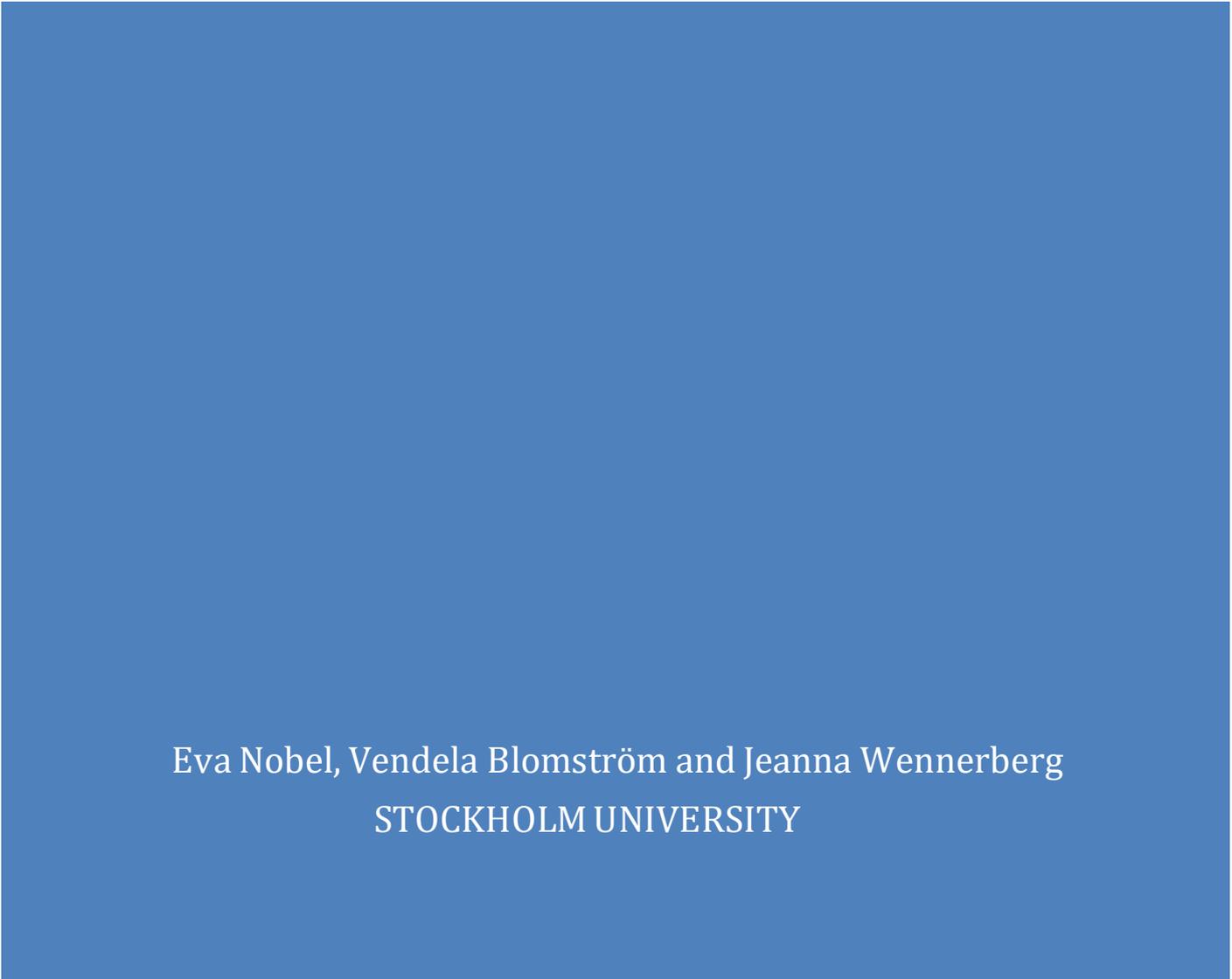




ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR COLLEGIAL LEARNING

**Teaching Observation Including Feedback and
Reflective Collegial Discussions**



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Teaching Observation, Feedback and Collegial Group Discussions

In this paper, we present different templates for teaching observation, feedback and collegial group discussions which we have designed and used in our academic development program at the Department of Swedish and Multilingualism at Stockholm University. The advantage of teaching observation is that it can lead to in-depth collegiate exchange. However, at the same time the cost, the teachers' motivation to participate, as well as attitudes in the performance of feedback are factors that may adversely affect the result. In our experience, the teaching observations will be conducted in a more structured way, both in terms of preparation and follow-up, if using relatively simple templates. In addition, giving critical feedback is often perceived as easier if based on templates.

