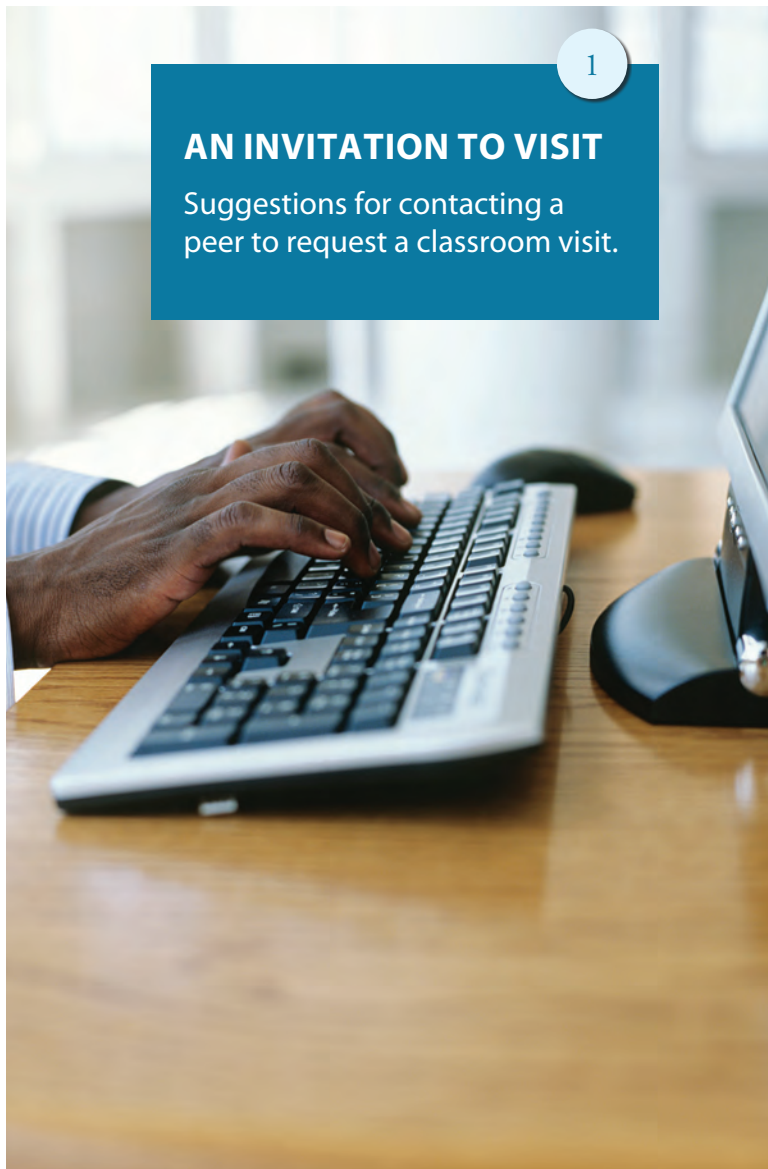


CLASSROOM VISITS

By Joellen Killion

Educators who have opportunities to collaborate with their peers through classroom visits or lesson observations will benefit from intentional planning. The four tools below and on pp. 55-57 offer suggestions and prompts for classroom visits at the planning and debriefing stages. Use or adapt the tools to fit your context and specific needs.



Date:

Dear _____,

Part of my professional learning goal is to understand more about _____ (*name the aspect of instructional practice, student learning environment, etc.*).

I would like to visit your classroom sometime in the next two weeks to learn from your practice so that I can enrich my own. (*If comfortable, explain your reason for selecting this colleague to visit, or explain how you decided to use peer visits as one way to meet your goal.*) If you agree to my visit, I would like to meet with you in advance to discuss my visit, plan when it will be appropriate for me to visit, set ground rules that we will both be comfortable with, and determine when we will meet to debrief my visit.

Please let me know a convenient time and day for us to meet. My best times to meet are _____.

Sincerely,

PEER VISIT PRELIMINARY PLAN

The visiting teacher and the visited teacher consider together the following questions before the visit.

PURPOSE

- What is the exact purpose of the visit?

LOGISTICS

- When will it be best for the visited teacher to welcome his or her peer?
- How long will the visit be?
- Where will the visitor sit during the visit? May he or she interact with students when they are working individually or in teams?
- May the visitor interact with the teacher during the visit?
- What are the shared agreements about confidentiality regarding this visit?

LESSON SPECIFICS

- What is the learning objective for the lesson?
- Where in the developmental process is this group of students with the lesson objective, i.e. introduction, developing, practice, extension, etc.?
- What information about specific students should the visitor know in advance?
- In what ways can the visitor lend a hand if appropriate?

DATA

- What types of information will the visiting teacher be looking for?
What kinds of information will he or she collect?
- How will the visiting teacher take notes or record information?
- How will the information collected be used by the visitor?
- What will happen with the information after the visit and debriefing?

OTHER

- What else should the visitor know before coming?

DEBRIEF

- When will we meet to debrief the visit?



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SAMPLE AREAS OF FOCUS FOR PEER VISITS

The visiting teacher may focus on multiple aspects of instruction during a classroom visit. Below are several possibilities.



TEACHER PRACTICES

- Clear statement of lesson focus.
- Activating background knowledge.
- Use of specific instructional methodologies, i.e. direct instruction, minilesson, inquiry, modeling, discussion, Socratic seminar, guided practice, independent practice, etc.
- How teacher engages students.
- Emphasis of higher-order thinking.
- Use of instructional resources, i.e. technology, print, and nonprint resources.
- Differentiating instruction.
- Accommodating learning needs.
- Formative assessment.
- Student management.

STUDENT PRACTICES

- Level of engagement.
- Type of student work, i.e. hands-on, individual, collaborative, etc.
- Learning processes.
- Seeking assistance.
- Asking questions.
- Independent work.
- Self-monitoring of learning.
- Assessment of learning.

CLASSROOM STRUCTURE

- Organization of physical space.
- Location of resources.
- Types of resources.
- Flow of teacher and students.
- Routines.



DEBRIEFING A VISIT

Following a classroom visit, the visiting and visited teachers take time to talk about the lesson. The focus of the conversation begins with the purpose of the visit and may include other topics if both agree they are appropriate to discuss. These sentence frames might help get the conversation going.

VISITING TEACHER

- The purpose of my visit was to _____ (*repeat the purpose*). As a result of my visit to your classroom, I saw several examples in your classroom that will help me. They included _____ (*be as specific as possible*).
- I noticed that when you _____ (*identify specific behaviors*), students were _____ (*identify specific behaviors*). I'd like to know if my observations are similar to yours.
- During the lesson, it was evident that you were making a number of decisions based on how students were responding. I want to know what you were considering as you _____ (*identify some point in the lesson related to the area of learning*). Tell more about how you decided to _____.
- Teaching is never as easy as it looks. I wonder if there were times in this lesson when you reassessed your intention. Where did that occur, if it did, and what prompted it? What decision did you make? Share your reasoning.
- What I learned about _____ (*state focus of the visit*) from visiting your classroom was _____. How that will help me in my own classroom is _____ (*be specific*).

VISITED TEACHER

- Sometimes it takes extra eyes to see everything going on in my classroom. I want to know more about what you saw students doing when I _____ (*identify specific actions*).
- Considering my classroom from your perspective gives me an opportunity to reflect on my practice. As we talked about the visit, what I thought about was _____. What I have learned from your visit that will help me in the future is _____ (*be specific*).