

# Building Communities through "Visit your Colleague" week



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## About "Visit your Colleague" week

### Theoretical background

In order to value and develop the academic community and encourage meaningful discussions about teaching and learning the week "Visit your Colleague" was initiated at the University of Tartu.

The theoretical background of the week "Visit your colleague" is based on the following concepts:

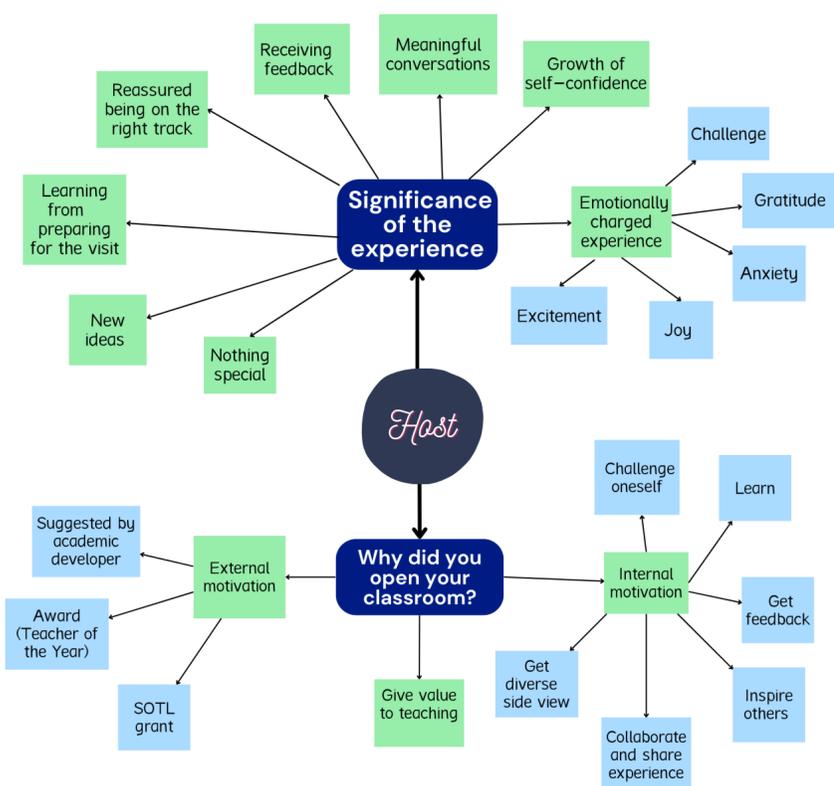
- learning from colleagues is essential to learning teaching skills in interaction with colleagues (Kreber, Cranton, 2000);
- pedagogical conversations contribute to the professional growth of the academic community (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009, Gosling 2002).

Every year for one week, university teachers can visit each other's classes. Participation in this week is entirely voluntary. During the week, it has been possible to participate in different formats of teaching (lectures, seminars, workshops) both in-class, hybrid, and online. University teachers from different fields (social sciences, medicine, natural sciences, humanities) invited colleagues to visit their classes to share their teaching practices.

Research indicates that peer review of teaching could be perceived as evaluation (Esterhazy et al., 2021), but in our context, these classroom visits intend to support mutual learning and informal discussions on teaching. Therefore, we encourage follow-up peer discussions after each visit.

### Overview

The week "Visit your Colleague" has taken place four times since 2019. About 20-40 classes have been opened for the visit, and about 100 visits have taken place during the week. Feedback has been collected after the "Visit your Colleague" week from hosts as well as visitors.



### Conclusions

- In order for the academic community to evolve meaningful conversations between university teachers are crucial. Organised events can act as catalysts for the conversations to happen.
- Different aspects (curiosity, personal invitations, obligations, wish to share, wish to develop, get new ideas, experience versatility, prior positive experience) can induce participation. While organising the events, one should consider these aspects.
- The significance of the experience was varied - in some cases, the significance of the experience was not sensed, in other cases the significance of the experience was powerful.
- It is important that the visit concludes with a conversation. If the university teacher is open to conversation, meaningful conversation takes place. University teachers appreciate that the academic developer leads and moderates the conversation.
- University teachers suggest that such visits could be part of professional development.