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TEACHING

SQUARES

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TEACHING

SQUARES PROGRAM

The Teaching Squares Program involves the formation of a three or four member group of educators from different departments or disciplines. The diversity in knowledge and experience helps to promote cross-disciplinary learning and professional growth among teachers. Once the group has been formed, the teachers select a class they will each teach during the observation phase. Other teachers observe each instructor as they lead the students and engage with them. Participants then meet after they make their observations to provide feedback. The teachers meet regularly to provide feedback in a supportive and constructive manner.

The Teaching Squares Program helps to promote continuous professional growth and development. As teachers observe their peers, they learn practical strategies that their peers use to encourage a collaborative and supportive learning environment. A significant benefit of Teaching Squares is that faculty can observe and learn from their colleagues. In this program, teachers observe their colleagues in the teaching process and give feedback using given criteria. Teaching Squares allows teachers to receive feedback on their teaching approach and strategies from their peers. The program encourages the teachers to reflect on their practice and seek

practical opportunities for development and growth. This program is a multidisciplinary model for instructor reflection and assessment. Furthermore, Teaching Squares provides a sense of togetherness and collaboration among faculty members.

Usually, teachers devote much of their time to preparing lessons, teaching, and assessing students, leaving them with little time to observe and learn from colleagues. Teaching Squares is a structured program that allows teachers to observe and learn from their colleagues. It is a practical approach that can help improve their performance and effectiveness. This is a peer review process that allows collaboration and reflection among faculty members. Teaching Squares is a structured program that involves approximately 3 to 4 faculty members who observe their colleagues in the teaching process and give feedback using given criteria. The program aims to provide faculty with a platform to observe and learn from each other's teaching approaches in a non-competitive and supportive environment. The participating members follow the teaching process of their colleagues and then offer helpful feedback as they engage in reflective discussions.

OVERVIEW

OF THE TEACHING SQUARES PROGRAM

Typically, Teaching Squares begins with forming a 3- or 4-member group of educators from different departments or disciplines. As Widjaja et al. (2017) notes, the diversity in knowledge and experience helps to promote cross-disciplinary learning and professional growth among teachers. The participating teachers agree to work under a structured framework that includes empathy, respect, collaboration, and adherence to non-evaluation. The teachers need to be non-judgemental of their colleagues' teaching approach. The non-judgemental and respectful approach allows the teachers to be reflective and open-minded. During the formation of the group, the participants agree on expected behavior and criteria for engagement and providing feedback.

Once the group has been formed, the faculty members select a class they will each teach during the observation phase. The other 2 or 3 faculty members, depending on the size of the group, observe each faculty as they lead the students and engage with them. Feedback is then provided based on agreed-upon criteria. Some of the criteria faculty use to provide input are the level of student engagement, proficiency

of the strategy used, and effectiveness of the assessment strategy (Lemus-Martinez et al., 2021). As the teachers observe their colleagues engaging with students, they reflect on their teaching strategies and engagement with the learners.

Participants then meet after they make their observations to provide feedback. The faculty members meet regularly to provide feedback in a supportive and constructive manner. The feedback focuses on particular areas of improvement rather than general criticism. Kirker et al. (2021) noted that the provided feedback allows the teachers to reflect on their teaching and areas of improvement, such as classroom engagement, management, assessment, and teaching strategies. Feedback is essential for development and growth as participating faculty members reflect on their performance and incorporate suggestions from their peers. The self-reflection helps the teachers to become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. As a result, they make more informed decisions about their teaching practices to enhance their performance and student outcomes.

TEACHING

SQUARES PROGRAM IN THE LITERATURE

The structure of the Teaching Squares Program helps to promote continuous professional growth and development. The program is not a one-time activity; participants can repeat the process in subsequent semesters for continuous peer learning and evaluation. Haave (2014) noted that in a supportive and collaborative environment, teachers can learn practical strategies to improve their performance from their peers. As they observe their peers, they learn practical strategies that their peers use to promote a collaborative and supportive learning environment. Also, the team acts as a support system for the teachers to explore and experiment with various teaching strategies and philosophies to enhance student success and retention rate. According to Fleming et al. (2015), teachers who engage in Teaching Squares find that the program is effective in helping them to promote a sense of community and collaboration with their peers. Similarly, Friedman et al. (2022) noted that Teaching Squares helps teachers to learn from their peers' effective teaching strategies and philosophies that can then help to improve their performance and student outcomes.

A significant benefit of The Teaching Squares Program is that it allows teachers to receive feedback on their teaching approach and strategies from their peers. In their study, Atkins et al. (2018) noted that feedback provided by peers in Teaching Squares is more relevant and practical than feedback from outside evaluators. The reason is that participants in Teaching Squares understand the opportunities and challenges of teaching in the same institution. They tend to perceive their peers' feedback as more genuine, and their suggestions are more likely to help them succeed in their teaching careers.

