

Peer Observation: Inspiring Collegial Collaboration and Self-Reflection

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Abstract

Schools are dynamic environments in which the needs of students and educators are constantly shifting. As such, it is the responsibility of school organizations to foster collaborative learning environments that encourage self-reflective practice. Peer observation is a valuable approach to professional development that allows for continuous learning among educators. Through peer observation in structured teacher triad teams, educators are encouraged to set meaningful goals, trial new strategies, receive feedback from their peers, and reflect on the implementation of new practices. In this study, a peer observation framework, which highlighted the teacher triad approach to peer observation, was found to be successful in a sample middle school. With clear vision and intentional use of time, the peer observation process inspired collegial collaboration and self-reflection among educators. Supporting educator professional growth in this way is essential for the success of our schools. Through purposeful, continuous professional learning, educator efficacy is enhanced, and thus student learning is positively influenced.

Keywords: peer observation, collegial collaboration, professional development, self-reflection, continuous learning

It is the very nature of education to be in a constant state of change, and educators must continuously reflect upon the effectiveness of their practices. Whitehurst (2024) explained, “The

landscape of K–12 education is ever-evolving, shaped by advances in technology, changes in societal expectations, and continuous efforts to provide the best educational experience for students” (para. 1). With varying demographics among students, educators must design experiences that address a wide variety of learning needs. For this reason, it is important for educators to be reflective of their practice and open to trying new methodologies.

Peer observation is a powerful tool that enhances professional learning by providing continuous opportunities for goal-setting, practice with new strategies, feedback, and reflection (Faddis et al., 2022). By focusing on practices that promote student learning and are relevant to teacher growth, educators can help one another develop the skills necessary for meeting student needs (Rouleau, 2019). An essential component of peer observation, the ongoing dialogue among fellow educators, is crucial for fostering a high-trust, collegial culture centered around learning. (Caskey & Carpenter, 2020; Griesinger, 2023).

Continuous learning through peer observation is not without challenge. School days are often full and busy times for educators. Between teaching classes, attending meetings, assessing student learning, and preparing for future lessons, teachers may perceive there is little time left to prioritize engaging in meaningful reflection and dialogue with fellow educators. Time is, therefore, one of the major barriers to collegial collaboration and the peer observation process (Jarvis et al., 2017; Rouleau, 2019). In addition, asking teachers to reflect on their own practices requires a certain level of trust.

It is the collective responsibility of both administrators and educators to engage in opportunities that cultivate high-trust environments (Tschannen-Moran, 2020). Designing a framework to support collegial collaboration and educator self-reflection will require more than just allocating time in the schedule. Purposeful collaboration through the peer observation

process is vital for inspiring collegial interactions, which are essential for supporting educator professional growth and the overall success of our schools (Caskey & Carpenter, 2020; Crawford, 2022; Education World, 2019; Nordgren et al., 2021).

To support their adult learners, school administrators must collaborate with their educators toward a shared vision. As Shah (2012) shared, “Teacher collegiality could modify instruction, therefore teachers (and administrators) need to recognize the value of working together” (p. 1243). By addressing inconsistencies among opportunities for nonevaluative, formative observation and reflection of educator practices, schools can foster a collegially collaborative culture. Through continuous, collaborative interactions where goal-setting, feedback, and self-reflection are the basis, educators can become more aware of the impact of their practices on student learning, thus supporting their own professional growth (Faddis et. al., 2022; Rodman, 2023).

Literature Review

Teachers as Learners

With the ever-changing landscape of education, educator professional learning must be a priority for schools (University of San Diego, 2022). The inundation of rapidly advancing technologies and constantly evolving needs of student learners requires educators to adapt (Whitehurst, 2024). To support professional growth and educator efficacy, schools should foster a positive learning environment for not only their students but also their teachers.

Learning environments that aim to meet the needs of the adult learner are essential. Schools often focus more on student learning needs, overlooking the needs of their adult learners (Rodman, 2023). Educators, like students, thrive with guidance along their learning journeys. An educator's ability to rapidly adapt in response to change and to be open to embracing new ideas is

variable, at times hindering administrator efforts to support adult learners (University of San Diego, 2022). For this reason, carefully designing opportunities that foster trust and encourage vulnerability are vital (Coyle, 2019). School leaders must have a clear vision and be truly invested to encourage and support adult learning in their organization (Rodman, 2023).

Quality professional development can have a positive impact, promoting a growth mindset among educators and enhancing student learning (University of San Diego, 2022). From large-scale professional development days to small-scale team meetings, there are a variety of ways to support educators. Though these opportunities may be embedded in school calendars, their effectiveness is dependent upon several factors. Professional learning experiences are successful when they focus on teaching skills, develop subject matter expertise, offer strategies for overcoming classroom challenges, encourage collaboration, provide choice, address technology needs, are simple and specific, are ongoing, create opportunities for feedback and discussion, and allow time for practice with new strategies in the classroom (University of San Diego, 2022). These considerations are important for administrators as they embark upon the challenge of designing meaningful learning opportunities for their educators. Based on my research, I believe if the aim of schools is to empower their students as learners, then schools should also empower their teachers as learners.

There are five practices that can help educators grow professionally: attunement, alignment, perspective, collective efficacy, and organizational learning (Rodman, 2023). For schools to continue learning and growing, educators must first understand who they are as learners before they can align with their organizational goals. Administrators and teachers alike must also consider others' perspectives, recognizing and accepting the differences between members of their school organization. By understanding the needs of adult learners and

considering the practices that can support educator growth, the collegial landscape of a school's culture can be developed.

Collegial Collaboration

Throughout the literature, it was evident that collegial collaboration is necessary to support educator professional growth (Codrington, 2022; Kaneft, 2022). Collegiality is about more than congenial interaction among colleagues. Though congenial schools may be pleasant workplaces, this type of culture may not necessarily promote organizational growth (Kaneft, 2022). Typically, congenial cultures emphasize individual comforts which can detract from the importance of the school as a community. When there is a need for organizational change in congenial environments, there is often discussion about educator buy-in which places emphasis on individual educators rather than the organization (Kaneft, 2022). In a collegial culture, individual and school needs are woven together, supporting educator and administrator collaboration toward a shared vision (Codrington, 2022). Disagreements and respectful debates occur in these environments and promote organizational growth (Codrington, 2022). If administrators aim to lead their staff beyond what is comfortable, and supersede the status-quo, they must foster collegial interactions (Kaneft, 2022). As such, the success of the school as a collegial community depends upon the candor of its administrators and educators (Kaneft, 2022).

