

Professional Observation

Word count: 2387

Introduction:

As part of this assignment I have been asked to observe six hours of professional teaching and critically reflect on my experience of these sessions, what I have learnt and how this will affect my professional practice in the future. Therefore, I observed two lecturers at The College Merthyr Tydfil. Lecture 1 was a practical workshop style and lecture 2 was in a more traditional lecture style.

I will be using Driscoll's Model of Reflection of "What?", "So what?" and "What now?" (Driscoll, 2017) to analyse my findings. For the purpose of this observation, I will be categorising my findings thematically.

What?

Lecturer 1 led a class of eight students at The College Merthyr Tydfil through a devised drama lecture to develop the performance they had been creating in response to a stimulus for the devised section of their upcoming assessment. Students had two weeks left before the end of this module.

The second observation was with a large group of Games Design students at The College Merthyr Tydfil. The first section of this lecture entailed students receiving external feedback from an assessment they had just completed. For the second section of this lecture, lecturer 2 led a 'brainstorming' session to encourage ideas for their next module, using digital tools.

So what?

Learning environment

Research shows that there is a direct link between the design of a classroom and the impact it has on a student's learning and behaviour. Sandra Horne Martin, states in an article written for the University of Central England that "intuitively" we know that there is a direct link between the physical learning environment and the behaviour of students and teachers, but it is difficult to measure how much of this impact is

influenced deliberately by the teacher. Through my observations, I attempted to test this theory and evaluate how a teacher's setup decision can affect performance. Martin suggests that this knowledge should encourage teachers to take ownership over the design of their classroom; "any teaching can be effective if teachers understand their setting and how it influences behaviour" (Martin, S.H).

Lecturer 1 had set up the classroom in a specific way prior to students arrival, with music playing and tables on the outskirts of the room to create a large playing space for performers. According to an article for Inside Higher Ed, there are three main reasons why music is encouraged within a learning environment. These reasons are to "set the tone", "create collaboration" and "establish context" (Mowreader, A). These findings were supported by research found through an adult study carried out by Stanford's School of Medicine, where researchers found that music can help with attention span, making predictions and recalling memories (Baker, 2007). The effect was very calming and students came into the space and were ready to engage with the session. Students were in the right frame of mind to start the session.

On the tables around the room, there were different stimuli; images of performance, mind maps of ideas, lists of scene aims and objectives and a selection of text. These stimuli had been strategically positioned to create a productive atmosphere. This was incredibly useful as students instantly connected with the material, sparking new ideas and was an effective teaching strategy.

According to a teacher's guide to devising, stimuli such as images can "evoke an immediate reaction and response, with a whole language of its own" (Djurica, 2016). The types of materials that were used as stimulus embraced diversity and were inclusive. The main stimulus 'knowledge is power' was designed to challenge discrimination. As well as developing student's cultural understanding, this stimulus is in line with the Welsh Government's professional standards (Welsh Government 2017). The work created was thought provoking and created a safe space for students to discuss opinions.

In contrast, when observing the second lecture, due to the technology required for the session, the room was set up in a very different way. Each student had their own

work station with a computer, headphones and a large monitor. This setup was quite restricting so to compensate, there were screens above the monitors for students to see the session content and the lecturer moved around frequently so they could interact with students. This setup created a different atmosphere; a more individual, often isolating atmosphere. This individual atmosphere was effective for the first section of the lecture, where students were reflecting upon written feedback for a previous assessment and making individual changes to work created. This allowed lecturer 2 to give one to one help when required.

The importance of classroom set up was clear from these observations and from noting that lecturers were being conscious of the classroom set up, which is in line with professional standards “ensuring learners are supported and taught in a safe learning environment” (Welsh Government 2017).

Relationship between lecturer and student:

I observed that the relationship between the tutor and student was very different for each lecture. The relationship between lecturer 1 and their students was comfortable but could be strained at times due to the upcoming deadline compared to that in lecture 2 where the tone was more informal as students had just taken part in an assessment and were moving onto a new module. This difference in dynamic was interesting to observe as it helped me to understand the students' need for a tutor at various parts of a module. Students in lecture 1 were seeking more guidance and support from the lecturer, due to assignment pressures, and students in lecture 2 felt more relaxed and sought guidance as and when it was needed.