In order for this model work well, the teachers should be granted extra time or compensated somehow for participating, and of course, participating should be optional with an opt-out possibility at any time. The basic idea is that the collegial support and commitment that we normally devote to research also include teaching. The model is suitable for a group of teachers of about 10–20 people, and is intended to last a whole semester, in order to get routine in the process itself. This model is included as one of three parts of a development program for collegial learning that also includes co-teaching and in-depth collegial discussions about teaching practice and theory.

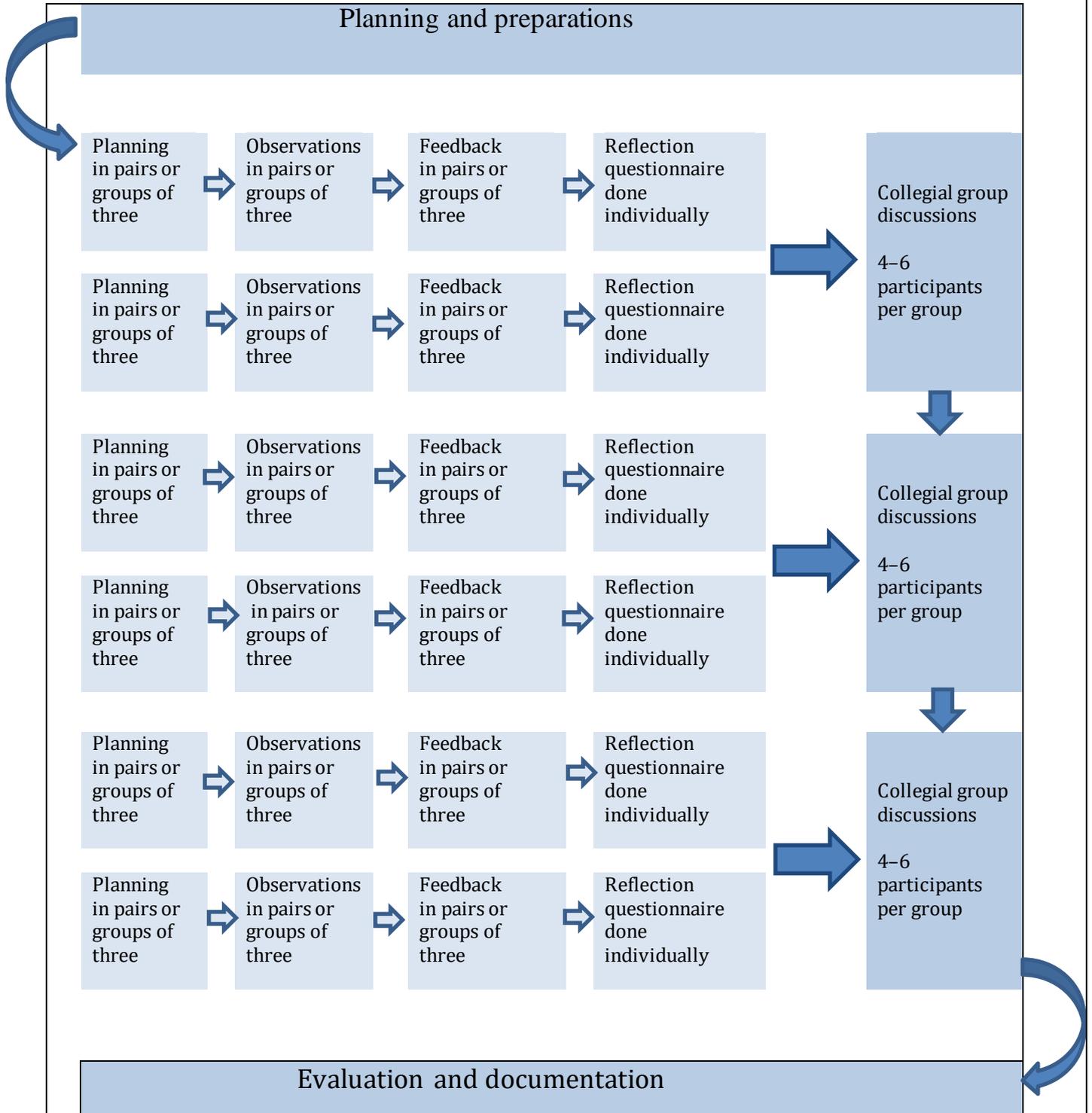
The teachers act as *critical colleagues* in pairs or small groups (see for example Handal 1999 about *critical friends*). According to Handal (1999), the method of critical friends is beneficial as the individual teacher has greater opportunity for academic development together with colleagues. Professional learning takes place in the context of practice and motivation where understanding and development occurs when teachers are challenged and given the opportunity for reflection and discussion with colleagues (Timperley, 2011). Lave & Wenger (1991) suggest that learning is based on participation in practical activities for which you feel committed, in a community of practice.