Models to Support Collegial Collaboration

There are a variety of organizational models that support teacher collaboration including common planning time (Caskey & Carpenter, 2020; Education World, 2019), professional learning communities (Caskey & Carpenter, 2020; Education World, 2019), critical friends groups (Caskey & Carpenter, 2020; Education World, 2019), teacher learning walks (Education World, 2019; Fisher & Frey, 2014), teacher learning labs (Miller, 2023), and peer observation

(Crawford, 2022; Education World, 2019; Jarvis et al., 2017). Each model strives to support teacher learning, increase collegiality, and provide more awareness and insight of instructional practice relative to student learning (Caskey & Carpenter, 2020).

Common planning time (Caskey & Carpenter, 2020, Education World, 2019) is one method for inspiring collegial collaboration. Allocating time in the schedule for groups of educators to collaborate as they plan their lessons is an important step toward supporting collegial interaction. Though this simple schedule design may have good intentions, there are some barriers to supporting collegial collaboration in this way (Nordgren et al., 2021).

In one study conducted in Sweden, researchers analyzed teacher planning and preparation in order to understand the impact of collegial collaboration on educator perceptions of conditions for lesson planning (Nordgren et al., 2021). Both qualitative and quantitative data were used to analyze the implementation of and outcomes associated with planning and preparation. The results indicated that most teachers involved in the study experienced inadequate infrastructure when there was ineffective use of time for planning and preparation.

This study concluded that when there was more intentional collegial work, teachers were more satisfied with the amount of time available (Nordgren et al., 2021). Additionally, teachers with more time scheduled for reflection were better able to enact and evaluate instructional practices (Nordgren et al., 2021). In environments that promoted open, reflective dialogue and provided a structure supporting collaboration, both educator and student learning were enhanced.

Learning walks (Education World, 2019; Fisher & Frey, 2014) are another approach to positively influencing collegial collaboration. This nonevaluative, low-stakes process can be beneficial for schools aiming to support educator reflection on their own learning (Fisher & Frey, 2014). There are three different strategies to implement learning walks. Each opportunity

requires some formal structure so the process is beneficial. With a lack of guidance in approach to learning walks, some schools have found the initiative to be unsuccessful (Fisher & Frey, 2014).

Ghost walks are considered the low-level entry into learning walks where educators are encouraged to visit other educator classrooms when there are no students present (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Two other types of learning walks include capacity-building learning walks and faculty learning walks. In each of these experiences, observations are occurring in classrooms where educators are teaching. The capacity-building approach focuses on data collection of the implementation of particular teaching strategies whereas faculty learning walks are more flexible. Faculty learning walks can be designed to focus on particular data or can be more open-ended. Regardless of approach, it is of great importance to conclude learning walk opportunities with whole group reflection led by the facilitator of the process.

An alternative approach to teacher professional development is the creation of a teacher learning lab (Miller, 2023). This strategy, implemented by a school in Connecticut, is designed to support continuous professional growth. Typically, school districts use intermittent, often sporadic professional development days embedded within a school year. These disjointed learning moments can prohibit the establishment of a culture of continuous learning and growth. With the learning lab design, educators have both a physical and vulnerable space that fosters supportive, trusting relationships where teachers can experiment with new strategies. In this space, educators can collaborate with colleagues and work with volunteer students to model new teaching ideas. Then, educators can reflect on and dialogue about the processes tested and bring new strategies back to the classroom.

This design of continuous learning can provide comfort for educators and encourage their vulnerability (Miller, 2023). In Miller's (2023) study, educators were more inclined to take risks in the learning lab environment. Not only did the school promote a culture of learning among their staff, but also among their students who often volunteered to participate in the learning labs. Inevitably, the culture of learning trickled down to the students and inspired them to be more engaged in their school community (Miller, 2023).

Peer observation is another means for promoting professional growth. Teachers observing one another is invaluable, supporting on-going collegial interactions and continuous learning (Education World, 2019). At the University of Porto, researchers sought to determine how the results of a peer observation framework influenced educator practice (Torres et al., 2017). Observations occurred both within and across content areas, allowing colleagues to observe a variety of peers. During observations, participants recorded notes which were later analyzed to look for trends in the teaching practices that were most impactful. These observations were categorized into teacher's attitude, class climate, class structure, and class organization. Researchers determined observations across all fields mainly focused on aspects that allowed for better teacher-student interaction and fostered student engagement.

In addition to this conclusion, researchers determined there were different benefits for educators when observing peers across and within content areas. Though observations of similar content peers offered insightful reflection about specific teaching practices, educators also found benefit when observing peers outside of their content (Torres et al., 2017). Cross-curricular observations shifted the focus toward pedagogical needs, thus inspiring reflection around broader instructional goals (Torres et al., 2017). In the end, Torres et al. (2017) recommended peer observation programs as "enhancer devices" (p. 836) for teaching practices.

Though each of these strategies provides infrastructure in support of collegial collaboration, their design and implementation must meet the needs of adult learners for them to be successful. There must be some level of autonomy, choice, and relevance to the specific needs of the educator (Rodman, 2023). Of greatest priority, professional learning must be ongoing and create the opportunity for critical reflection (Crawford, 2022).

Peer Observation: A Closer Look at the Teacher Triad Model

In an article published in the *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, Crawford (2022) analyzed the impact of critical reflection and collegial peer observation on educator efficacy. To begin, a history of reflective thinking processes was recounted as educational pedagogy evolved through the years. Among the educational theorists studied, a common theme emerged, showing “learning takes place as a result of purposeful interaction and modification of practice” (Crawford, 2022, p. 55). According to this study, there are two ways to engage in critical reflection: gaining new knowledge and reviewing current practices. Through careful consideration of practice, this “problem finding and solving” (Crawford, 2022, p. 56) approach is beneficial.

Through their study, Crawford (2022) showcased the benefits of critical reflection on teaching and suggested the use of teacher triad teams as a peer observation strategy for carrying out action research at the classroom level. In this model, there are two observers and an action research leader. They work through a spiraling process of research and reflection of current practice, planning for modification of practice, trying the new strategy, and observing its implementation. Then, the cycle repeats itself beginning with new reflection of practice. This triad model provided for ongoing collegial collaboration among educators.

Another vision of teacher triad teams is showcased by researchers at McREL International (Jarvis et al., 2017). Through analysis of the use of teacher triad teams for peer observation, researchers highlighted the importance of using a strengths-based approach to self-reflection as prior research show a deficit-based approach does not work (Jarvis et al., 2017). Similar to positive reinforcement strategies in the classroom, encouraging educators to reflect upon and set goals around what is going well can positively impact the mindset around professional learning (Moore, 2019).

