

Record of Observation or Review of Teaching Practice

Session/artefact to be observed/reviewed: Unit 3: Collaborative

Size of student group: group of 4/5

Observer: Tim Stephens

Observee: Rachel Louise Brown

Note: This record is solely for exchanging developmental feedback between colleagues. Its reflective aspect informs PgCert and Fellowship assessment, but it is not an official evaluation of teaching and is not intended for other internal or legal applications such as probation or disciplinary action.

Part One

Observee to complete in brief and send to observer prior to the observation or review:

What is the context of this session/artefact within the curriculum?

The session is part of Unit 3: Collaborative – a cross-departmental unit which includes MA Commercial Photography (of which I am CL), MA Photojournalism and Documentary and MA Photography. This is the D&AD New Blood Awards option, which I am leading on, along with AL W.L and VP R.W.

How long have you been working with this group and in what capacity?

This is our 4th session.

What are the intended or expected learning outcomes?

The students are working together in groups of 5 (with students from each MA Pathway), on different D&AD New Blood briefs. The expectation is that they create a submission for the D&AD New Blood Award and an output for an exhibition at Copeland Gallery in Peckham.

What are the anticipated outputs (anything students will make/do)?

The expectation is that they create a submission for the D&AD New Blood Award and an output for an exhibition at Copeland Gallery in Peckham.

Are there potential difficulties or specific areas of concern?

Collaborative working raises lots of problems! They are at a stage of finalizing their ideas – this is the most stressful part for them.

How will students be informed of the observation/review?

It was mentioned last week that I am being observed for PGcert, they will be reminded when they enter the session today

What would you particularly like feedback on?

Interaction with the students

How will feedback be exchanged?

Via email?

Part Two

Observer to note down observations, suggestions and questions:

Rearranged the room into the form of a judging table and space for student presentations.

Team teaching, with two others.

Sent email before the session. [See Feedback]

1st Team

Google Cloud/AI

“Hi team google...” Nice to see you...” [Friendly and welcoming]

[Helps with plugging in and tech briefly...]

[Introduces me]

“Yeah let’s start...”

“How are you feeling after last week...”

St. responds

“Amazing” [Lots of NVC’s]

[Taking notes and engaged expression, eye contact. And small comments.]

[Giving good spacious attention, with lots of silence and focus]

“Yes, your event...”

[Next student presenter comes up]

“Yep”....lots of ‘hmms’ and nods, etc [all good NVC to encourage and show attention]

‘fantastic’....”I’m thinking.... Of using this as an example for every Collab. unit going forward”

“Do you want to feed back yet? [To colleague...good indication of involving the team]

[Feedback on site and curators, Alec on tech and AI interactivity...]

[Dialogue regards travel, gamification and a relaxed approach to the staff Team inclusion that shows trust in colleagues, and their trust in you to lead the interaction].

"I had a couple of questions... 'what's a hackathon?' [This was a great example of transparent communication and teaching, no ego posturing or performing of teacher expertise..., openness to curiosity and learning and a great example of you sharing your power with students]

St. responds

[You acknowledge] "aimed at that audience.."

[More dialogue on the brief with the Team, explaining.]

"We just have a couple of mins before the next group..."

[You ask about the reward for tasks...]

"For your social media campaign....taking over..."

[3rd panellist, R.] "Random Studio Amsterdam" [mentioned as example, offers very clear and insightful references]

'Maybe have a screen in'

"Right well, done if any further questions...[you explain and give more positive feedback]

[brief chat with colleagues about students and personalities...]

2nd Team

'Mac & Cheese'

"Hello

"Hi, how are you

"Hi

[Welcoming, by individual, this was good NVC again]

[Same form and responses of listening, welcoming, maintaining contact, taking notes, putting people at ease.]

"Great you've got lots..." Encouraging but perhaps not so fine detail.

[Discussing the images and production development.]

Team asks about making more abstract – conceptual perhaps.

"Absolutely fine, you can do that.."

"Roles within the Team, you have to be involving of everyone...[starts discussion]

[You explain the contraband idea...] [Rosie also gives feedback on this...]

“What are the most famous games right now which....”

[W. chips in on the gaming...]

“It’s interesting that the three of us have gravitated towards ..in game idea...whereas...”
[Good meta-communication]

[You ask about the AI and hands...

‘Any more feedback...

[W.’s comment about motion and animating the images- great intervention.]

“Have you tried using runway...? [You recommend an AI app for this purpose.]

Summary and key points.