The academic development program is intended to extend over at least one semester, and aims to:

- create an arena for educational and subject-didactic discussions
- act as continued professional development for the teachers
- increase the opportunity for dialogue and cooperation between teachers
- give teachers insight into parallel groups and courses within the same program, or into courses new to them
- enable exchange of ideas, development work on courses, progression between courses
- create opportunities for teachers to develop in their own teaching profession and teaching skills
- increase awareness of what is happening in the teaching situation
- ensure that students are given good opportunities for learning

Semester Plan/Schedule – Teaching Observations and Collegial Discussions

Work plan for a semester



Teaching Observation as a Critical Colleague

To observe a colleague's teaching as a critical colleague in this context means to attend the colleague's seminar or lecture, and give feedback afterwards on the teaching. The collaboration regarding the observations is meant to be conducted in pairs or in small groups of three people. The participants are free to choose whoever they want to collaborate with, if they want to conduct reciprocal observations or if they want to visit different colleagues' seminars or lectures. The situation in the specific collegial group determines what is best suited for them.

The teaching observation activity includes a number of parts:

1. Planning and preparation
2. Conducting observations of teaching
3. Feedback and reflection

We have designed five templates with different focus for the observations of teaching (appendices 1 – 5). The templates can serve as a starting point and can be modified if needed. It is important to document in real time during the observation to get as comprehensive support as possible for the subsequent feedback. Both the observing colleague and the teaching colleague take notes in connection with the seminar or lecture. The observing colleague takes notes in “Observation Protocol for the Observing Colleague” (appendix 6), and the teaching colleague takes notes in “Notes for the Teaching Colleague” (appendix 7). The notes form the basis for the feedback (appendix 8) to the observed teacher, and will be used for reflection and serve as a basis for the subsequent collegial discussions (appendices 9 – 10).

Planning and Preparation

Contact is made with a colleague who's teaching you would like to observe, or that you would like to invite to observe your own teaching. Together, you agree on a seminar or lecture that is suitable for observation, which template to use and what time to give feedback. The templates can be adjusted to the specific interest regarding the observation at hand. The teaching colleague gives the observing colleague a brief presentation of the seminar and/or course before the observation.

Conducting Observation of Teaching

During the seminar or lecture the observing colleague should position himself so that it does not interfere with the teaching, e.g. at the back of the room or along the side of the room. The observing colleague takes notes in the template “Observation Protocol for the Observing Teacher” about the impressions of the teacher's performance, and the teaching colleague makes notes as well, in the template “Notes for the Teaching Colleague”. In this template, the teaching colleague can, for example, make notes about unexpected situations that may arise or if the condition for teaching changed during the current teaching session.

Feedback and Reflection

The feedback should be given in close proximity to the observed teaching session, preferably the same day or within the next few days, since it might otherwise be easy to forget the subtler nuances regarding the teaching (e.g. the atmosphere, the interaction or other details). If the feedback is given immediately after the observation, it is recommended that the colleagues first take a moment to reflect individually, and make notes in the templates. At the time of feedback, the teaching colleague should first be given a chance to summarize his or her own experience of the seminar or lecture based on the notes. Thereafter, the observing colleague presents his or her feedback.