According to McREL researchers, there are four major aspects of professional learning opportunities necessary for the transfer of learning into classroom practice (Jarvis et al., 2017). First, there must be meaning behind new strategies; second, demonstrations of these new strategies must occur. Third, educators go on to practice in their own classrooms, and fourth, teachers must follow up with fellow educators through peer coaching interactions. The consistent use of each of these components led to meaningful professional learning.

The triad model proposed in this article is consistent with most peer coaching models, incorporating three roles: the coach, the coachee, and the observer (Jarvis et al., 2017; Rouleau, 2019). For peer coaching to be successful, certain key elements are necessary: (a) defining the purpose behind the peer-coaching, (b) identifying the roles of the participants, and (c) understanding how to provide feedback (Rouleau, 2019). To support peer coaching infrastructure, there must also be dedicated time and space for the triad group to interact (Jarvis et al., 2017; Rouleau, 2019). In addition, aligning the peer coaching experience with individual needs is essential (Jarvis et al., 2017). Research and data to guide informed decision-making around classroom practice is an important support for successful peer coaching. Through the triad model, schools can extend educator practices and connect individual educator goals with

whole school goals. In the end, peer coaching builds capacity for professional learning and educator growth (Fullan, 2016; Jarvis et al., 2017).

By nature of design, teacher triad teams embrace the teaching sprints process in which educators create research-based goals, trial new strategies, and reflect on their impact on student learning (Breakspear & Jones, 2020). The teaching sprints approach promotes continuous professional learning and is intended to encourage overwhelmed educators with their professional growth. Through this process, collaboration occurs among a small group of educators beginning with the determination of an area of focus. This is followed by dialogue among the members which is based upon current, related research. With background knowledge, educators are better able to make informed decisions about how to address challenges they may face in their classrooms. After brainstorming and goal-setting, educators engage in a sprint in which they trial a new idea in their classroom. Posttrial, teachers then reflect on their practice.

To promote the feeling of safety, which is a necessary support of the peer observation process, the teaching sprint approach can assist educators with identifying goals, building knowledge, and allowing for the safe practice of new instructional strategies (Breakspear & Jones, 2020; Faddis et al., 2022). Reflective dialogue inspired by the teaching sprints process is essential for extending professional learning and is naturally built into the teacher triad model of peer observation. Regardless of the nuances specific to the approach to teacher triad teams, peer observation has the most impact on educator professional growth (Breakspear & Jones, 2020).

Summary

The literature reviewed in this document focused on the needs of adult learners, the importance of collegial collaboration, and suggestions for successful models of peer observation. Like their students, educators have learning needs that must be met (Rodman, 2023). To promote

growth, professional learning opportunities must be designed with the adult learner in mind (Rodman, 2023). There are a number of examples of professional learning opportunities that foster collegial collaboration among educators. Peer observation is one avenue for inspiring collegial interaction and self-reflection which can have a positive impact on the school learning environment (Crawford, 2022; Jarvis et al., 2017; Miller, 2023; Nordgren et al., 2021; Torres et al., 2017). Through the review, evidence in support of using peer observation as a means for professional learning was abundant (Crawford, 2022; Jarvis et al., 2017; Nordgren et al., 2021).

Many of the professional learning strategies highlighted throughout the literature focused on the benefits of collegial collaboration in schools (Crawford, 2022; Jarvis et al., 2017; Miller, 2023; Nordgren et al., 2021; Torres et al., 2017). There are numerous advantages to collegial collaboration among educators. These include providing assistance and support to new educators, helping teachers respond effectively to change, establishing a positive sense of self-efficacy, and creating a climate that values risk-taking and continuous improvement (Shah, 2012). Though there was some discussion around barriers to supporting collegial interactions, more research is needed to help problem-solve these challenges. One of the barriers that stood out in the literature is the barrier of time (Jarvis et al., 2017; Rouleau, 2019). School schedules are busy and at times inflexible, which can make it challenging to support peer observation. Another highlighted barrier was the need to shift a school culture (Codrington, 2022; Kaneft, 2022, Miller, 2023). Cultural shifts do not happen overnight and with sometimes frequent changes in administration or teachers, establishing a culture that embraces vulnerability can be challenging.

To establish a collegial environment administrators must create a culture of trust (Coyle, 2019). By encouraging vulnerability, educators are more apt to take risks and trial new ideas

without fear of failure (Coyle, 2019; Miller, 2023). This mindset promotes professional learning and educator growth. Through the adoption of a teacher triad model for peer observations, schools are better able to support continuous, collaborative interactions that embrace goal-setting, feedback, and reflection. By tapping into adult learning theories and designing professional learning opportunities that meet the needs of adult learners, schools can inspire collegial collaboration and deepen their collective learning.

Middle schools are prime environments for educator collaboration due to their general organizational model, which includes designated common planning time and professional learning communities (Caskey & Carpenter, 2020). In addition, meaningful educator interactions are also supported through professional development days (Griesinger, 2023). Though each of these opportunities is designed to encourage frequent educator interactions, how schools go about using this time is crucial to supporting the adult learner (Rodman, 2023) and promoting collegiality (Kaneft, 2022). With the goal of increasing peer observation, recognizing fellow educators as important resources for professional learning and growth, middle schools can support their teachers through the design and implementation of a peer-observation framework. Through these means, collegial collaboration and self-reflection can become central to continuous professional learning.

Research Plan

The specific goal of this research was to determine what educators perceive as important factors supporting collegial collaboration and the impact of peer observation on perceptions of collegial collaboration. The following research questions guided the research:

1. What are the important elements of collegial collaboration, and what is needed to support educator collegiality and self-reflection?

2. What are the effects of a peer observation process on educator perceptions of collegial collaboration?

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected at a sample middle school comprising approximately 80 educators and 700 students. I administered an educator survey (see Appendix A) regarding collegial collaboration, self-reflection, and peer observation. In addition to the survey, data collection occurred through both observation (see Appendix B) and focus group interviews (see Appendix C). These data points were used to better understand educator perceptions around collegiality, self-reflection, and peer observation.

After this data collection and analysis, a pilot group study occurred in which a group of teachers experimented with a triad model peer observation approach. This process provided guidance for participants, designating already allocated time in the schedule for premeeting, observation, and debrief. Through focus group interviews, reflection and feedback on the process were recorded. The pilot group feedback aligned with both the survey data and interview data as participants confirmed the challenge of time as the biggest factor when engaging in peer observation. In addition, pilot group data reinforced the need for built-in accountability to support the process.