In an article written for ‘Devising Place and Social History’, Gillan Arrighi documents the devising process of students in the tertiary sector. Arrighi states in the final weeks of devising, the course enters a stage “where raw creative ideas and the processes through which they can be realised struggle against fears that projects are not good enough or, worse still, might not be completed in time” (Arrighi, 2010). Lecturer 1 supported the students through this “fear” through the room design, using music to create a relaxed tone and a series of teaching strategies. These teaching strategies consisted of revisiting previous tasks in the module to refresh students'

focus and using targeted group work to break down barriers that students were facing .

Module structuring:

The tone for each lecture was very different as they were at different parts of a process. Lecturer 1 was guiding students who were approaching an assessment and lecturer 2 was starting a new module with students. This difference had an impact on student behaviour, engagement and the relationship between the lecturer and student. Lecturer 1 suggested that due to the upcoming deadline, some students needed more “scaffolding” than others. Scaffolding was a learning technique developed by Jerome Bruner which emphasised how tutors aid learners. (Bruner, 1978, p. 19)

Reece and Walker define a scheme of work as “a series of planned learning experiences, sequenced to achieve the course aims in the most effective way” (Reece and Walker 2003). When discussing how a scheme of work is created, lecturer 1 gave some invaluable advice. They stated that they found the most “effective” way to create a scheme of work is to work backwards from the assessment. This allows them to ensure that all of the aims, objectives and content of the lessons are building upon each other, leading up to the assessment. It was incredibly useful to discover that theory surrounding schemes of work that had been learnt in class, had been applied in a classroom setting. For example, lecture 1 suggested that easier topics and theory is explored first to allow students to develop confidence which is then supported by practice.

Teaching Model:

The College Merthyr Tydfil focuses on using DR ICE as a learning model (The College Merthyr Tydfil 2024) which focuses on facilitating student-led learning. The DR ICE model has been created as a learning programme by Olevi Alliance (OLEVI 2023). According to a resource created by educator Liz Smith, the acronym allows for “deep thinking”, “role modelling”, “Impact on learning”, “challenge” and “engagement” (Smith 2013). Smith suggests that a fundamental function of the DR ICE model is to use the teaching strategy of questioning to extend a learner’s thinking. This can be used by asking a “big question” at the beginning of the session

and coming back to it at the end of the session (Smith 2013). This was clearly seen by the use of aims and objectives in both lectures. Lecturer 1 asked the group at the beginning of the session what the students wanted to achieve throughout the session. As well as following professional standards and allowing students to have responsibility over their own learning (Welsh Government 2017), it gave the students a sense of confidence and independence. Students were told that they were going to present the work created at the end of the session to see if their aims had been achieved. Students reacted very positively to this and the work created was focused and well presented.

Technology:

In the Games Design lecture, collaboration between students was minimal so the lecturer embedded different software into the session to overcome this issue.

Padlet, an interactive 'brainstorm' style digital tool, was used to support students in working together to explore ideas for their next module. Students were able to add text, pictures and videos, exchange thoughts and opinions on work, on one screen, in real time. Whilst observing, I noted that this substitution of software was very effective in enhancing students' learning as it enabled students to collaborate in a focused manner. My observation was clearly reflected in the feedback submitted by students after using the tool. Appendix A shows 17 out of 30 students voted 5/5 on aiding collaboration (Appendix A). This is further supported by a quote from a student stating that the software allowed for a "closer form of contact" (Appendix B).

The lecturer enforced clear boundaries with the software as the student's comments were anonymous. Although this gives the students agency over their own learning, a safe environment for all must be maintained. The lecturer also shared the software on the large screen at the front of the class in order to monitor but also limit any inappropriate behaviour. Enforcing guidelines and offering positive suggestions to the class, lecture 2 was in line with professional standards; commitments to learners safety and demonstrating respect towards others (Welsh Government 2017).

Another professional guideline that was met was delivering effective learning through a range of digital tools to enhance the student's learning (Welsh Government 2017).

