

## Review of Teaching Practice

Session/artefact to be observed/reviewed:

Size of student group: 10 max

Reviewee: Nicola Thomas

Reviewer: Agnes Cameron

*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.*

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### Part One

#### Reviewee to complete in brief and send to reviewer prior to the review

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

This will be the second of a series of 4 sessions (the first was an introductory session) for a project called Sonic Visions.

The students will have chosen to be on this project, as it is one of 16 electives that the whole of the BA Fine Art can choose for their Unit 8.

The student cohort will consist of 2nd years from all 4 BA Fine Art Pathways: 2D, 3D, 4D & XD, interested in the British Artists' Film & Video Study Collection held at CSM.

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

This cohort/group is new to me, as I would have only met them a week before for the first time.

What are the intended or expected learning outcomes?

In general, learning what a useful research resource the British Artists' Film & Video Study Collection can be.

For that morning: have them consider the different ways sound and visuals are used.

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

After the first session the students will be asked to find a clip that they consider combines sound and visuals really well.

The expectation for the morning of the second session is that each student will have a clip to show and share.

The output is a discussion around their chosen clips and the use of sound and film.

Are there potential difficulties or specific areas of concern?

Making sure that an equal amount of time is spent on each student - discussing their chosen clip.

How will students be informed of the observation/review?

Verbally during the morning of the review (and in writing by email).

What would you particularly like feedback on?

The engagement with the students

How will feedback be exchanged?

Assuming this means feedback on my teaching session - it can be verbally and written.

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## Part Two

**Reviewer to note down observations, suggestions and questions.**

Nicola welcomed students at reception and brought them into the space. She asked questions about what they thought of the class last week, specifically what they thought of the film she showed. She asked if students had questions from last week — a bibliography of the films was requested, which Nicola agreed to accommodate.

She confirmed students' names, and coordinated with the other teacher (Steven) to accommodate students who were running late. Nicola and Steven discussed last weeks' film while waiting for students to arrive. She checked with students about a workshop about reel-to-reel tape, relating it to their interests, and encouraged them to seek support from technicians in the film workshop.

She showed a clip that a student had brought last year, and asked students what they thought first before sharing her own interpretation. She asked questions to lead the students to reflect more about sounds. She also asks Steven what he thought — the class feels very horizontal.

The students have been asked for clips where they think sound and visuals work really well. Marta is first, and had chosen an animated clip by Joanna Priestly. Nicola makes notes as the clip is playing. She closes her laptop and focuses on what the student has brought, making notes on paper. (At this point I think, I should close my laptop too and continue on paper).

Nicola asks everyone else before Marta what they thought of the film, including Steve. I like how she doesn't ask for any context or justification for the clip — and doesn't say what she thinks until after, either. She takes notes on paper while students are talking. Her responses are very thoughtful — small observations, and she picks up on what the students say

We then go round the room and watch more clips that other students have brought, continuing in the same manner. Some students are quite late, but by the time we've watched a few more clips there are 6 students present. Everyone who has brought a clip is afforded a similar amount of discussion time, and each time the class is consulted before the context is given. The second clip that's shown is quite dark and

gruesome, and leaves people a little shocked. I really liked how much the students clearly feel trusted to bring very diverse and quite challenging material, it's handled in a thoughtful way, where the discomfort is both acknowledged, and explored as a cinematic effect. There's not a sense that there's a 'right' and a 'wrong' thing to have brought.

(the only time this happened is right at the start where Nicola seems a bit worried about having got them all to watch Blue last week, and seems a bit apologetic for how challenging it was — I don't think you need to apologise for it! It's cool that nobody else seems apologetic about their clips!)

Nicola's teaching style is very gentle, and creates a focussed and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom by example, rather than by trying to enforce it. She appears very calm throughout. It's nice to watch — there's a student that seems very disengaged and anxious, and instead of immediately trying to bring him in, she leaves it for a bit, and then asks some open-ended questions to encourage him to talk about his experience of the film.

Another student who is initially a bit disengaged puts away his laptop and focusses more when asked a couple of follow-up questions about what he thought of a film clip. I liked that Nicola was thoughtful about when to push students a little, vs leave them to engage a bit more by themselves. When a student came in near the end who hadn't attended before, Nicola makes sure to follow up with him and ensure he had the materials for the class. Similarly, she was very accommodating of technical issues — and didn't jump into rushing/fixing things for people, simply making time for it to happen later.