Research Phases

The research was carried out through three phases of data collection and analysis. In Phase 1, meaning was established in support of a peer observation framework. In Phase 2, a framework to guide peer observation was designed, and in Phase 3, the framework was trialed.

Phase 1: Building Meaning

A mixed-method approach to data collection (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) allowed for both quantitative and qualitative analysis of collegial collaboration, self-reflective practice, and

the peer observation process. The sampling method included a school-wide educator survey (see Appendix A) in which representatives from each grade-level and content area provided feedback relative to perceptions of collegiality, self-reflection, and peer observation. The survey provided large-scale, whole-school feedback in which 33 middle school educators, representing 42% of the staff, participated. There was a mix of male and female teachers. Quantitative analysis was then used to generalize educator perceptions and feedback. In addition, qualitative analysis of open response survey questions occurred. Responses were analyzed for high frequency word use from respondents, such as references to the factors of time and trust. Qualitative data, encompassing representatives from each grade-level and content area, were recorded via observation notes (see Appendix B), focus group interview responses (see Appendix C), and administrator interview responses (see Appendix D).

Phase 2: Designing a Framework

Through a review of the literature, ideas for supporting adult learners and designing peer observation frameworks were explored. Using this information along with data analysis from the educator survey, focus group interviews, and administrator interviews, a framework to support the peer observation process was designed. This included partnering volunteer educators in teacher triad teams, the explicit use of faculty meetings for pre-observation dialogue, scheduled observation time, and the use of PLC meeting time for debrief and reflection. A pre-observation template (see Appendix E), observation notes template (see Appendix F), and post-observation dialogue guidelines (see Appendix G) were used to support educators through the process.

Phase 3: Peer Observation Trial

In conjunction with teachers, I created two teacher triad teams with representatives from each grade level and within the same content area. Teacher triad groups were introduced to the

new framework in advance of the pre-observation encounter. These groups were provided guidance for recording objective observations and providing specific, meaningful feedback (Anderson, 2024). Teacher triad members collaborated to determine the day and time of the observation based upon the master schedule, carried out a round of observation, and reflected on the experience. Qualitative data, gathered through pilot group post-assessment questions, was collected posttrial (see Appendix H). This trial data was then used in triangulation with prior survey data and interview data to create recommendations for a school-wide peer observation framework.

Results

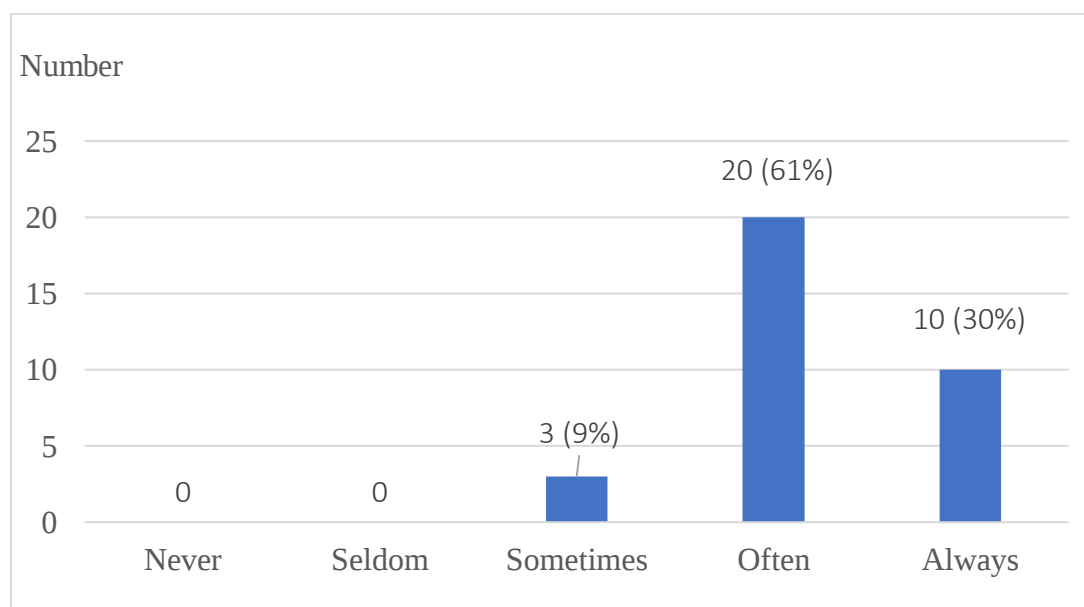
The majority (68%) of the 33 survey respondents considered their interactions with colleagues as often or always collegial, and the most common factors associated with educator collegiality included trust, open-mindedness, shared-vision, and flexibility. Most educators (97%) reported they frequently or always reflect on their instructional practices with the majority (73%) reflecting frequently or always through dialogue with peers. The data also highlighted overlapping themes between the supports needed and barriers to the peer observation process. Dedicated time to the processes of peer observation and collegial collaboration was mentioned the most (65% of short response answers) throughout the data. In addition to the time barrier, providing some level of accountability for educator engagement was another common response from educators (22% of short response answers). This could look like embedding expectations in a schedule, providing prompts to encourage these interactions, and shared vision reinforced by school leaders.

Collegial Collaboration

Pre-study perceptions of educator collegiality are displayed in Figure 1. Thirty of the 33 participants (91%) rated their interactions with fellow educators as 4 or 5 showing the vast majority of educators perceived their interactions as often or always collegial in nature. The other three participants (9%) rated their interactions as sometimes collegial. No participants rated collegial interactions as occurring rarely or never.

Figure 1

Frequency of Collegial Interaction with Fellow Educators



The degree to which educators found opportunities for collegial collaboration favorable for supporting their own professional growth are highlighted in Table 1. The most beneficial opportunities for supporting professional learning and growth included: (a) 73% (24) of participants rated peer observation as often or always beneficial; (b) 76% (25) rated content meetings as often or always beneficial; (c) 91% (30) participants rated informal conversations as

often or always beneficial. The least beneficial opportunities included: (a) professional development sessions in which 88% (29) participants rated PD as sometimes or rarely beneficial; (b) 82% (27) of participants rated after-school monthly PLC meetings as sometimes or rarely beneficial; (c) 78% (26) of participants rated nonevaluative observations from curriculum leaders as sometimes or rarely beneficial.

