



TEACHING SQUARES

celebrate teaching **build community**

Teaching Squares Handbook for

Participants **Facilitator** **Contact Information:**

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Teaching Squares Co-Sponsored by:

**Centre for Academic and Faculty Enrichment (CAFE) - Durham
College**

Teaching and Learning Centre – UOIT



All Squares Initial Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions
2. Welcome to Teaching Squares
3. Review the Teaching Squares Handbook
4. Schedule your Square Visits

What are Teaching Squares?

The purpose of **Teaching Squares** is to improve teaching and build community through a structured, non-evaluative process of classroom observation and shared reflection.

A **Teaching Square** consists of four faculty participants (ideally from different disciplines) who:

- Observe at least one class taught by each Square Partner (a total of 3 observations)
- Reflect on the class observation experience
- Share reflections with Square Partners
- Share Square observations with Project participants as a whole

Your Teaching Squares experience offers you the opportunity to improve your own teaching by observing your Square Partners in an actual classroom situation.

By participating in the Teaching Squares Project you will have an opportunity to:

- observe, analyze and celebrate good teaching
- increase your understanding of and appreciation for the work of colleagues
- experience the joy and confusion of being a student
- formulate a plan for enhancing your own teaching based on your observations and reflections and the shared reflections of your Square Partners.

Cornerstones for Participants

Teaching Squares is unique in offering a classroom visitation process free from evaluation.

The Cornerstones of Teaching Squares are the positive attitudes and behaviours that create a mutually supportive, energizing environment for sharing the joys and challenges of teaching.

Cooperation and shared responsibility facilitate a team effort and a team result.



Reciprocity and Shared Responsibility

Through the mutual exchange of visits with our Teaching Squares partners, we assume the dual roles of the observer and the observed, teacher and student. We simultaneously experience and share the opportunities and risks of inviting others into our classrooms.

As Teaching Squares participants we jointly assume the tasks of arranging classroom visits and exchanging course information. By fully participating in the organization and administration of the Square we minimize the effort that must be expended by any single participant. Our self-leadership maintains a climate of collegiality. This structure facilitates a team effort and a team result.

Self-Referential Reflection

The Square Share is an opportunity to report what **we** have learned from the observation experience. It is NOT an opportunity to improve a Square Partner's teaching. By keeping our observations self-focused we avoid any hint of evaluation or judgment that could contribute to a climate of defensiveness and suspicion.

Appreciation

The Square Share reflection session is an opportunity to identify and celebrate the behaviours and practices that create a productive environment for learning. Expressing observations in a positive way offers us a goal to be pursued and a source of energy for achieving that goal.

Mutual Respect

We enter our Square Partners' classroom with an attitude of empathy and respect for both the professor and the students, recognizing that different methods and techniques are required in different disciplines and classroom situation.

Timeline

The Teaching Squares program extends over a period of several weeks. The program is offered in the Fall and Winter semesters. This schedule was established to allow you to complete all assigned milestones. If you follow the suggested schedule, participating in the project should require about one hour or so per week of your time. **Please see the timelines outlined on the next page.**

Fall Semester Timeline

Fall Semester Milestones Dates		
Milestone dates	Activity	Milestones
Kick Off meeting – early October	All Squares Kick Off Square meeting	Meet all Square participants Meet with your Square partners Schedule Square visits
Early October – November	Class visit 1 Class visit 2 Class visit 3	Visit to Square partners (total of 3 visits) Organize materials for visiting partner Record observations
Late November	Time for Self-Reflection Square Share	Analyze observations Prepare for your Square Share Share personal, positive observations with Square Partners
All Squares Celebration Dinner – early December	All Squares Celebration	Share Square reflections and observations at Dinner Celebration gathering

Winter Semester Timeline

Winter Semester Milestones Dates		
Milestone dates	Activity	Milestones
Kick Off meeting – early February	All Squares Kick Off Square meeting	Meet all Square participants Meet with your Square partners Schedule Square visits
Early February – March	Class visit 1 Class visit 2 Class visit 3	Visit to Square partners (total of 3 visits) Organize materials for visiting partner Record observations
Late March	Time for Self-Reflection Square Share	Analyze observations Prepare for your Square Share Share personal, positive observations with Square Partners
All Squares Celebration Dinner – early April	All Squares Celebration	Share Square reflections and observations at Dinner Celebration gathering

Square Organizational Responsibilities

Each Square can set its own rules for operating. We have included our suggestions below.

You and your Square Partners will need to determine the:

1. Amount of notice required for a visit

Since the purpose of Teaching Squares is to observe you Square Partners in their “natural” state, we suggest that 24 hours notice be given. A bit more notice guarantees that your Square Partner can return your email and confirm your visit.

2. Role of the visiting professor

The urge to participate in the class activities is nearly irresistible. It is entirely too easy to be swept up into the joy of being a student again and to forget that the purpose of the class visit is to observe your Square Partner’s work. We best fulfill our Teaching Squares goal by restricting our role to that of an observer. With your Square Partner’s consent, you can always visit the class again as a participant!

3. Information exchange

How and when will you share your syllabus and course information? Some Squares prefer to exchange this information prior to the classroom visit or to deliver this information to the visiting professor at the time of the classroom visit.