The Teaching Squares Program helps to foster a culture of continuous improvement. The program encourages the teachers to reflect on their practice and seek practical opportunities for development and growth. According to Bereson (2017), Teaching Squares allows teachers to observe and reflect on their teaching and learn from

their peers. For example, a teacher who observes a participant using a technique whereby students in groups study a given concept and then teach their classmates can learn how to increase student commitment and engagement in the classroom effectively. The observation exercise helps the teachers reflect on their teaching strategies and how they can use the observed techniques to improve their performance. Therefore, Teaching Squares fosters continuous professional growth and development for the teachers through self-reflection exercises and peer feedback.

In addition, Teaching Squares helps to promote intercultural teaching competence. The program is a multi-disciplinary model for instructor reflection and assessment. A study by Dimitrov and Haque (2016) noted that The Teaching Squares Program promotes interdisciplinary collaboration and learning. The school environment is diverse, with students and teachers from different cultural backgrounds. In order to effectively teach the students, an instructor must engage with them irrespective of their experiences. A teacher finding it difficult to uphold intercultural teaching competence can learn effective strategies for teaching a diverse classroom from their peers. By observing classes in different disciplines and settings, teachers gain new insights into effective teaching strategies that can be applicable to their profession. As such, teachers better understand their challenges and how best to overcome them.

Furthermore, Teaching Squares provides a sense of togetherness and collaboration among faculty members. A study by Andrew et al. (2021) noted that peer-observation initiatives, where teachers observe each other's teaching strategies and provide constructive feedback, allows teachers to connect with colleagues from different departments and disciplines. Collaboration and a sense of community are essential factors that help to enhance morale and job satisfaction. As such, Teaching Squares promotes a sense of belonging, collaboration, and mutual support among teachers, thus enhancing their performance and effectiveness.

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TEACHING

SQUARES AT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF BALTIMORE COUNTY

Teaching Squares was started at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) in the fall of 2017 and has been running successfully until the present day. It is a semester-long professional development program and faculty members, both full time and part time, are recruited every semester. Depending on the number of faculty enrolled, groups of 3 and 4 are formed as triangles and squares respectively. During the first week of each semester, the kick off meeting is held and enrolled members choose their group, usually across various disciplines. Faculty members in each group share their class schedules with group members and each group member schedules visits, either face to face or online, to observe their peers.

This is a non-evaluative and non-judgemental observation process, where the observing faculty appreciates the teaching methodology, assessment design, and engagement techniques of the faculty member and reflects later during a meeting. This process involves engaging in a reciprocal classroom

visit, sharing of teaching materials, reflecting on observations, and celebrating best practices with colleagues. At the end of the semester the program members meet to share and reflect on their experiences. This program has helped many faculty members to enrich their teaching styles based on high impact practices that they learned about during the class observations such as contextualized teaching, transparency in learning and teaching, transparency in assessment design, capstone problems, gradebook analysis, collaborative projects, global learning principles, design of culturally responsive teaching strategies, and service-learning principles. This program has a positive influence on participating members to enrol again in a future semester and gain further knowledge from their peers.

Table 1 illustrates Teaching Squares data by semester at CCBC. It includes the number of applicants, squares, triangles, and participating campuses. Ideally, the participants should have diverse teaching experiences and education levels.

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Table 1. Participation in Teaching Squares by Semester at CCBC.

Semester	Applicants	Squares Formed	Triangles Formed	Participants Completing the Program	Campuses Represented
Fall 2017	30	4	2	22	No data
Spring 2018	18	4	0	16	No data
Fall 2018	16	2	2	14	C, D, E, O
Spring 2019	14	2	2	12	C, D, E
Fall 2019	15	3	0	12	C, E, O
Spring 2020	20	4	2	6	C, E, O
Fall 2020	8	2	0	8	C, E, O
Spring 2021	14	2	2	14	C, D, E, O
Fall 2021	0	0	0	0	None
Spring 2022	7	1	1	7	C, D, E, O
Fall 2022	7	1	1	6	C, D, E, O
Spring 2023	15	1	3	15	C, D, E, O

All semesters used Share Point, TLR Fair, Vice President's Newsletter, Fall Focus Conference , Professional Development Conference to advertise
Abbreviations: C = Catonsville; CCBC = Community College of Baltimore County; D = Dundalk; E = Essex; O = Owings Mills.

Table 2. Participant Ranks

Semester	Adjunct	Instructor	Assistant Professor	Associate Professor	Full Professor	Coordinator	Repeater
Fall 2017	7	1	9	4	1	0	2
Spring 2018	6	0	4	3	0	3	7
Fall 2018	1	1	7	3	1	1	5
Spring 2019	3	1	4	3	0	2	6
Fall 2019	2	2	7	2	0	1	0
Spring 2020	0	0	3	3	0	0	0
Fall 2020	1	0	3	4	0	0	0
Spring 2021	2	2	6	3	1	0	5
Fall 2021	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spring 2022	0	1	4	2	0	0	7
Fall 2022	1	1	4	1	0	0	6
Spring 2023	2	2	7	2	0	2	6

Table 2 presents the different ranks of faculty who participated in Teaching Squares from the fall of 2017 to the spring of 2023. Participants included adjuncts, assistant professors, associate professors, full professors, and coordinators. In addition, the table indicates the number of teachers from different departments who participated in the Teaching Squares program each semester. Table 3 explains the spread of participating members from different schools at CCBC.