It is recommended to begin with comments on the overall impression of the teaching session, and some positive feedback about what worked well and thereafter more constructive critique or suggestions for changes. Remember to provide motivation for all comments, e.g. if something is perceived as positive it should also be explained in what way, and why. The feedback may also be followed by a reflective conversation between the observing colleague and the teaching colleague (see the template for this in appendix 8).

Collegial Discussions

After a couple of observation of teaching sessions, collegial group discussions are held (4-6 people in each group) to follow up the implementation of the observations. In each group, one of the participants is appointed discussion leader who then leads the discussion and possibly documents what the group comes up with. The aim of the discussions is for the teachers to get an opportunity to exchange experiences and reflect together on the observations of teaching, and discuss ideas about course development, in a more structured way. The notes that the participants have made in the templates may serve as a starting point for the collegial group discussions.

The collegial group discussions can be more or less structured. To begin with, the template with more general and overarching sets of questions can be used in order to get the conversation and reflection going (appendix 9). Alternatively, a template with more specific questions relating to the different steps and focuses in the five observations templates can be used (appendix 10).

Suggested Reading:

Dahlgren, L. O., Eriksson, B. E., Gyllenhammar, H., Korkeila, M., Sääf-Rothoff, A., Wernerson, A. and Seeberger, A. (2006). To be and to have a critical friend in medical teaching. *Medical Education*, 40, s. 72–78.

Handal, G. (1999). Consultation Using Critical Friends. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 79, s. 59-70.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning. Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Timperley, H. (2011). *Realizing the power of professional learning*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

List of Appendices with Templates for Observation of Teaching and Collegial Group Discussions

Appendix 1: Observation with a Focus on the Teacher as a Speaker

Appendix 2: Observation with a Focus on the Content of the Teaching Session

Appendix 3: Observation with a Focus on Student Learning

Appendix 4: Observation with a Focus on Specially Requested Feedback

Appendix 5: Observation with Open-ended Feedback

Appendix 6: Observation Protocol for the Observing Colleague

Appendix 7: Notes for the Teaching Colleague

Appendix 8: Template for Oral Feedback

Appendix 9: Collegial Group Discussions – Basis for Discussion (Reflection and Evaluation – Looking Back)

Appendix 10: Collegial Group Discussions – Basis for Discussion (Process – Change – Challenges)

Appendix 1: Observation with a Focus on the Teacher as a Speaker

Before the observation of teaching: The observing colleague and the teaching colleague agrees upon a suitable seminar or lecture when the observation can take place, and a specific time when the feedback will be presented and discussed. They both prepare appendices 6 (“Observation Protocol for the Observing Colleague”) and 7 (“Notes for the Teaching Colleague”). The teaching colleague gives a brief presentation of the course and/or the seminar/lecture in question.

During the observation of teaching: The observing colleague attends during the entire teaching session, or in a part of it, and takes notes of his or her observations in the protocol. The teaching colleague takes notes as well, in the designated template.

After the observation of teaching: During the feedback conversation, the teaching colleague begins with presenting his or her view of how the teaching was conducted. Thereafter, the observing colleague gives his or her feedback based on the notes in the protocol. They both write down their reflections.

Feedback with a Focus on the Teacher as a Speaker – some starting points

Aims and adaptations

- Is the teacher’s speech loud and clear?
- Is the oral information adapted to the students’ level of comprehension?
- Is the teacher sticking to the subject?

Content

- Is the content relevant and carefully selected?
- Is it a fair amount of information?
- Is there a good balance between different content?

Structure

- Is there a clear outline and structure?
- Is the content presented in the appropriate order?
- Does the teacher have a clear introduction and conclusion?

Language

- Is the language adapted to the students?
- What characterizes the teacher’s linguistic style (e.g. formal/informal)?
- Are new terms and concepts explained?

Script and resources

- Does the teacher speak freely or based on the script?
- Does the teacher use relevant presentational tools?
- How are potential presentational tools used?

