

# Southern Regional Hub-funded project

Resource Pack



A framework for  
enhancing teaching culture  
and practice

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*Updated July 2024, Dr Julie Timmermans*



# University of Otago

ŌTĀKOU WHAKAIHU WAKA

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*July 2024 updates: replacing the previous University of Otago logo with the updated University of Otago logo; p. 7, linking to Form B; p. 7, correctly referring to p. 8, vs p. 5 for conversation guiding questions; removing grey background on cover page.*

## Resource Pack

This resource pack provides information about the purpose and proposed process of Teaching and Learning Circles and includes some handy forms to guide you through the process. Due to the flexibility of the Teaching and Learning Circles framework, this resource pack is relevant to any tertiary context, including formal tertiary institutions such as universities or polytechnics and more informal teaching/education contexts such as Adult and Community Education and Private Training Establishments.

## Introduction

Teaching and Learning Circles is not like your usual peer review of teaching programme. Teaching and Learning Circles is a voluntary, collaborative and reciprocal peer observation of teaching framework; centred on fostering collegiality and reflexive teaching practice.

Here is what teachers have to say about participating in a Teaching and Learning Circle:

*“The cool thing about the Teaching and Learning Circles I think is the fact that you get to know other people not in your department in a way that you can’t really develop those kinds of relationships in regular life, unless you’re sitting with them on committees and meeting them regularly.”*

*“It’s that constructive alignment of seeing others and talking about the ways they get their class to work, and being able to talk about your own process with them is probably what I think is missing if I do it with peer review (the formal process).”*

*“I found it very valuable to sit in on other people’s classes and observe what I thought was working and what wasn’t”.*

We hope you discover some of these benefits for yourself as you take part in a ‘Teaching and Learning Circle’.

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# Why would you join a Teaching and Learning Circle?

## Purpose

Teaching and Learning Circles provide a supportive, sociable environment for teachers to talk about their teaching, and gain new ideas about, and affirmation of, good teaching practices.

The purpose of Teaching and Learning Circles is to foster collegiality and celebrate teaching. Teaching and Learning Circles do not operate like formal peer review of teaching. Therefore, providing and receiving evaluative feedback is not a requirement (but is an option if you wish to do so).

Teaching and Learning Circles is ideal for anyone who feels isolated in their teaching practice or wishes to enhance their teaching practice.

## Benefits

Your participation in Teaching and Learning Circles may include the following benefits:

- improved confidence regarding your teaching
- collegial affirmation of your effective teaching approaches
- greater appreciation of students' learning experiences
- greater sense of community regarding teaching
- supplementary evidence of teaching practice.

The final point refers to the information generated from your participation in a Teaching and Learning Circle. Any feedback or reflective observation notes can be used to complement student evaluations or use in teaching portfolios or similar.

