

Teaching Champions Lunch: Teaching Squares

Tuesday, January 17, 2017

Monica Vesely (Centre for Teaching Excellence) and Marc Hurwitz spoke about the fall 2016 Teaching Square at Conrad Business, Entrepreneurship and Technology. Monica began with a description of the Teaching Squares process including an overview of the mechanics and some key take-aways.

Teaching Squares: the mechanics

- A square is formed by four instructors who visit each other's classes over the course of one term
- The visits are preceded by a preparatory meeting where participant reflect on how they want to develop as an instructor; *visits are not assessments of the other instructor's teaching*
- Those being visited are encouraged to share and material that would enhance the observation experience (such as syllabus, class notes, handouts, etc)
- The peer visitors are instructed to take notes during the classroom visit and reflect back on the visit at recommended intervals
- The visits are followed by a final debrief meeting where participants share what they learned from observing the other participants
- The facilitator sets the meeting dates, organizes the visits, sends reflection and visit reminders, and facilitates the debrief discussion

Teaching Squares: the take-aways

- Opens up unique spaces for reflection about one's teaching
- Leads to a more student-focused approach to teaching
- Builds community across disciplines
- Offers an opportunity for instructors to engage in discussions about teaching
- Provides a catalyst for growth
 - Through recognition and sharing of good practices
 - By providing inspiration and motivation to try new approaches

Marc gave some insights from his experience as a Teaching Square participant.

- Just going into classrooms was an excellent opportunity; not something we're accustomed to
- Described Teaching Squares as a way to build connections between colleagues; a peer-assisted self-development tool
- Although all four were Conrad instructors, their areas of subject expertise were quite distinct
- Debrief (approximately two hours) was an opportunity for observers to share what they learned about teaching by observing their peers; described as a very potent experience
- All four Conrad participants would be interested in doing another Teaching Square
- Conrad participant comments included
 - "a time to think about teaching"
 - "a way to look at the "how" rather than the content"
 - "participants are open, vulnerable, but protected"

Questions from the Teaching Champions

Q Could TAs do Teaching Squares?

A *Yes, as long as the four are peers, power imbalance is avoided and the model would work.*

Q Could Teaching Squares be added as a check-box item on Merit review? There are currently many more such items in the Research category than the Teaching category.

A *It may be a possibility. Those engaging for that purpose may not be the ideal participants.*

Q Would it be possible to videotape lectures of four instructors and each watches the three other videotapes on their own time (ie to reduce scheduling barriers)?

A *It wouldn't be the same experience. Sitting in a classroom as a student, with the students, brings a different level of understanding of what's happening in that room. Videotaping doesn't always bring out the best in some (nervousness). Videotaping of your class to develop self-awareness and for self-reflection can be facilitated through CTE.*