Presentation (body language and voice)

- By what means does the teacher show commitment, interest and credibility?
- What does the teacher’s eye contact, body language, gestures and facial expressions signal?
- How does the teacher use emphasis, vocal strength and pauses in his or her speech?

Other aspects?

Appendix 2:

Observation with a Focus on the Content of the Teaching Session

Before the observation of teaching: The observing colleague and the teaching colleague agrees upon a suitable seminar or lecture when the observation can take place, and a specific time when the feedback will be presented and discussed. They both prepare appendices 6 (“Observation Protocol for the Observing Colleague”) and 7 (“Notes for the Teaching Colleague”). The teaching colleague gives a brief presentation of the course and/or the seminar/lecture in question.

During the observation of teaching: The observing colleague attends during the entire teaching session, or in a part of it, and takes notes of his or her observations in the protocol. The teaching colleague takes notes as well, in the designated template.

After the observation of teaching: During the feedback conversation, the teaching colleague begins with presenting his or her view of how the teaching was conducted. Thereafter, the observing colleague gives his or her feedback based on the notes in the protocol. They both write down their reflections.

Feedback with Focus on the Content – some starting points

Purpose

Is the purpose of the teaching session stated?
Is the content linked to the intended learning outcomes of the course?

Content

Is the content relevant? Level of abstraction? Level of difficulty?

Structure

Is there a clear outline and structure?
Is the content presented in the appropriate order?

Time

How important are different parts of the teaching session?
How is time allocated between different parts and activities?
Is enough time devoted to different parts?

Further comments?

Appendix 3: Observation with a Focus on Student Learning

Before the observation of teaching: The observing colleague and the teaching colleague agrees upon a suitable seminar or lecture when the observation can take place, and a specific time when the feedback will be presented and discussed. They both prepare appendices 6 (“Observation Protocol for the Observing Colleague”) and 7 (“Notes for the Teaching Colleague”). The teaching colleague gives a brief presentation of the course and/or the seminar/lecture in question.

During the observation of teaching: The observing colleague attends during the entire teaching session, or in a part of it, and takes notes of his or her observations in the protocol. The teaching colleague takes notes as well, in the designated template.

After the observation of teaching: During the feedback conversation, the teaching colleague begins with presenting his or her view of how the teaching was conducted. Thereafter, the observing colleague gives his or her feedback based on the notes in the protocol. They both write down their reflections.

Feedback with a Focus on Student Learning – some starting points

Student activity

- Is there any student activity? (passive listening, engaging in learning activities)
- Which teaching techniques are being used? (... quiz, group discussion etc.?)
And how does this work?

Responsibility, roles and interplay

- What characterizes the interplay between teacher and students?
- Does the teacher adapt to the student group, or to the individual student?

Interaction

- Is there any opportunity for interaction and discussion?
- How much of the seminar time does the teacher and the student group talk respectively?
- Are the students encouraged to ask questions?

Further comments?

Appendix 4: Observation with a Focus on Specially Requested Feedback

Before the observation of teaching: The observing colleague and the teaching colleague agrees upon a suitable seminar or lecture when the observation can take place, and a specific time when the feedback will be presented and discussed. They both prepare appendices 6 (“Observation Protocol for the Observing Colleague”) and 7 (“Notes for the Teaching Colleague”). The teaching colleague gives a brief presentation of the course and/or the seminar/lecture in question.

During the observation of teaching: The observing colleague attends during the entire teaching session, or in a part of it, and takes notes of his or her observations in the protocol. The teaching colleague takes notes as well, in the designated template.

After the observation of teaching: During the feedback conversation, the teaching colleague begins with presenting his or her view of how the teaching was conducted. Thereafter, the observing colleague gives his or her feedback based on the notes in the protocol. They both write down their reflections.

Feedback with a Focus on Specially Requested Feedback – some starting points

- Feedback to the teacher as a speaker (e.g. loudness of voice, speed of speech body language, eye contact, gestures, student contact etc.)
- Feedback about the seminar/lecture (content, structure, allocated time for different parts of the seminar, level of abstraction, is the purpose of the seminar clear etc.?)
- Feedback regarding student learning (level of student activity, responsibility, roles, interaction, encouragement to take part in discussions and ask questions etc.)