Time management:

Time management in each session was a fundamental element in each lecture. Lecturer 1 allowed students to devise a task from their aims and objectives and would check in after twenty minutes and suggest a 'brain break' which consisted of students walking around the space and visualising themselves in their safe space. They would then leave the room for 10 minutes to refresh. This was a very effective method as students who often leave the space overwhelmed and come back into the room re-focused. In an article written for edutopia, Youki Terada suggest that regular "brain breaks" not only provide downtime for students but develop productivity and creativity (Terida 2016). This study was supported by a 2016 study by psychologist Kerrie Godwin who observed that students were more attentive after regular "brain breaks" (Godwin et al., 2016).

This structure was replicated in the Games Design lecturer and was of utmost importance to give students a "brain break" from the computer screen. In an article reflecting on the effect of "brain breaks" with computer science subjects is defined as a "strategy where the teacher pauses the class for a few minutes to shift the focus to some other form of activity" (Adam, 2021). This study found "brain breaks" for computer science students "helped reduce tension which helped students learn at high levels and kept the student brain active and alert" (Adam, 2021).

Now what?

For the purpose of this observation, I will be reflecting on my findings and analysis through the creation of an action plan.

Please note, all of the professional standards in the action plan are referenced from the Welsh Government's 'Professional standards for further education teachers, work-based learning practitioners and adult learning practitioners in Wales (Welsh Government 2017).

Target	Objectives	Action	Timescale	Professional standard
1. Creating a productive learning environment	- Setting tone - Creating collaborative environment - Setting up space appropriate to task (written or practical)	- Researching further and trialling effective stimulus - Ensuring inclusive and safe learning spaces	- Throughout teaching hours with The College Merthyr Tydfil	- Demonstrating commitment to learners and their safety.
2. Building positive relationships with students	- To build professional and supportive relationships with students to support learning	- Treating learners fairly and equally - Listening and respecting others views and opinions - Reviewing my professional attitudes	- Throughout the next cohort of LAMDA students	- Working to build and maintain positive relationships with learners.
3. Managing students	- Develop a series of behaviour	- Observing how other	- Throughout teaching hours	- Demonstrating commitment to

behaviour when approaching deadlines	management tools	professionals manage behaviour in educational settings - Using policies and guidelines to take appropriate action regarding behaviour	with The College Merthyr Tydfil	learners and their safety.
4. Creating sessions using DR ICE model	- Creating sessions that achieve deeper thinking and are student led	- Empowering students by asking “big” (Smith 2013) questions at the beginning of the session and revisiting - Observing and reflecting on the practise of other lecturers using the model	- Throughout my teaching hours with The College Merthyr Tydfil	- Creating sessions that allow students to take responsibility for their own learning
5. Structuring sessions and modules	- Creating a scheme of work that fits assignment criteria - Devising sessions that	- Observe and discuss module structure with professionals - Reflecting on research and developments of	- Throughout the next cohort of LAMDA students	- Keeping my knowledge up to date so that I am in the best position to teach and assess subject areas.

	build upon skills and practice	subject area with other colleagues		
6. Imbedding technology into teaching	- Imbed appropriate technology into sessions to enhance learning	- Trial different technology and their uses - Reflect upon my practise and the benefits of using technology as a substitute	- Throughout my next Theatre in Education course	- Plan and deliver effective teaching and assessment

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Professional standards

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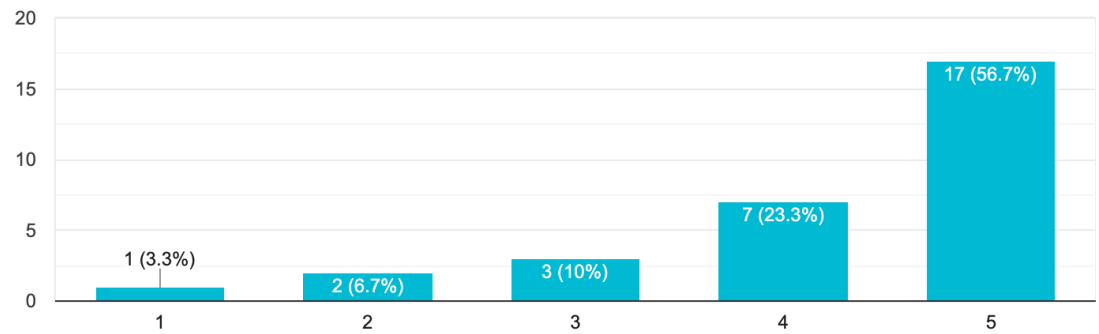
Appendix A

Feedback from submitted by students after Games Design lecture

Was Padlet useful to collaborate with your team?