Table 1*Benefit of Collegial Collaboration Opportunities*

	Number of Survey Respondents			
	Rarely Beneficial	Sometimes Beneficial	Often Beneficial	Always Beneficial
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Peer Observation (nonevaluative)	1 (3%)	8 (24%)	11 (34%)	13 (39%)
Informal Conversations	0	4 (12%)	18 (54%)	11 (34%)
Content Meetings	2 (6%)	6 (18%)	17 (52%)	8 (24%)
Team Meetings	2 (6%)	12 (36%)	13 (39%)	6 (18%)
Evaluator Observations	4 (12%)	18 (54%)	9 (27%)	2 (6%)
Curriculum Leader Observations (nonevaluative)	11 (34%)	15 (45%)	6 (18%)	1 (3%)
PLC Meetings	9 (27%)	18 (54%)	6 (18%)	0
Professional Development Sessions	6 (18%)	23 (70%)	4 (12 %)	0

Through analysis of the short open-response survey questions, high frequency words were used to determine key factors in support of collegial collaboration. According to educators,

these factors included: time at 67% (22) of respondents; open-mindset at 52% (17) of respondents; trust at 21% (7) of respondents; and shared vision at 21% (7) of respondents. These factors also showed up as barriers to collegial collaboration when they were not positively and regularly in place.

In addition to educator perceptions of collegial collaboration, administrator interviews provided another perspective on the nature of collegiality and the opportunity for engaging in such interactions. All administrators interviewed remarked about the high collegiality witnessed among content teams and grade-level teams. One administrator shared that during team meetings it is clear educators in these groups “get along well as they often engage in professional and respectful interactions, even in times of disagreement.” In addition, administrators spoke of the importance of fostering high-trust environments to support these interactions. One administrator remarked, “While there are various means for collaboration, a high-trust environment is necessary for welcoming informal critique.” When asked about what is required to encourage peer observation, both tangibility and accountability were highlighted as necessary supports. One administrator stated, “If we feel peer observation is beneficial, then we need to hold each other accountable.”

Self-Reflective Practice

Table 2 data indicates that 79% (26) of participating educators were comfortable or extremely comfortable with receiving nonevaluative feedback from their peers, while 21% (7) of teachers reported feeling neutral or somewhat uncomfortable with this concept. Thus, 26 of the 33 teacher participants were comfortable with nonevaluative feedback.

Table 2*Teacher Comfort with Nonevaluative Feedback*

Categories	Never n (%)	Seldom n (%)	Sometimes n (%)	Frequently n (%)	Always n (%)
Score	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	6 (18%)	10 (30%)	16 (49%)

In subsequent survey questions, educators were asked to rate their use of feedback and their engagement in self-reflective processes. For these questions, 63% (21) of staff reported feedback frequently or always influenced their classroom instruction. Interestingly, 97% (32) shared they frequently (21%) or always (76%) reflect on their instructional practices. Teachers self-reported that of this high-level of reflection, 55% (18) of staff reported frequently reflecting through dialogue, while 18% (6) of staff reported they always engage in reflective practice through dialogue with their peers (see Table 3).

Table 3*Self-Reflective Practice*

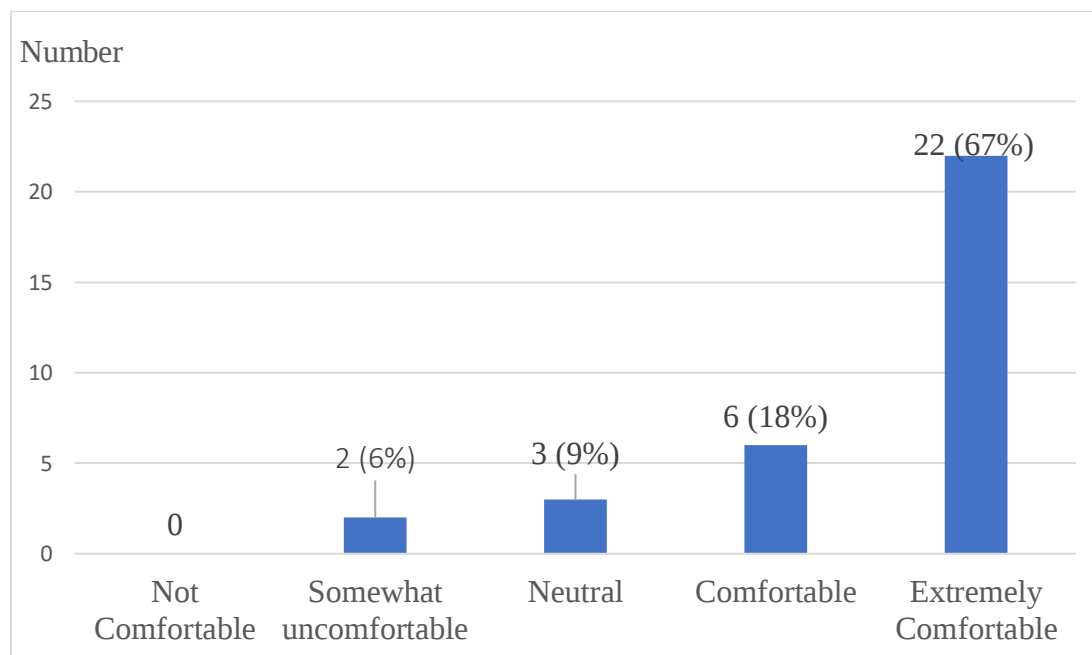
Categories	Never n (%)	Seldom n (%)	Sometimes n (%)	Frequently n (%)	Always n (%)
Influence of feedback on classroom instruction	0	3 (9%)	9 (27%)	14 (42%)	7 (21%)
Frequency of reflection on instructional practices	0	0	1 (3%)	7 (21%)	25 (76%)
Frequency that reflection involves dialogue with a peer	0	1 (3%)	8 (24%)	18 (55%)	6 (18%)

