lectures

4. Additional Comment
   Sitting in the back of Katie's class reminded me what being a student feels like and it helped me remember what I liked/disliked then.
1. What have you gained from this experience?
   - Reminder of student perspective - emotional level especially
   - New ideas for my class - art collage
   - better understanding of my comfort level with my material

2. What are your take-aways?
   - Feeling of inspiration and community with colleagues, confidence
   - Lessening of isolation
   - Widening of perspective

3. Would you do this again?
   - Yes

4. What would you do differently?
   - Square or even interdisciplinary

5. Additional comments
   - Wondering how this would go with ppl I don't know or not sure I can trust.
   - Will feel more like risk, more vulnerable
Follow-Up

- Did I change/do/incorporate anything based on the teaching square?
- We argue this step is critical for transformative teaching.
- Measure it!
Jessica’s Results

**Challenges:**
- Difficulty scheduling
- Level of trust in self and other participants

**Benefits:**
- Reminder of student perspective
- New ideas for my class
- Better understanding of my comfort level with my material
- Less feelings of isolation in my job
- More feelings of community, confidence, and inspiration

**Follow up:**
- I made an effort to relate to my students as people with emotional needs in the following classes by intentionally using empathy
Katie’s Results

Challenges:
- Avoiding self-deprecation
- Developing a lesson that engages not only students but the observer

Benefits:
- Gaining ideas regarding approaches peer-review
- Intentionally avoiding evaluative language (“I like/dislike” vs. “I noticed”)
- Gaining a deep appreciation of the teaching style of my peer
- Becoming more comfortable with a student-driven class

Follow-up:
- Used a modified version of Jessica’s peer review workshop, involving more structure to the class session and more student-reflection regarding what worked and what didn’t work
- Students felt positively about the structure and student-driven nature of class that day
Generalized Results

- Challenges: Logistics, Vulnerability

- Benefits: Perspective, Reflection, Community-building, Empowerment

- Follow up: We both did incorporate changes into our classroom within a couple weeks of the teaching square.

- Impacted Areas: Teacher-to-student relationships, teacher-to-teacher relationships, teacher-to-self relationships
Activity #3: Reflection

- Take five minutes to discuss the following in small groups:
  - What would it take for you to form a teaching square?
  - Do you see any obstacles?

- Now, reflect on your answers with the entire group.
Some Online Resources


- Stanford University: [https://tomprof.stanford.edu/posting/535](https://tomprof.stanford.edu/posting/535)
References


Questions?

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