Table 2. Participant Ranks

Semester	School of Continuing Education	School of Business, Technology and Law	School of Health Professions	School of Arts and Communication	School of Mathematics and Sciences	School of Writing, Literacy and Languages	School of Wellness, Education, Behavioral and Social Sciences
Fall 2018	0	3	1	0	6	1	3
Spring 2019	0	0	1	1	7	1	2
Fall 2019	0	1	1	1	9	0	0
Spring 2020	0	1	1	1	3	0	0
Fall 2020	0	1	2	2	3	0	0
Spring 2021	0	3	1	0	9	1	0
Fall 2021	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spring 2022	0	2	1	0	4	0	0
Fall 2022	1	2	0	0	4	0	0
Spring 2023	0	4	0	2	8	0	1

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SPRING 2023

PARTICIPANT TESTIMONIALS

As a mathematics faculty, I liked the philosophy behind teaching an art class helping students think critically in which I found it interesting to know how close art, science, and mathematics (are in) requiring critical thinking to solve problems. I look forward to having many more Teaching Squares experiences in the future.—Kebede

Teaching Squares this semester was very interesting and enriching. Indeed, I connected with a business department faculty on zoom and was able to navigate his business online class and see it was beautifully set up. I learned from him other ways to engage online students and make online classes as inviting as possible. I am glad that I was in Teaching Squares this semester.—Aw

I was in the group with a technology professor and a chemistry professor. I thoroughly enjoyed visiting both colleagues. The technology class was entirely different than what I'm used to. He was teaching high school students about the programs and coding needed to use a lathe. During the 2 hours, I eventually started to catch on. I enjoyed the gentle ways he engaged the class. It was clear they felt comfortable with him, and his confidence in answering questions was apparent. Afterwards, the professor took me to the "lab" or shop where the more advanced students work with the machines to make all types of things like motors and components of machines. It was fascinating! In the chemistry class, which is more closely related to biology that I teach, as I sat in his class I was reminded of how much chemistry I've forgotten. The professor

has a warm, inviting presence. It's clear he makes his students comfortable with his eagerness to answer any questions they have.

I enjoyed watching him interact and the methods he used to teach and encourage them to draw on what they already know to make conclusions about the new material. I would have enjoyed being in both of their classes as a student. This Teaching Squares semester was enjoyable, and I look forward to participating again next semester!—Hovis

I believe Teaching Squares is beneficial. There is no pressure, and you can compare your teaching styles to others, allowing you to take away as much as you need. It was fun. I wish I had more time to devote to it. I think it is good for educators to share what works and what does not.—Lyons

Teaching Squares gave me the opportunity to visit with colleagues outside my department and helped me to find meaningful ways to incorporate their techniques into my own classes.—Krizan

Visiting (in person and virtually) others' classes was beneficial to see how they structure their classes and keep the class engaged. I learned a few skills, such as mindfulness practice that I would like to add into my classes. Also, I really liked the opportunity to meet others outside of my discipline, it is nice to connect with other faculty.—Allen

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TEACHING

SQUARES IS VALUABLE TO DIVERSE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Teaching Squares is a unique professional development program offering participants insights into many teaching strategies. Through collaboration, constructive feedback, reflection, and a commitment to excellence in teaching, this program can help faculty members to improve their teaching, engagement, and assessment design practices and provide the best possible education to their students. The Teaching Squares program is a successful strategy to advance professional development in community colleges, because it allows educators to examine one another's teaching styles and innovative approaches and get helpful criticism. The program promotes a culture of collaboration and continual improvement to create a dynamic and productive learning environment for students. Through this program, institutions can demonstrate their commitment to providing high-quality education to their students. This commitment can attract and retain high-quality faculty members and students.

Institutions aiming to initiate their own Teaching Squares programs should strive to fulfill the following objectives: (1) participants will observe, reflect on, and appreciate great teaching

strategies, (2) participants will learn directly from their colleagues, and (3) participants will implement teaching, engagement, and assessment design methodologies they observed during the program. Participants should embrace the following core values: respect, empathy, collaboration, and adherence to non-evaluation.

In addition, to promote the most valuable learning experience, participants should have diverse educational levels and represent different areas of expertise. Based on the positive feedback from CCBC's faculty participants, other higher learning institutions should embrace Teaching Squares as well. The program is vital for promoting collaboration and reflective teaching among peers. By providing teachers with a chance to observe, learn and receive feedback on their teaching approach and strategies from peers, the program helps to promote a culture of continuous growth and improvement.





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