4. Information to be shared with students

Most students are very curious about the presence of a visitor in the classroom. Feel free to introduce the visiting professor and explain the purpose for their visit and their role (observer or participant) in the class session.

5. Classroom visit duration

Class times can vary considerably. Observing an entire class session from start to finish offers the best (and least disruptive) experience for you, your Square Partner, and the students. If scheduling conflicts do not allow you to stay for an entire class, discuss with your Square Partner the least disruptive means of joining and leaving the class. We think that a visit of no less than an hour is required in order to adequately sample the classroom experience.

6. Square Share time and location

Your Square Share should occur before the final All Squares Celebration. We have found that setting the Square Share date at the organizational meeting greatly reduces both the time devoted to Square administration and the likelihood of a scheduling conflict. We strongly urge you to set your Square Share date as soon as possible and let facilitators know when the date is.

We strongly encourage you to consider conducting your Square Share in a relaxing location free from the possibility of interruption, perhaps even off campus.

Sharing Course Information

In all likelihood, your Square Partner will not be acquainted with your course and its function in your students' academic lives.

You can help your Square Partners gain a greater appreciation of the work that you do by providing the following:

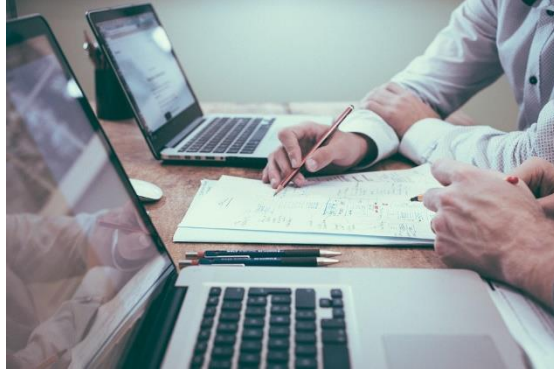
- A copy of the course syllabus / outline
- A brief description of why these students are taking the course or how it fits into their academic program
 - Required course for degree/diploma
 - Transfer /or/ career /or/ personal interest

- Major teaching goal/ learning outcomes for the course
 - Higher-order thinking skills
 - Basic academic success skills
 - Discipline-specific knowledge and skills
 - Liberal arts and academic values
 - Work and career preparation
 - Personal development

Classroom Visitation

The Teaching Square Project Timeline has been established to allow you to visit one class per week. You will need to contact your Square Partners to arrange for these class visits. The actual visitation schedule will depend on your and your Partners' availability.

The class that your Partner visits should be as "normal" as possible. The visiting Partner should understand that he/she may have missed some background information critical to understanding that day's material.



Your Square Partner will find it much easier to follow the flow of your class if you provide the following prior to the visit, if possible:

- Course Syllabus
- Textbook
- Daily Materials
- Handouts
- Web site address, if applicable

The Square Share

After completing your classroom visits, you will need to organize your reflections to share with your colleagues.

Your Teaching Squares experience offers you the opportunity to improve your own teaching by observing your Square Partners in an actual classroom situation. It is NOT an invitation to offer feedback to improve your Partners' teaching.

Keep your reflections positive and personal. Offering opinions (even positive ones) or direct observations on a Square Partner's teaching creates a judgmental climate and undermines the trust necessary to the success of the Teaching Squares experience.



These questions to be helpful in shaping feedback:

- 1) What did you observe that you might use to make your own teaching more effective?
- 2) How did your participation in Teaching Squares give you a greater appreciation of:
 - Our students?
 - Our colleagues?
 - Our school (s)?
 - The teaching profession?
- 3) What assumptions that you hold about teaching have been challenged by what you have observed?
- 4) What aspect of your teaching do you plan to improve and how are you going to do this?
- 5) About Teaching Squares
 - What are some specific things you liked about the project?
 - What are some suggestions for improving the project?

Teaching Squares Final Reflection

As a culminating activity, we ask that you prepare a short 1-2 page written reflection (or video/multimedia alternative) documenting your experience in the program and share this reflection with the Teaching Squares facilitators prior to the All Squares Celebration. These reflections can be added to your teaching portfolios and will be used to generate discussion during the All Squares Celebration.

The following are some questions that can be used to guide your final reflection:

- What was the most surprising thing that you learned by participating in the Teaching Squares program?
- What three words best describe your learning experience in the Teaching Squares program?
- How would you describe your feelings/reactions to your experience of participating in the Teaching Squares Program?
- What is one thing you learned by participating in the Teaching Squares program that will impact your teaching practice?
- How will you use what you learned in the Teaching Squares program?

All Squares Celebration

To conclude the Teaching Squares program, we invite you to attend the All Squares Celebration. This is an informal dinner experience where you get to celebrate, connect and enjoy.

As one last requirement in order to complete the program, we ask each Square to share their experiences with the group. You can do this in a number of different ways, though we encourage you to keep it simple and informal (no PowerPoints!). You can:

- Choose one group member as a spokesperson
- Each Square partner shares a summary of their own experiences
- Refer to the suggested questions for the Square Share

We encourage each Square to discuss what they will share at the Celebration during their Square Share meeting.

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