

Teaching Squares as a Tool for Transformative Teaching and Reflective Practice

By Jessica Tess-Navarro and Katie Jostock

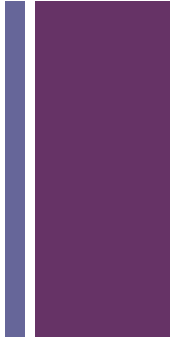
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Activity #1: Pair-Share

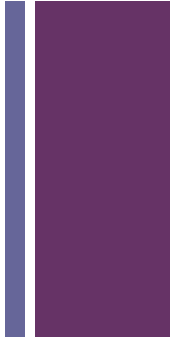
- How long have you been teaching?
- How do you keep your teaching fresh?
- Have you ever shared resources with colleagues?
- Have you ever done a non-evaluative teaching observation of a colleague or vice versa?



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



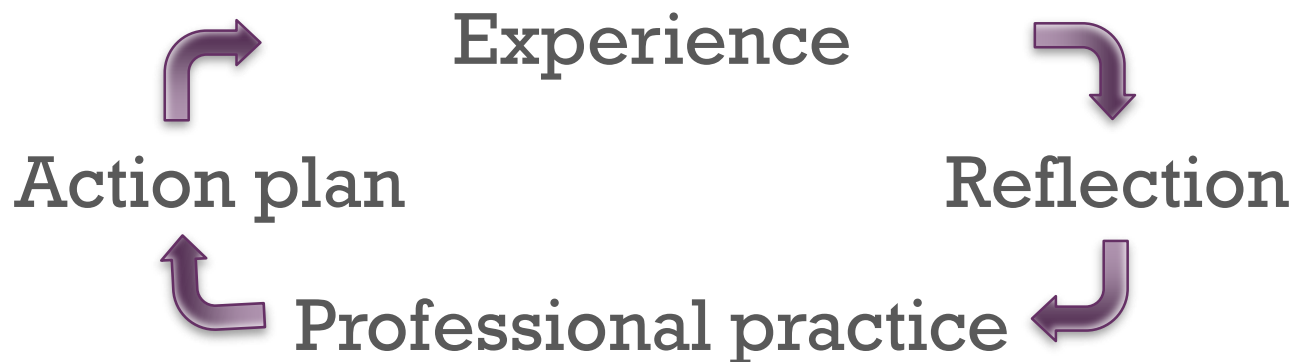
- **DEFINED:** Reflective practice was defined as reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action by Donald Schon (1983).
- According to Reece & Walker (2006), experiences should be interspersed by periods of reflection (p. 33).
- Institute For Learning (2008) observes that continuing professional development is most effective when practitioners reflect of their professional practice.



Teaching Squares as Reflection Practice (continued)



- 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



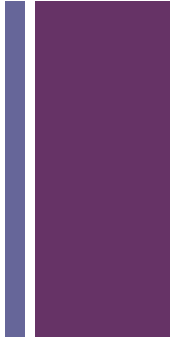
- How would you teach a class of 20 to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, assuming they have no prior sandwich making experience/skills in a 45 min session? What teaching tools/methods would you employ and in what order?
- Create a brief lesson plan (10 minutes)



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)



Planning Sheet

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:

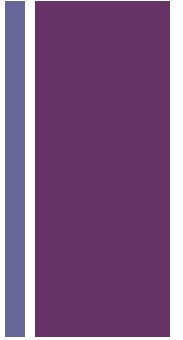
Location of Observation:

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?



Observation

Teaching Squares- Observation Notes

Name of Faculty Member you are observing: Katie Jostock

Course: CURT 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



Reflection Notes

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

- Sharing 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
 - quizzes (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 student's hand writing (for quizzes)
- I'm nervous about sharing 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 + it helped me remember what I liked/didn't like then.



Debrief

Teaching Squares- Debriefing Notes

- together

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, conf
- lessening of isolation
- widening of perspective

3. Would you do this again?

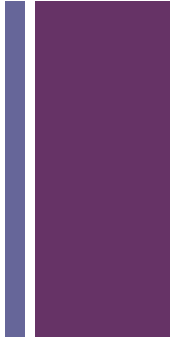
yes

4. What would you do differently?

- Square or even interdisciplinary
4
ppl

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:

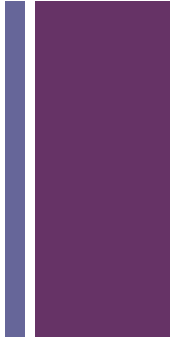
- Avoiding self-deprecation
- Developing a lesson that engages not only students but the observer

■ 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

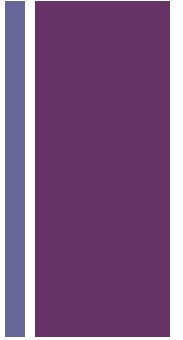
■ Follow-up:

- 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

- Oakland University CETL Quick Notes (1-pager):
<https://wwwp.oakland.edu/Assets/Oakland/cetl/files-and-documents/Handbooks/TeachingSquares/TeachingSquaresCETL2015.pdf>
- Stonehill College (includes PDF handbook):
<http://www.stonehill.edu/offices-services/ctl/programs/teaching-squares/>
- Northern Virginia Community College Manual:
<https://www.nvcc.edu/cetl/files/CETL-Teaching-Squares-Program-Manual-Spring-2015.pdf>
- York Technical College Manual:
http://flash.yorktech.com/CTL_PD_Schedule11-12/Teaching_Squares.pdf
- Stanford University: <https://tomprof.stanford.edu/posting/535>



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Questions?

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