



Teaching Squares

Participant Guide

**Angela Brown, Tanya Weiler, Kathy Darzanos, Amanda
Bridgewater, Joanne Harmon (2025)**

Welcome and team details

Thank you for agreeing to join in the professional development activity - **Teaching Squares**. We have developed this handbook to assist you in this activity.

“...love being in other people’s classrooms and getting to see what they do because everybody is individual and isn’t doing the same and bring part of your personality to it and I think all people should do it really”

What are teaching squares?

“Teaching squares is a professional teaching development initiative that brings instructors together in small groups to observe one-another’s classes and reflect on their experiences in a non-judgmental, supportive environment” (Bell and Mladenovic 2008). Teaching in higher education (HE) is often an isolated practice and, despite its performative nature, occurs largely unobserved by other colleagues (Hattam & Weiler, 2024).

Participation in teaching squares is an opportunity for you to observe teaching without any pressures of evaluation or critique (Brown et al., 2024 ; Harmon et al., 2024). You will ideally work in groups of four and observe your peers in their teaching activities.

“So, it was like a really good stop, pause, actually think, reflect: What can I do better? What do I do good? Those kinds of things. Yeah, so I really liked it [teaching squares] for that purpose too”

The purpose of teaching squares is to provide an opportunity for a cycle of personal reflection on your teaching and is not a critiquing exercise.

What are the benefits of teaching squares?

Participation can be a safe way to prepare for a Peer Review or a Summative Peer Review of Teaching. You are also provided with an opportunity to meet other higher education academics, make friends and develop social networks.

“The best part, I think, was meeting [interviewee 2] and [interviewee 3] because, you know, sometimes you don't know people in your own environment, and that was really good”

What is not a part of teaching squares?

Teaching squares is not an opportunity for you to provide advice to your peers on how you think they should be teaching or what you think needs improvement. Teaching squares allow you the opportunity to engage in *self*-reflection, not evaluation of your peers.

“That it was a privilege to be in someone else's class and ... engaged with them in this process. Not only did you see their teaching style, but we had the opportunity to chat”

What is next?

Please contact your team members and a place for you to put details are provided below.

- TeamSite: [Teaching Squares UniSA](#)

You will need to find mutually agreeable times to attend your colleague's teaching session. Each member will observe their peers. You may wish to use a reflective journal or use a formal reflection model such as [Gibbs](#) or accessing the [reflection toolkit](#).

Participant name	Email address	Meeting Point	Date/Time

Determine some group norms such as how you will introduce the observer to the class, amount of notice prior to a visiting session, how long the observer will attend, time and location and if you will want to share the course outline or any other information prior to the visit.

- We have left page 6 deliberately blank you can use as a notes section.

“Interacting with people from outside teaching and seeing what they do as a benefit, could go wider to different campuses. Networking inherently happens. It brings people together” (FG1)

What do I need to remember?

Please be respectful and demonstrate positive engagement with your peers, this exercise is a safe one for all participants. The role of your facilitator is to support you should any issues arise.

“...love being in other people’s classrooms and getting to see what they do because everybody is individual and isn’t doing the same and bring part of your personality to it and I think all people should do it really”

What happens after peer observation has occurred?

The four participants should meet up and share their reflections around their teaching (note: this can be via Zoom).

Try asking the following questions:

- What was the focus of your reflections after this activity?
- What did you observe that might make your own teaching more effective?
- What have you learned from the experience?
- What might you change in your own teaching, and how might you do that?

“I think I learned a lot about my own style of teaching and different aspects”

Research project

As you are aware, this facilitated teaching squares activity is also part of a research project.

- We will be in touch about participation in a focus group/interview and have appreciated your input into the activity.

References

- Brown, A., Harmon, J., Birbeck, D., & Costabile, M. (2024). Interdisciplinary teaching squares enhance reflection and collegiality: a collaborative pedagogical approach. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 80(104121), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2024.104121>
- Harmon, J., Brown, A., Birbeck, D., Crockett, J., Panadgoo, S., Nawas, A., Stringer, A., & Costabile, M. (2024). Interdisciplinary reflection by higher education academics using teaching squares: A scoping review. *Nurse Education Today*, 106353. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2024.106353>
- Hattam, S. K., & Weiler, T. (2024). Reframing the 'illegitimate' academic: the critical role of professional development for sessional staff. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 29(4), 1023-1041. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2022.2049743>

WARNING

This material has been reproduced and communicated to you by or on behalf of the University of South Australia under Section 113P of the *Copyright Act 1968* (the **Act**).

The material in this communication may be subject to copyright under the Act. Any further reproduction or communication of this material by you may be the subject of copyright protection under the Act.

Do not remove this notice.

University of South Australia

<https://doi.org/10.25954/pgtn-n196>

This page has been deliberately left blank.
Notes