



[Contents](#)

[Introduction to Peer](#)

[Observations](#)

[Protocols](#)

–[Introduction to Protocols](#)

–[Classroom Observations Protocol \[pdf\]](#)

–[Basics of Structured Conversations](#)

–[The Consultancy](#)

–[Classroom Visit Protocol](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Resources](#)

[Tips on Peer Observations](#)

[Description, Interpretation, or Evaluation?](#)

[What Is an Essential Question?](#)

Tip #1: Plan for a sustained effort.

Peer observation will be more effective if it is sustained over time and if participants can see that changes in teaching and learning are resulting from their work.

For example, in the John Hancock Demonstration School, an elementary school in Philadelphia, observers walked through the school looking for evidence of literacy instruction across all content areas. After the walkthrough, they commented on a lack of writing in the science work they observed. The principal met with the school's teachers and shared these comments.

The faculty as a whole then had a conversation about how they might address this issue. As a direct result of this visit, the school implemented a science journal program. At the end of each science class, each child is given a topic to write on in his/her science journal. Every Monday and Friday, the science teachers get together, review the journals, and schedule follow-up work with students who need it.

(Example taken from [Looking at Teaching and Learning through Peer Observation](#), 2002, Annenberg Institute for School Reform)

Tip #2: Allow sufficient time in the school day.

Peer observation practice requires setting aside time for preparation, observations, and feedback. However, this does not necessarily involve a major restructuring of the school or district day. Most schools and districts already provide time for teachers and administrators to meet together in groups to discuss teaching and learning. As a first step toward establishing ongoing peer observations, a school or district can capitalize on the relationships and time configurations that already exist by making the work of existing groups of teachers and administrators more explicit, focused, and intentional.

Tip #3: Develop a shared knowledge base.

Part of building the necessary skills and culture to support peer observation is sharing a common knowledge of current issues in education and their effect on teaching and learning. One way to build this background is to have a group of educators read articles on some aspect of education and discuss the issue in depth at a group meeting. Productive discussions can result from all members reading the same article or each member reading a different article on the same topic.

See [Resources](#) for a variety of useful materials.

Tip #4: Give constructive feedback.

Learning communities are strengthened when participants see the

peer observation exercise as an opportunity to learn from each other. It is important to establish an understanding among the participants that observers make observations and give feedback not as critics, but as advocates for teaching and learning. This allows the observers to give honest, constructive feedback, and allows those observed to receive the feedback as a valuable contribution to their professional development, with the goal of improving teaching and student performance.

See [Description, Interpretation, or Evaluation? Giving Constructive Feedback](#).

Tip #5: Take time to develop a focus question.

As you carry out peer observation activities, it is important to choose an appropriate focus question (also referred to as an essential question). If the question or topic, for either an individual teacher or a whole school, is too broad, the person asking the question will not receive useful information. Also, teachers or schools should propose a question that they need help finding an answer to, not one to which they think they already have the answer and for which they just want confirmation.

Here is an example of how one school developed focus questions for peer observation:

Sarah, the principal of a 550-student elementary school, has changed the content of weekly staff meetings dramatically since the early years of her tenure. Instead of announcements and reminders, today's meeting focuses on the teachers' upcoming visits to one another's classrooms. Sarah begins the session by asking teachers to write a focus question for their peers to guide their observations during the visit. One 2nd grade teacher writes, "When you observe my classroom, what evidence do you see that students are receiving instruction that meets their individual needs as learners?"

(Excerpt from "Beyond Instructional Leadership: The Changing Shape of Leadership," by Deborah King, Principal Associate, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, *Educational Leadership* 59:8 (May 2002), 61-63.

See [What is an essential question?](#) for more information.