Peer Observation

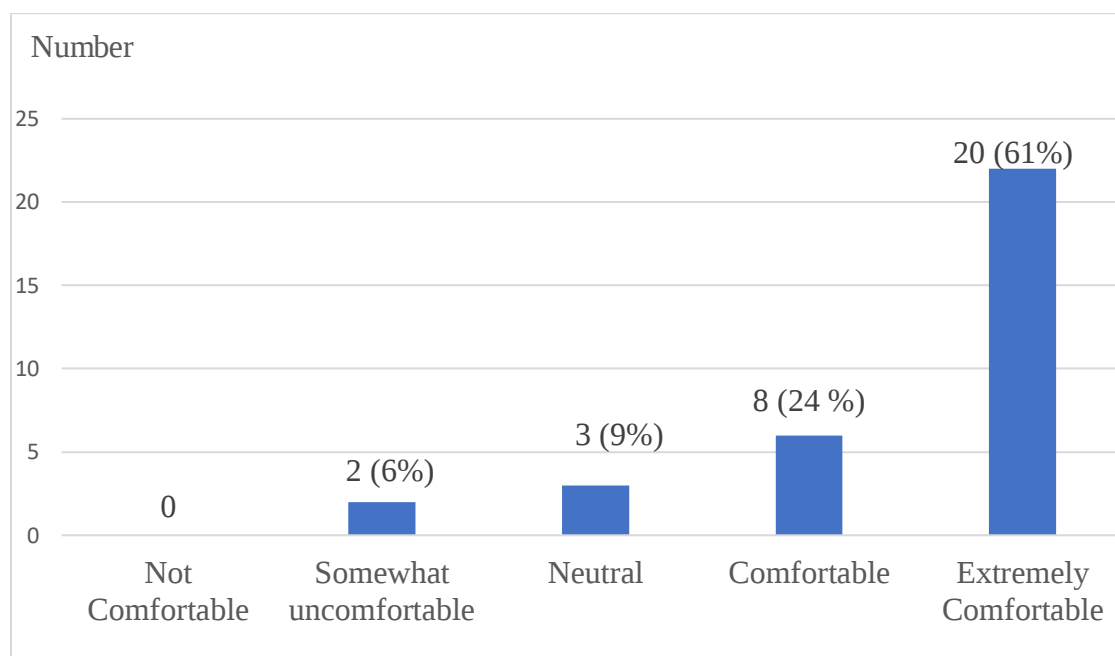
When asked about comfort with observing peers, 28 of the 33 respondents (85%) expressed they were comfortable or very comfortable with observing their peers (see Figure 2). The results also indicated three teachers were neutral, but two participants were somewhat uncomfortable observing their peers.

Figure 2

Comfort Observing Peers



In terms of having their peers observe them, the overall numbers were the same with 85% (28) of the 33 respondents expressing they were comfortable or very comfortable, three teachers were neutral, and two teachers were somewhat uncomfortable being observed by their peers. Three teachers moved their ratings from very comfortable to comfortable from observing their peers to being observed by their peers (see Figure 3).

Figure 3*Comfort Being Observed by Peers*

Educators reflected on the frequency of their peer observations over the course of the school year and the data varied, with some educators that had visited multiple classrooms while others had visited none. For this survey question, 18 (55%) of participants indicated they had made 3 or 4 observations during the year. Three participants (9%) had made two observations. Six participants (18%) had made one observation, and the final six (18%) participants had made no observations during the school year. Thus, 27 (82%) of participants made at least one observation and 21 (64%) of the participants in this study had made at least two observations during the year.

Qualitative data results from educator focus group interviews (see Appendix C) and administrator interviews (see Appendix D) brought about important explanations relative to the success of a peer observation program (see Table 4). A review of the data from these interviews

helped me to gain more insights into two important topics for this study: (a) barriers to peer observation and (b) support for peer observation. It is no surprise these barriers and supports align with one another. Within the qualitative data four themes emerged that can be either a barrier to or a support for implementing a peer observation program successfully. The themes included: (a) school and/or team schedules, (b) confidence or trust in the process, (c) dedicated time for meetings and observations, and (d) making the process a priority for the teams and school. The survey data alluded to each of these themes and the focus groups and principal interview data confirmed the importance of these themes in creating an efficient and effective peer observation program for our school.

Table 4

Barriers and Supports for Peer Observations

Barriers	Supports
Schedule overlap between grade-levels	Alignment of schedules between grade levels
Lack of confidence in/comfort with the process	Establishing trust between observer/observee
Not combined with important meetings such as administration team meetings	Dedicated time
Not prioritized	Explicit/prioritized/accountability

Each administrator interviewed emphasized the importance of being mindful of the use of educator time, understanding teachers have many responsibilities to balance. One administrator said based on their own observations, “peer observation is not happening a lot, likely due to the

difficulty of getting out during teacher planning time.” To mitigate this challenge, administrators brainstormed suggestions for the use of already established times to support the peer observation process. These included the use of faculty meetings, PLC meetings, grade-level meetings, and early release days. Each administrator also shared the importance of embedded accountability in a peer observation framework. One administrator noted “the success of a peer observation process relies on it being something tangible, with built-in accountability.”

Teacher Triad Program

Based on the data collected and the suggestions that emerged, I created a model framework for peer observation that teachers, administrators, and I piloted. In this framework, content colleagues across three grade levels were grouped into teacher triad teams. Through analysis of the whole-school schedule and with careful consideration for the barrier of time, currently embedded opportunities for collegial collaboration, namely a faculty meeting and a PLC meeting, were repurposed to support the goal of peer observation. In addition to the designation of time, the framework included templates for guidance in pre-observation meetings (see Appendix E), during the coordinated observation (see Appendix F), and post-observation debrief (see Appendix G). I interviewed teacher triad pilot groups after the trial and their responses have been categorized into benefits and challenges to the peer observation process (see Table 5). From the data I found there were six benefits to the triad process we used and three challenges. Both sets of themes are important as we work to develop our full peer observation program.

Table 5*Triad Pilot Data*

Teacher Triad Pilot Group Feedback: Benefits	Teacher Triad Pilot Group Feedback: Challenges
Structure to the process: designated time - Use of faculty and PLC meeting - Use of overlap in daily schedule between the three grade levels	Difficulty aligning schedules due to one teacher in each triad requiring coverage
Structure to the process: templates for guidance	Not enough time for training on how to use the templates (i.e., a limitation of this particular study)
Increased collaboration among three grade-levels	Initially challenging if no prior relationship building has occurred
In-depth dialogue with colleagues	
Ability to carry-out peer observation if one member of the team was absent	
Frequency of peer observation cycle would allow for each educator to be observed once per quarter.	

One educator remarked they liked the “great feedback and advice, the time to reflect, and the dialogue with multiple people” as part of this framework. This same educator remarked “engaging in peer observation in this manner was very helpful, and I took feedback that I will immediately use in my classroom.” Another educator shared the triad approach to peer observation was “better than observing alone since it was a shared experience but it was also harder to coordinate the event.” Educators positively reflected on having designated time for

carrying out peer observation and templates for guidance in the process. One educator noted the benefit of “using time that is allocated for reflection.” Another educator discussed the importance of the relationship between educators, stating the observation process can be “nerve-wracking without prior relationship.” Despite this, educators dialogued during the pilot group debrief about how the peer observation process encouraged collegial collaboration; they hypothesized this process could enhance relationships between educators by increasing connections both within and across grade levels and content areas.