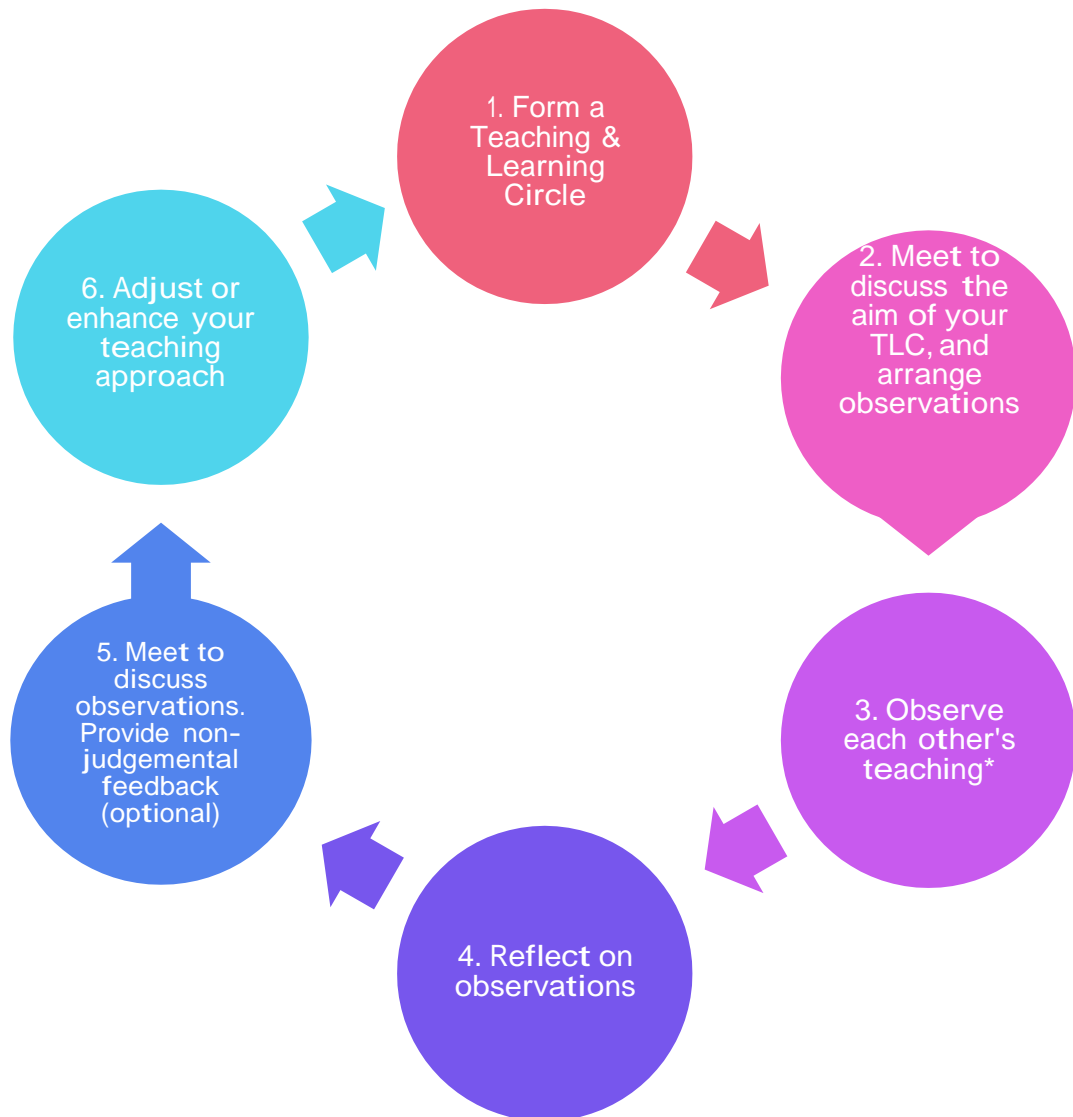
## Teaching and Learning Circles: the options

You, along with two or three colleagues, will have the autonomy to decide the aim of your Teaching and Learning Circle (TLC). You may decide to:

- visit each other's classes over the course of a semester and then meet to discuss what they have learned from observing your colleagues' teaching
- gain non-judgmental feedback on your teaching
- meet regularly to engage in collegial conversations about teaching.

## Teaching Learning Circles: the process

Below outlines the process you may wish to follow, remembering that dialogue is the central feature of Teaching and Learning Circles.



1. Form a Teaching and Learning Circle. You may wish to form a Teaching and Learning Circle with teachers outside of your discipline/department, or you may wish to work with members of a teaching team.
2. Once your TLC has formed, arrange to meet socially to agree on the focus and structure of your TLC. You may wish to use the questions on page 8 to guide your conversation. You will share your teaching schedule and arrange a time to observe each other's classes. [Form A – Class Observation Plan](#) can assist with this. At your first meeting, also arrange a time to meet together after all observations are complete.
3. Observe each other's teaching. Observations are reciprocal so every member will have the opportunity to observe, and be observed by, everyone in the Teaching and Learning Circle. [Form B – Teaching and Learning Circle Observations](#) provides an exemplar for one possible approach on how you can note your observations. \* You may also wish to gain informal student feedback as part of your observations.
4. Reflect on your observations using the prompts provided in [Form C – Teaching and Learning Circle Reflections](#)
5. Meet socially to discuss what you learned from observing others, and provide non-judgemental, constructive feedback to others, if your TLC decided to incorporate peer feedback.
6. Plan to make adjustments to your teaching practice based on your observations, reflections, and peer feedback (if this was included).