Let’s start with the very good elements of your approach. The light-touch structuring of the presentations, including room layout, project brief, email to the teams prior to the sessions inclusion of your colleague team, welcoming of the students, NVC (nonverbal communication and contact, affirmation, umms, ahhs, agreement eye contact – all excellent), and interventions with key concepts. Verbal communication, in general. These are all aspects of v. good practice.

Email to the teams prior to session cc’d into the Tutor observing. This is an excellent teaching intervention and I must say, in general, the role of email comms is underestimated in the scheme of educational resources. Your email could be saved and printed in a pdf alongside the Teaching Obs on your blog! Why. Some of my feedback relates to enacting the guidance in the email itself, on team-work amongst students and its importance. The advice is spot on. The notes, individualised, for each team are also very good teaching resources -as a handout- or material for formative feedback, informal as it is. A possible downside of the email being high quality...Are you sure that sometimes you are not “informalising” feedback or teaching content, in communications that may get missed or misinterpreted by some students as teaching resources?

Let’s unpack the context. A live brief session or other activities sometimes known as an event led curriculum might add a lot of motivation and dynamism to the teaching scenario.

However, such approaches might also require more of a range of coaching, mentoring and professional support-type demands on the teacher’s role.

How students work and participate in a team *is not necessarily learnt through unstructured or independent teamwork*. Independent working may simply reinforce differences between advantaged and disadvantaged students in any scenario. Those that are more mature and know how to work independently from prior work experience will implement this in such activities, those less experienced will flounder. Those international students who communicate in ways that are less adapted to westernised pedagogies will flounder unless such teaching tasks are semi structured (a form of scaffolding), roles assigned and given more specific responsibilities.

Insight? Sometimes what we are already aware of (know) as tutors, requires another strategy of implementation to be understood and enacted (learnt) by students.

This means your email was 'spot in' in identifying the problems that were then, unfortunately, shown to be the case within the presentations. Whilst MA students do not require the hand holding that BA students might. If there is no culture or practice of learning names nor opportunities for cross cultural learning e.g. unless there are some tasks such as week one presentations on photographic inspirations from our own cultural, or subcultural, or transcultural, contexts, how do international students know their opinions are being respected from day one? Fast forward, and we had in team Mac and Cheese a clearly able, particularly focussed and extravert student, of E. Asian heritage whose name seemed not to be known by the main male presenter and not included in 'presenting' from the front, which was a role taken by the two English first language students. I felt for her, she may have had a lot more to say.

You – collectively as a team- could not evidence in the presentation format the teaching and learning requirements you had stipulated in the email. Nor perhaps those that were referenced in the Unit brief. This could mean that a) W. and R. were not as aware of your message in the body of the email, and hence did not think it necessary to feedback to this point. b) professionalism became performative and less educational c) points of learning and opportunities to build student confidence and esteem were missed.

On the last point, c) For example, your Team, W. and collectively recommended the playing with AI as part of the tools and methods of this task. Where is the critical teaching on the ethics related to generative AI use, does that happen elsewhere, prior to or alongside this. If gen AI is seen as ubiquitous and integrated, is it already invisible, habitual, and thereby already not about education?

Aside. In professional, real world, contexts, "teamwork or team playing", contributions to operational process or meta-tasks such as planning are very often part of the debrief of every single project, or professional project evaluation. Why not here?

So, peer pressure. For us as tutors. You may have experienced split loyalties to your team and to the students meaning it was more efficacious to side with the tutors. Sometimes we work in a team to a cultural norm that appears then invisible to ourselves. Yes, this was a Dragons Den format, but that is a highly specific and rigid frame within which you, as tutors, could "step out" of your roles and ask each student in the room to make a comment or offer a thought. How do a teaching opportunity and learning opportunity remain balanced. Instead, not everyone in student teams spoke, nor made a contribution, meaning that the gamification, or role play format was exclusionary.

One tutor is scary for some students, three can be inhibitive. What can be done to mitigate this? Your coaching of your team could assign them roles, good cop/bad cop' de Bono's "thinking hats", roles within the panel; the media, the comms, the visual expert etc. This can lean into the prep for tutors to deliver the session, as tutors, with more depth. Other-wise AL/visiting tutors can default to either dispensers of answers, or arms-length critics. Time allotted also plays a role here.

Hence there was no need to overplay the presentation format, which is what I think happened. This is also common in performative assessments (in general, e.g. tests, or other) where we feel we cannot "interrupt" a performance to point out pedagogic issues. Why? There are no rules saying we cannot, unless, it is summative and an assessment format, which this was not. Maximising learning opportunities where and when they occur is perhaps more important in an educational context than anything else. The complexity of such timed formative feedback or progress events such as this are that content is prioritised over process, unfortunately. This is a learning opportunity for something that perhaps did not go as well as I imagined it could.

