

## **Record of Observation or Review of Teaching Practice**

Session/artefact to be observed/reviewed: collaborative project research session no. 001

Size of student group: 30 menswear students (plus students from knit/print and embroidery)

Observer: Karen Mathewman

Observee: Rory Parnell-Mooney

*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?**

This session was the first workshop of the Collaborative project in year two of a three-year BA Degree in fashion design, menswear. The collaborative project asks the menswear students to work in groups of 3 to design and manufacture a 3-look capsule collection that can include textile collaborative elements.

The workshop had collaborative working, show and tell elements, a revisit to the brief of the project and independent working elements where students were asked to show their research work and set up collaborative working within this session.

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

I taught these current second years in the Winter term for ten weeks on an industry collaborative project.

#### **What are the intended or expected learning outcomes?**

For students to leave with a good understanding of their Muse, research concepts and brand aesthetics and also to facilitate collaborations between BA Menswear students and students from a mixture of textile pathways.

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

Boards of research that have been edited and discussed should show a clear avenue forward for collaborative creative work. In a non-physical sense, the outputs also include facilitating collaboration between pathways.

#### **Are there potential difficulties or specific areas of concern?**

The areas of concern are that less confident students would struggle to independently set up a collaboration; this would involve introducing yourself and your work to a group from the opposite pathway, so some students might find this challenging.

**How will students be informed of the observation/review?**

NA

**What would you particularly like feedback on?**

How to facilitate more organic sessions of work sharing within the curriculum and Learning outcome structure and how to include lower confidence students in this (ESL students also)

**How will feedback be exchanged?**

Teams meetings/Email

**Part Two**

**Observer to note down observations, suggestions and questions:**

This was an interesting and reflective online discussion held online in Teams after a session Rory had held earlier in the year. It was the first workshop in a collaborative project. This was the time when students started to work in their new groups.

It was a wide ranging discussion but focused mainly on the challenges, joys and interesting areas of student collaboration, group dynamics, and what we can do as educators to navigate these challenges in the best way possible. We also reflected on the importance of not taking on too much of the burden of workload from the students, who are learning principles of autonomous and collaborative working – skills so useful for their industry experience later.

Rory explained that in previous years grouping had been random. This caused some ongoing issues with conflicts, differences of creative opinion and issues around different levels of input and motivation. Rory struggled with how to overcome this, as didn't want to be seen to be 'streaming' students by ability but needed to intervene to make sure the groups worked better.

He applied his disciplinary knowledge as well as his knowledge of the students and their design aesthetic and way of working to better match from that perspective. This has worked very much better than previously, and some groups are working in an exceptional way. However, others seem to be matched in less motivated groups, perhaps where their design aesthetic was less strong, and they take significantly more time and energy.

Rory described the difficulty of balancing time with the high achieving groups who really listen and benefit from input, and other groups who seem to demand so much more time and yet make less progress.

After many years of teaching, I recognised the problem as one that occurs in ALL collaborative teaching situations, and for that matter in working life! I recognised the professionalism and good decisions that Rory had made, based on his teaching and industry knowledge, and the positive impact this was having. I particularly noted the good practice of using something like Padlet to share notes so that he could see what was happening and when, and which groups were communicating effectively or not.

We discussed some suggestions. E.g. at the beginning of the sessions using these examples as a teaching point in themselves- highlighting that these tricky situations are common in working and student life and asking what their strategies would be if they encounter these kinds of issues in their collaborative groups. These could be in the form of scenarios on cards that students work in groups to 'solve'.

E.g Your partner is nice, but they never answer emails and seems to always agree with your decisions. This is frustrating as you feel you are doing all the work. What might you do?

I think sharing this kind of common occurrence and showing it can happen in their professional life too helps them develop skills to navigate professional life. It might also help everyone be on the same page a little more and have something to refer back to in tutorials.

There could also be a shared understanding that not everyone likes to communicate in the same way, and maybe as a group sharing preferences in terms of ways of working in their first interaction (e.g. I feel nervous talking in a group because of my language skills and prefer to take time to write a text or email if it is something important; I work all weekend so cannot answer emails during that time).

We acknowledged that this was a perennial problem and that it would never be 'solved' , however good the tutor, as it is part of real-life working. I also suggested that Rory think about coaching as a way of navigating this, so that the 'burden' is not just on him as a tutor to get his students through, but that this was a time to think about how students could develop a greater sense of independence and autonomy, and we discussed a few possible techniques that might help him do that with his students.

This was a really productive and reflective conversation, and although I could not attend in person, which would have been lovely, I really gained an insight into Rory's practice.

Karen Matthewman

### Part Three

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

The feedback I received above offers valuable insights into my teaching practice, highlighting both strengths and areas where I can continue to grow. One of the key takeaways is the recognition of the improvements I have made in group formation, particularly in how I match students based on their design aesthetics and working styles. This approach has led to stronger collaboration in many cases, but I am also aware that some groups still struggle with motivation and engagement. Balancing my time between high-achieving groups that require minimal input and those that need more guidance has been an ongoing challenge. To address this, I could implement clearer collaborative working principles at the start of the project as outlined by Karen here, encouraging students to set their group agreements around expectations and communication and hold them to these throughout the project in workshops. By doing this, I can help them take greater ownership of their working dynamics, reducing the need for me to intervene constantly or manage their expectations for them.

Another challenge I have faced is managing the uneven workload between groups. Some teams are self-sufficient and highly engaged, while others require significantly more of my time and energy without making as much progress. I see the value in shifting my role from a problem-solver to more of a facilitator, using coaching techniques to help students take responsibility for resolving their own issues. Instead of stepping in with solutions, I can guide them by asking reflective questions, such as what steps they have already taken to address a problem and how they might approach it differently. Encouraging students to take this responsibility will not only ease the burden on me but will also help them develop the self-sufficiency and collaboration skills they will need in their professional careers.

I also see the potential of incorporating real-world scenarios into my teaching. If students are given examples of common challenges they might face in collaborative environments and asked to problem-solve as a group, they will be better prepared to handle these situations when they arise. This could be an effective way to help them recognise the realities of teamwork and encourage proactive thinking. I could introduce these scenarios early in the project, using them as a discussion point in tutorials so that students can connect their experiences in the classroom to what they may encounter in the industry.

Using digital tools like Padlet has already been helpful in tracking group engagement, and I see an opportunity to expand on this by incorporating self-reflection and peer feedback. Encouraging students to complete weekly reflections on their teamwork could provide more transparency and accountability, helping them become more aware of their own contributions and challenges. Structured check-ins and peer reviews could also support this process, giving students a way to provide constructive feedback to one another while making my role less about monitoring and more about guiding their development.

Overall, this feedback has reinforced my confidence in the decisions I have made while also challenging me to refine my approach. I recognise that my role as a tutor is not to solve every

issue for students but to equip them with the tools to navigate these challenges independently. By embedding more structured self-assessment, group reflection, and coaching strategies into my teaching, I can help students develop a greater sense of autonomy while ensuring that collaborative projects remain a meaningful and productive experience for everyone involved.