## Pre-observation conversation starters

Here are some questions you may want to discuss at your pre-observation (first) meeting:

1. What are your personal values regarding teaching and learning?
2. What do you aim for your students to learn? How do you enable them to learn this?
3. How do you evaluate your teaching and your students' learning currently?
4. What are you doing well, and what might you improve or enhance in your teaching to enable student learning?
5. What are you feeling confident about and what are you feeling less confident about in your teaching approach?
6. Are you trying anything new this semester?
7. What are your goals for the day your TLC colleagues are in your classroom?
8. What are you apprehensive about, if anything, regarding being observed by your colleagues?
9. What are you hoping to gain from participating in a Teaching and Learning Circle?

## Form A – Class observation plan

MEMBER DETAILS	CLASS OBSERVATION DETAILS	
Member 1:  Contact details:  Additional comments:	Paper:  Date:  Location:	Time:
Member 2:  Contact details:  Additional comments:	Paper:  Date:  Location:	Time:
Member 3:  Contact details:  Additional comments:	Paper:  Date:  Location:	Time:
<b>My class observation details</b>		Paper:  Date:                      Time:                      Location:
<b>Post-observation meeting details</b>		
Date:                      Time:                      Location:		

## Form B – Teaching and Learning Circle Observations

This is an exemplar of one possible way to carry out your observations.<sup>1</sup> However, you are encouraged to choose an approach that best suits your objectives for participating in a TLC.

Description of what's happening	Personal Reflections
<p>AH greets students as they come in. One student asks a question about the homework – AH says she'll address that in class. An agenda has already been written up on the board.</p>	<p>I like the easy rapport with students – seems organised with agenda already on board. Impressed that she held off on answering student's question – I think I sometimes jump in too quickly with an answer.</p>
<p>AH closes door and says, "reading quiz!" – students put away books and get out paper.</p>	<p>Students seem to know what's coming – this must be a regular thing. Interesting to let the Students help write the quiz – what happens if someone suggests a bad question? But they sure like it.</p>
<p>AH reads through 5 questions, waits about 90 seconds between each. Invites students to suggest "bonus" question – a student speaks up immediately. Students laugh.</p>	
<p>A couple of students come in late – don't get out paper, just sit there</p>	<p>Ok, definitely looks like a regular thing – and they already know they don't get to do the quiz if they're late. She must be really clear about her expectations. I wonder how Students feel about that . . . they don't look frustrated. Might be an interesting thing to try.</p>
<p>AH reads through questions one more time and then after a minute calls "time!" and students pass up papers.</p>	

## Form C – Teaching and Learning Circle Reflections

It is important to remember that the purpose of observing teaching is to encourage your own self-reflection. Therefore, observations are carried out in a **non-judgemental manner**, and post-observation discussions should be seen as a **collaborative dialogue between peers**. The following questions may help guide your reflections and post-observation discussion.

1. What have you learned about your teaching philosophy and the personal values you bring to your teaching from your classroom observations?
2. How has the experience of again being in the “learner” role prompted you to reflect on your own teaching?
3. What have you learned is one of your teaching strengths?
4. What aspect of your teaching do you now wish to improve? How are you going to do this?
5. What surprised you during this experience? What assumptions about teaching were challenged by what you observed?
6. What is one thing you learned that will make your teaching more effective?

## Further reading

[A framework for enhancing teaching culture and practice.](#)

## Acknowledgements

We are particularly grateful to Associate Professor Tim Cooper, who whilst in his role as Associate Dean Academic (Humanities), took it upon himself to foster a culture that celebrates teaching and collegiality within the Division of Humanities. His passion for teaching instigated the development of Teaching and Learning Circles.

We extend a special and sincere thank you to all the university teachers who participated in a Teaching and Learning Circle and were willing to share their experiences and passion for teaching with us. Their feedback has informed this resource pack.

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<sup>1</sup> Exemplar and questions for reflection were sourced from the Centre for Teaching and Learning <http://www.stonehill.edu/ctl.xml>