However, all that being said. *Do not doubt that you are an excellent teacher.* Teaching Obs are notoriously niche and partial glimpses NOT representative examples of your work. You also have my glowing responses and references to your microteach to prove this.

Let us discuss and very happy to hear your thoughts and reflections.

Part Three

Observee to reflect on the observer's comments and describe how they will act on the feedback exchanged:

Hi Tim, thank you for your generous time and observing our early-stage Collaborative unit session. It is a tricky unit that I feel partly (given that I didn't get the form to you – due to access issues – until very close to the session) has been observed and responded to without full context. Although I do really appreciate your points, based on what you saw / what you assumed the context to be. I hope you understand my defense of the session approach – and in response to some of your points - as it became apparent that a critical point hadn't been acknowledged within your observation... that the students working together are from different courses - not from a cohort that have worked together since last September and also that my colleague Will is not someone I have worked with often before and hasn't been particularly engaged with the process (something you weren't to be aware of).

I feel that the performative approach - at this stage of the D&AD collaborative process – works for two different reasons - it gives the students a structure to work within (which they need when in the early stages of being in a new group), mirrors industry (which is why they have chosen this option) but more crucially shows me where the cracks may be appearing within the group dynamic.

Following this session, I then tailor support to each group with follow up time – which occurs in the days after the session. Unfortunately, the session you viewed must have a timed approach due to the nature of SLT hours. Will should not have mentioned the Dragon's Den reference – prior to the first group - as it was not to be the format this week. I should have clocked this and explicitly said to you that it was not the format of today's session as this also set the tone for you in a way that was not intended. That being said – please rest assured I will fully take on board your points – particularly regarding international student integration and AI - ensure they are applied within this unit and my wider teaching approach.

I agree that mentoring, coaching etc is very useful ahead of this type of presentation. The students participate in cross departmental lectures looking at collaborative working before they go to their specific tutors for the chosen options. Unfortunately there aren't hours available for myself, Will / Rosie to attend these but we try to bring in coaching into the minimal D&AD time prior to the session. It's then up to the groups to allocate responsibility and choose their presentation format based on their skills. Being able to attend the cross departmental lectures (as tutors) would definitely help as we'd then be more aware of how the students are being taught to 'group work' beyond our classroom. I will try to push for this.

Within the allocated timeframe for the 2/7 groups that you saw (both of whom also turned up late), they were to present in a way that mirrored industry and we were to feedback on the idea (as they only have 2 weeks to make the work) rather than their chosen presentation format – within the session. I fed back more indepth with each group after.

In defense of the student who didn't recall one of his team members' name's. He is neurodiverse and has an ISA. He struggles to remember details like this so it was not something I could comment on at the time. He has assured me all names of his group are now memorised and I also spoke with the student affected so she knew it personal. I work very hard to ensure that everyone feels included within my course and the wider collaborative unit – but ofcourse as these students are just getting to know one another, there are issues. This work continues behind the scenes and with future crits, their final presentation, 121 sessions + the final exhibition.

I have and will continue to follow up with each group ensuring each person is included within the process. Within the presentation format, we do not expect every student to present – some are shy, some neurodiverse - they have been taught (during the collaborative unit) up to this point to play to their strengths within the group context – it would have been inappropriate for me to mention this during the session you observed but I agree that I could have pushed more to understand how each person had contributed (during the feedback session) and please rest assured I will be doing so in the follow up crit.

Your points regarding the ethics of AI are very valid and something we are thinking about intensively within the Photography Department. We are also in discussion with the AOP to help draft legislation. It isn't something we feel is naturally embedded within the course. The two groups you observed – while one is responding to an AI brief and the other used it as a way of mocking up their ideas – this isn't yet the norm but we also have to accept that the students will utilise these tools to mitigate time / budgetary constraints in the ideation stage. The ethics, copyright, social justice aspects are discussions we have often within the photography programme and the course (MA Commercial Photography) that I lead. Conversations will be had within the Collaborative Unit – particularly with those responding to the Google AI brief - to consider the carbon footprint of their brief response, social justice and climate change, while also bearing in mind (as educators) that they are responding to a live national brief set by the D&AD New Blood Awards with the intention and hope being to win recognition for their collective group effort. We must also balance up whether the hybrid use of AI can potentially reduce the carbon footprint of a large scale shoot or event and what the positives may be.

Once again, thank you for your time, engagement and valid points raised. They will certainly be taken on board.