Discussion

The results of this study show educators and administrators alike value collegial collaboration and consider the peer observation process as one of the most beneficial methods for encouraging professional growth. This study highlighted the need for clear vision and guidance to support adult learners as they engage in peer observation. Through the educator survey, it was evident there is an overall positive perception of the peer observation process including high levels of comfort among educators when observing peers, though many respondents shared this comfort was dependent upon the trust relationship between educators. According to the survey, teachers generally engage in self-reflective practice and use feedback to improve instruction. However, despite these perceptions, the follow-through with engagement in the peer observation process varied across the sample school. I believe this indicates a need for improved structure to support the peer observation process.

Educators provided feedback about the important factors that influenced the peer observation process and made suggestions for supporting this type of collegial interaction. Factors such as trust, open mindset, shared vision, and time were common among respondents. Educators noted the difficulty of collaborating with colleagues who display fixed mindsets and

the constant pressure of not enough time in the day to devote to such interactions. Of interest, though most educators discussed the time factor with regard to suggestions for supporting collegial collaboration and the peer observation process, many went on to describe this factor as requiring some type of accountability, such as purposeful designation of time, prompts to promote dialogue, and administrator engagement in the process.

Each of these highlighted factors aligns with Coyle's (2019) characteristics of highly successful groups. Building safety, sharing vulnerability, and creating purpose are all integral components of high-functioning groups. According to Coyle, encouraging educator collegiality and reflection requires a certain level of trust and an openness toward vulnerability. As educators have shared in this study, a high-trust environment is essential for creating a sense of safety that supports meaningful, collegial interactions.

Derived from my review of the literature and the initial data collection from teachers and administrators, I designed a framework model for the peer observation process, which the teacher teams and I piloted. In the post-trial focus group interviews, teacher triad group members shared the benefits and challenges they faced when following the new framework. Overall, the feedback was positive.

Through the use of a faculty meeting for pre-observation, common prep time for observation, and a PLC meeting for debriefing the observation, teacher triad teams felt supported in their engagement with the peer observation process. Educators noted the strengthening of relationships between the grade levels, the ease of follow-through with the designated time for the process, and the frequency with which observations could occur. Another benefit of working in teacher triad teams is the fail-safe for peer observation in the event one team member is absent. In one of the triad pilot groups, an educator, observation nearly fell through due to an

unanticipated absence. If peer observation were to occur in pairs, there could be an added challenge to follow-through with the process in light of educator absence. Teachers also shared that while it may be easier to carry out an observation independently, the benefit of two observers gathering feedback for the observee outweighed this particular challenge. In a group of three, the feedback and reflective dialogue were elevated.

The main challenge that persisted throughout the trial was coordinating schedules so the two observers could observe the observee at the same time. This barrier may have been present due to the short time-frame of this particular study and can be overcome with continued practice of the process, establishing a rhythm to carrying out peer observation. In addition, consideration for overlapping schedules and providing teacher coverage when needed could mitigate this scheduling challenge. Another limitation to this study was the lack of adequate time for preparing educators to engage in the process. With a more thorough understanding of how to observe and provide objective feedback, teachers may have been more comfortable engaging in the process.

Based on feedback from the educator survey and the peer observation pilot groups, educators within content areas are more comfortable with one another and, therefore, more inclined to engage in the peer observation process with one another. This is likely the result of frequent interaction due to attending the same weekly content meetings and monthly PLC meetings. Through these opportunities for interaction, trusting relationships have already been established, which paved the way for open, meaningful dialogue. By fostering collegial relationships in this manner, there is a higher level of comfort with trying out and reflecting on new ideas in the classroom.

To reinforce a sense of purpose in this important work, administrators and educators must collectively establish a shared vision around the peer observation process (Codrington, 2022; Coyle, 2019; Rodman, 2023). I believe creating a guiding framework supported educator collegiality and the peer observation process as it provided direction and inherent accountability. With more opportunity to engage with fellow educators and reflect on instructional strategies, as occurred in our pilot, schools can increase educator comfort with peer observation and foster a growth mindset among their adult learners. Through these means, collegial collaboration and self-reflection can become central to continuous professional learning.

Conclusion

Educator professional growth must be at the forefront of education. If schools aim to foster meaningful learning cultures for their students, they should do the same for their teachers (Rodman, 2023). This study shed light on the importance of supporting adult learners by encouraging their collegial collaboration and self-reflection which are important elements for both individual and organizational growth (Codrington, 2022; Rodman, 2023). Through relevant, meaningful, and ongoing professional learning, educator instructional practices can continuously evolve (Breakspear & Jones, 2020; Crawford, 2022; Miller, 2023). Therefore, it is essential that school leaders collaborate with their educators to establish a shared vision around professional learning and provide structural support to follow through with initiatives (Coyle, 2019).

By using a cyclic, embedded peer observation framework, a culture of ongoing learning can be fostered. As a result of this study and in agreement with prior research, the use of teacher triad teams is an effective method for supporting peer observation, thus inspiring collegial collaboration and self-reflection (Crawford, 2022; Jarvis et. al., 2017; Rouleau, 2019). Through the teacher triad approach to peer observation, not only is there added value to the depth of

reflective dialogue, but also there is built-in flexibility for ensuring the observation cycle occurs. Peer observation triad teams are beneficial within content areas and may also be favorable cross-curricular (Torres et al., 2017). Though this study did not pilot cross-curricular peer observation teams, prior research has indicated broader impact when this approach is used for peer observation. Further comparison of cross-curricular teams with content-based teams is needed.

According to this study and in congruence with earlier research (Coyle, 2019; Rodman, 2023) trust, open-mindedness, shared vision, and time are essential factors for supporting collegial collaboration and the peer observation process. By establishing a shared vision and embedding a peer observation framework for guidance, data from this study indicated positive changes can occur in both individual educators and the school organization (Codrington, 2022; Rodman, 2023). Through peer observation there is embedded, school-wide capacity for professional learning (Jarvis et al., 2017). This study showed the availability of time as the most common constraint for collegial collaboration and peer observation. Based on the results of the teacher triad pilot groups' feedback and in correlation with adult learning needs (Rodman, 2023), school leaders can support their educators through the purposeful use of available time. By establishing a guiding framework, which dedicates time and training to the process, peer observation can be prioritized, encouraging educators and supporting the safe practice of new instructional strategies (Breakspear & Jones, 2020). Through collegial collaboration and self-reflection inspired by the peer observation process, a culture of learning and growth can be fostered.