 Copy

30 responses



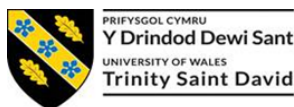
Appendix B

Feedback question from student in Games Design lecture

Do you feel this tool helped further your learning experience? How?

Yes as it allowed a closer form of contact/collaboration with my classmates

Teacher Observation Form



Teacher	Kayleigh Adlam at Merthyr College (lecturer 1)
Date	Thursday 18th January 2024
Group	A Level Drama Students
Topic/Context	Devised Drama College Lecture (3 hrs)

Notes on the lesson:

- Students are coming towards the end of the devising module so the performance they are creating has been developed in response to the stimulus 'knowledge is power' and using Sally Cookson as a practitioner.
- Using DRICE as a teaching strategy. See picture of acronym.
- Lecture was set up in a large open space with materials on tables around the room.
- Lecturer had already set up the materials for the students and had put classical music on the digital screen which created a calm and creative environment. Lecturer stated that they always play music during sessions.
- Lecturer said that they have to gauge the needs of the room as it is a small class.
- Opened with a discussion on what they had created last week and what they had worked on since last lesson.
- Lecturer asked the students what their aims and objectives were for the session and they stated that they wanted to polish the ending of the performance and the transitions between speakers. The lecturer allows students to set the agenda of the session as they are approaching their practical exam and checking in with them throughout the session. This gives the students agency.
- Lecturer referred students to the materials around the room which was a mind map which had been created throughout their process which had aims and objectives of each scene and a structure of the performance.
- Stating that the students are to work on their aims and objectives and that the lecturer will check in every 20 minutes. Also stating that the students will have to do a showback at the end of the session of the work they have done, to avoid procrastination and not completing work.
- Lecturer asked during check ins ' what's your aim for the scene?'
- When students became stuck, the lecturer would remind them of previous tasks they had taken part in earlier in the process to spark creativity.
- Lecturer stated that some students in the group need more scaffolding than others at different parts of the process so although the students have agency, the lecturer is always on hand with exercises to provide scaffolding e.g. Sally cookson exercise.

- **Providing students with 'brain breaks' and allowing them to walk around the space to clear their head. After a written task (scripting a new devised section) they were given a break. Lecturer stated that they always have a break after 25 minutes with written tasks.**
- **After a check in, the conversation digressed into more informal dialogue. Lecturer guided students back to the task and reinforced the importance of the showback.**
- **Asking students when showing back their work 'what's currently working' and 'even better if'.**

Teacher Observation Form



Teacher	Tomos Hooson
Date	26th January 2024
Group	The College Merthyr Tydfil
Topic/Context	Year 1 Games Design Students

Notes on the lesson:

Ideas generation session

They have just had an assessment and waiting for feedback so this week is almost limbo but wanting to get a head start on next assignment

Relaxed and informal environment

Every student has access to high tech equipment

Screens at the front and either side of the room for students to see

- Asking students if they have had feedback to gauge where people are
- Difficult to see tutor because of monitor but he was aware of this and kept moving
- Explaining the set up of the session- first hour you should have had feedback so you will have things to be working on and then second hour we will do idea generation
- Catchphrase 'lets crack on'
- Checking in on students throughout the session to help
- Student eating
- They are going onto a career skills module
- UAL has a more flexible structure than a BTEC so they are creating games in response to creative brief- gives them agency- they are learning by doing
- Lecturer had to think on his feet and be more flexible with sessions because they all had feedback
- Offering different tech and ideas as prompts
- Explaining what will happen in next couple sessions
- Students creating blogs to document their process on wix
- Watching youtube videos to learn skills on animation
- Allowing students to play to their strengths- some are more into design than coding
- They have had to choose a character they like in a video game and redesign it
- More artistic students looking at pinterest and youtube to inspiration
- Reminding them of the task
- No written learning objectives but clear task
- Does anyone want windows open? Because of the heat in the classroom from equipment
- Brain breaks for screens
- Second session- using padlet to create an ideas brainstorm
- Setting clear boundaries for the technology

- **Clear task instructions and giving ideas to help spark thoughts**
- **Repeating task**