All of this has the effect of making an atmosphere that felt really oriented around watching material closely. It's very un-pressured, it doesn't feel rushed or judgemental/critical. It made *me* want to sit and watch the films, and think about what I thought of them, engage emotionally with them and with what the students were saying. I can imagine it's frustrating that so many students were quite late, as once they were in the space (with a couple of exceptions) they seemed really engaged. It's definitely a class that someone has to *want* to engage in, but I think Nicola does a really good job of making that a very comfortable and easy thing to do.

I suppose if I'm left with a question, it's maybe whether there are times when you do feel like you need to push students a bit more to be engaged in different ways (coming on time, not looking at screens), and whether there's anywhere where you set out explicitly (e.g. a code of practice) how you want students to engage with the space? (you might have done this already in the first session!)

Also — totally not in Nicola's control but — it's a shame that the space dedicated to teach this class is also a bit of a thoroughfare for the Lethaby gallery staff! I thought Nicola handled the distraction well, and it didn't detract from the experience.

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### Part Three

Reviewee to reflect on the reviewer's comments and describe how they will act on the feedback exchanged. Reviewee should return this to the reviewer once complete.

Agnes' comments have been immensely helpful and insightful. I do make a lot of effort to ensure the students feel comfortable during the sessions, especially as it feels that year-on-year, and due to the consequences of COVID, there are more students experiencing some form of anxiety disorder. For me, it is important to create not only a supportive and encouraging climate, but one that will hopefully 'optimise interactions' with my students. (Biggs & Tang, 2007a). It is also important, that the students have an input into the direction and content of the course. So too, the focus and emphasis that is placed on certain topics, so that it is in accordance with their interests, goals and needs.

Also, as is the case with this group, when many of the students are new or unfamiliar with working with film, video, and/or sound, they can be very tentative, and concerned about saying the wrong thing. Or not being sufficiently knowledgeable in (film and media) theory to provide what they consider to be valid opinions - which is important to counter. I agree with Biggs & Tang that:

*'Teaching is not a matter of transmitting but of engaging students in active learning, building their knowledge in terms of what they already understand'.*  
(Biggs & Tang, 2007b)

Hence, I do try to foster discussions and conversations about all the material that we watch as a means of learning and engagement.

Each cohort is very very different, however this is my first year (out of nine years) of dealing with a group that is so tardy and non-consistent with regards to their attendance. I do think that one reason for this is due to how students now regard attendance, based on the way a class is logged within SEATs. To clarify, this is the first year that SEATs has been formally implemented on our programme, and none of the 16 different cross-pathway electives for the Unit (and 250+ students), have been logged as mandatory classes for SEATs - as this would have been an administrative and logistical nightmare to implement. As a result, myself and my colleagues have noticed a marked drop-off in student attendance for all timetabled classes that are not marked as mandatory - which is very frustrating.

I do think encouraging a Code of Practice for this group would be good. I have never before (with these sessions) been in a situation where I have needed to do this. So Agnes has definitely given me something to think about here.

In the past, I have been concerned about students' use of their phones (and laptops), and how that may be a sign of a lack of engagement. However, in the last few years I increasingly have had overseas students who use their phone to help translate what is being said during tutorials, discussions and lectures. I know that in this current group I have at least one student whose English is not very good, and so is using their phone to help them translate. I also know that I have another student who suffers from ADHD and understand their need to have access to a device. I am also aware that some students may use they phone

and/or laptops to jot down notes and google artists and works that are mentioned during discussions. However bearing in mind Agnes's comment, I do think it is worth encouraging the students, wherever possible to put aside their screens, so as to be fully immersed in watching.

Yes, the sessions can become quite disrupted by the activity of the Lethaby Gallery and Library Collections staff. Usually, it is not as bad and disruptive as on the day Agnes visited - but as luck would have it that day was particularly bad. One reason for having the sessions where they are i.e. in close proximity to the physical archive next door, is so that the students associate the British Artists' Film & Video Study Collection environment as a place where the collection can be researched and studied. It is hoped that this approach will encourage students to go back and visit the Study Collection independently. In the past, we have used seminar rooms, but increasingly this option is becoming less available. In an ideal world, at least a couple of the sessions would be held in a lecture theatre, just for the cinematic experience, but this too unfortunately is now no longer an option.

**Sources:**

Biggs, J. & Tang, C. (2007a) Setting the Stage for Effective Teaching. In: *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. 3rd edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press

Biggs, J. & Tang, C. (2007b) Teaching According To How Students Learn. In: *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. 3rd edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press