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Appendix A**Teacher Survey****1. Which grade level do you teach**

Check all that apply

Grade 6 _____

Grade 7 _____

Grade 8 _____

2. In which content area do you teach?

LA _____

Math _____

SS _____

Science Unified Arts _____

World Languages _____

Special Education _____

Enrichment or WIN specialist _____

Other _____

Collegial Collaboration**3. In a collegial culture, individual needs and school needs are complementary as educators work together towards a shared vision (Codrington, 2022).**

Based on this explanation, how would you rate your interactions with fellow educators?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 Always Collegial

4. To what degree do you think collegial collaboration impacts student learning? Strongly

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

5. Consider the following opportunities for collegial collaboration. How beneficial are they in supporting your own professional learning and growth?

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
	Beneficial	Beneficial	Beneficial	Beneficial
Content Meetings	_____	_____	_____	_____
Team Meetings	_____	_____	_____	_____
Peer Observation (non-evaluative)	_____	_____	_____	_____
Professional Development Sessions	_____	_____	_____	_____
PLC Meetings	_____	_____	_____	_____
Informal Conversations	_____	_____	_____	_____
CIA Observations (non-evaluative)	_____	_____	_____	_____
Evaluator Observations	_____	_____	_____	_____

6. How often are you meeting with your colleagues?

	Once a Week	Twice a Week	Three or more Times a Week
Content Meetings	_____	_____	_____
Team Meeting	_____	_____	_____
Team Admin Meetings	_____	_____	_____
Informally—Before school, During	_____	_____	_____
Prep, During Lunch, After School	_____	_____	_____

7. How often do you discuss instructional practices with fellow educators at TRMS?

Always_____

Often_____

Sometimes_____

Rarely_____

Never_____

8. How comfortable are you in sharing ideas and resources with educators at TRMS?

Not Comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Comfortable

9. Reflect on your experiences when engaging with other educators. What are the major factors that demonstrate collegial collaboration?

10. Reflect on your experiences when engaging with other educators. What are the major challenges to collegial collaboration?

11. In what ways can administrators provide more support for collegial collaboration among educators?

Feedback and Self-Reflective Practice

12. How comfortable are you with receiving non-evaluative feedback from other educators at TRMS?

Not Comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Comfortable

13. To what degree does feedback influence your classroom instruction?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 Always

14. How frequently do you reflect on your instructional practice?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 Always

15. When reflecting on instructional practice, how often does the reflection involve dialogue with a colleague?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 Always

16. How comfortable are you in taking risks in your classroom, trying new strategies to improve instructional practice?

Not Comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Comfortable

Peer Observations

17. How frequently do you use the Pineapple Chart to share what is happening in your class or to see what is happening in another class?

We have a Pineapple Chart? _____

Rarely _____

Sometimes _____

Often _____

Always _____

18. Please provide feedback about the Pineapple Chart. Why have you or have you not used the chart?

19. This school year, how often have you ventured to another teacher's classroom to observe their lesson?

Never 1 Time 2 Times 3 Times 4+ Times

20. This school year, how often have other educators observed your lessons?

Never 1 Time 2 Times 3 Times 4+ Times

21. How comfortable are you with observing your peers?

Not 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Comfortable

22. How comfortable are you with having other educators observing your class?

Not 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Comfortable

23. What are some benefits to observing fellow educators while they teach?

24. What are some barriers to observing fellow educators while they teach?

Appendix B**Observation Field Notes**

Observational Role: _____

Date: _____

Grade Level: _____

Interaction Type: _____

(peer observation, team meeting, content meeting, etc.)

Description of Educator Interactions:

Reflective Notes:

Appendix C

Focus Group Interview Questions

Interviewer: _____

Date: _____

Grade Level: _____

Meeting Type: _____

Questions for Focus Groups:

1. How frequently do you meet and why have you chosen to meet this often?
2. Do you have an agenda? Do you follow it? How is the agenda created?
3. What do you hope to accomplish with your meetings? What types of dialogue do you prioritize during your meetings?
4. Have you observed one another in your classes? If not, would you like to? Why or why not?
5. Have you observed other educators within your grade-level? Across your grade-level? Why or why not?
6. One of our school goals focuses on peer observation. How do you think we are doing as a school in achieving this school goal?
7. What is needed to support this school goal? How can we encourage more educators to engage in the peer observation process?

Appendix D

Administrator Interview Questions

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Interviewee: _____ Grade Level: _____

Questions:

1. How would you describe educator collegiality in our school?
2. What do you think about our current schedule design? Discuss your perceptions of the time available and use of that time to support collegial collaboration and educator self-reflection.
3. What are your thoughts about the Pineapple Chart?
4. One of our school goals focuses on peer observation. How do you think we are doing as a school in achieving this school goal?
5. What is needed to support this school goal? How can we encourage more educators to engage in the peer observation process?

Appendix E**Pre-Observation Notes****Observee:****Date of Observation:****Brief Summary of Lesson:** *Short and sweet, what will you be doing?***Observation Focus:** *Teaching practices, what do you want the observers to look for?*

Note: This template was created with my colleague Matthew McCabe as part of our work with Mike Anderson, an educational consultant. Mike Anderson Consulting:

<https://leadinggreatlearning.com/>

Appendix F

Observer Observation Notes

Observer:

Date of Observation:

Observation Focus: <i>Teaching practice(s) to look for</i>	
Observation Notes: <i>Specific, objective observations only</i>	
2 Positives and a Push: <i>Identify 2 positives + 1 push (area to work on/suggestion)</i>	
Positives	Push

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Note: This template was created with my colleague Matthew McCabe as part of our work with Mike Anderson, an educational consultant. Mike Anderson Consulting:
<https://leadinggreatlearning.com/>

Appendix G

Post Observation Debrief Guidelines

Post Observation Debrief Guidelines:

Observers:

1. Refrain from using vague statements such as, “Good job.”
2. Share direct observations as recorded in observer notes.
3. Share the two positives and the push.

Observee:

1. Listen to feedback from observers without response.
2. Once observers have finished sharing feedback, ask questions and engage in dialogue.
3. Set new goal(s) for improving instructional practice.

Note: These guidelines were adapted from my work with Mike Anderson, an educational consultant. Mike Anderson Consulting: <https://leadinggreatlearning.com/>

Appendix H**Peer Observation Pilot Group: Post-Assessment Questions**

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Interviewees: _____ Grade Level(s) _____

Questions:

1. What feedback can you provide about engaging in the peer observation process?
 - a. What did you like?
 - b. What would you change?
2. Based on your experience, how long should peer observation last in a class period?
3. How frequently should peer observation occur throughout the school year?
4. How did engaging in peer observation contribute to your self-reflection of instructional practices?
5. How did you feel about receiving feedback from your peers?
6. How did you feel about providing feedback to your peers?