Appendix 5: Observation with Open-ended Feedback

Before the observation of teaching: The observing colleague and the teaching colleague agrees upon a suitable seminar or lecture when the observation can take place, and a specific time when the feedback will be presented and discussed. They both prepare appendices 6 (“Observation Protocol for the Observing Colleague”) and 7 (“Notes for the Teaching Colleague”). The teaching colleague gives a brief presentation of the course and/or the seminar/lecture in question.

During the observation of teaching: The observing colleague attends during the entire teaching session, or in a part of it, and takes notes of his or her observations in the protocol. The teaching colleague takes notes as well, in the designated template.

After the observation of teaching: During the feedback conversation, the teaching colleague begins with presenting his or her view of how the teaching was conducted. Thereafter, the observing colleague gives his or her feedback based on the notes in the protocol. They both write down their reflections.

Open-ended Feedback – some starting points

- Focus on the overall impression and move on to specific details.
- Start by highlighting what was perceived as positive.
- Remember to provide motivation for all the feedback. What works well? Why does it work well? What can be improved? How could it be improved?

Appendix 6: Observation Protocol for the Observing Colleague

Observation protocol for the observing colleague			Date: Template used:
Focus	Observations	Feedback to the teacher	Reflections

Appendix 7: Notes for the Teaching Colleague

Notes for the teaching colleague			Date:
			Template used:
Focus	Notes (Regarding e.g. content, student activity, own performance)	Received feedback	Reflections

Appendix 8: Template for Oral Feedback

After the observation of teaching, both parties should be given some time to reflect individually, and take notes in the templates used.

1. The teaching colleague summarizes his or her own experience of the seminar/lecture based on the notes in the template.
2. The observing colleague presents his or her feedback based on the notes in the template. Suggested approach:
 - Start by giving an overall comment. Highlight what was perceived as particularly positive.
 - Proceed to present any constructive criticism or proposals for development. Remember to provide motivation for all comments. (What worked well? Why did it work well? How can it be improved?)
3. Feel free to end with a reflective discussion. Suggestions for possible questions to reflect on:
 - Did the observation of teaching contribute to any new insights, ideas or new perspectives, and if so, which ones?
 - What worked particularly well? Why?
 - What could be developed?

Appendix 9: Collegial Discussions – Conversation Basis Reflection and Evaluation – Looking Back

1. How has the observations of teaching and the following feedback worked out?
2. What templates for observation have been used, and how did they work?
3. What has worked particularly well, and been valuable? Why?
4. Did any problems or difficulties occur? Give examples!
5. Did any new questions, ideas or perspectives arise? What? Give examples!
6. What could be done differently? Why? How?
7. How can the collective practice regarding observation of teaching be developed further?
8. Additional questions that the group wants to raise:

Appendix 10: Collegial Discussions – Conversation Basis

Process – Change – Challenges

Questions about process

1. How did you decide who to observe?
2. Is there any difference between what you have learned by giving and receiving feedback respectively?
3. Are the templates a good support even if you have already conducted observations a few times?
4. What has worked particularly well and been particularly valuable? Why?
5. In what way did you become aware of your own practice through participating in the academic development program? Give examples!
6. If you have had more than one colleague observing your teaching, has the feedback that you have received been consistent?

Questions about change

7. Have any questions, ideas or perspectives been raised regarding teaching or the practice at the department? Give examples!
8. Has your desire to take part in other development projects increased as a consequence of participating in the academic development program (e.g. further collaboration with colleagues? New ideas for educational programs/courses? Participating in a teacher exchange program? Taking professional development courses in teaching and learning? Feeling a stronger commitment in pedagogical development projects at the department?)?
9. Has collaboration with colleagues in the academic development program affected your job satisfaction and overall work situation? In what way and in what contexts?

Questions about challenges

10. Were there any difficulties associated with the observations and/or feedback discussions?
11. Did you feel that the feedback you received was justified? Was the feedback constructive?
12. Did you feel that you could give all the feedback to the teacher that you observed that you felt was justified? Why/why not?

Concluding questions

13. Are there any additional questions that you would like to raise?
14. What could be done differently? Why? How?
15. How could the collaboration on the observations of teaching be developed further?