Review of Teaching Practice

Session/artefact to be observed/reviewed: *1:1 Tutorials for Vertical Studio 3 (Stage 2 and 3).*
Size of student group: *24 students, half of which I will see in tutorials*
Reviewee: *Gaia Crocella*
Reviewer: *Lucy Donelly*

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

What is the context of this session/artefact within the curriculum?
The studio brief this year is titledf "It Takes a Village", taking its name from a famous African proverb reminding us to nurture those networks of support which are the backbones of healthy and joyful living. The students are asked to develop an architectural proposal that revisits and re-envisions the existing Lewisham Dementia Day Care Centre, reimagining the existing urban condition through site-specific and intergenerational designs.

They are asked to explore how socially responsible, convivial architecture can spark durable systems for change. Focusing on the links between healthcare, housing, and social services, students are also invited to explore how food practices and creative spaces can help to imagine new models of living for society's most marginalised.

***On the 17th February**, the student will be returning from a couple of weeks break after the summative submission. Returning at this point, the new unit (which will count a total of 8 studio sessions) asks students to start revising, strengthening and finalising their proposal, making it more tangible and starting to address technical, structural an environmental aspect, along with aspects that do not yet work.*

***Given this tutorial will be the first one after their summative submission,** the tutorial discussion will be focusing on revisiting their submission and critically reflect on aspects of the proposal they need to consider, revise, change or strengthen.*

How long have you been working with this group and in what capacity?
I am one of their Design Studio Tutor (along with my partner in crime, colleague and friend Carlotta Novella) and I have been working with them since the start of the year in October 2025.

What are the intended or expected learning outcomes?
The learning outcome for the tutorial is for them to recognize and self-assess the work done so far and reflect on what they need to do to further develop and improve their proposal.

The learning outcomes for this commencing unit will be:
LO1: Enquiry
LO2: Knowledge
LO3: Process
LO4: Realisation
LO5: Communication

At the end of the unit, their proposal will need to respond to all the above LOs.

What are the anticipated outputs (anything students will make/do)?
The tutorial will mainly focus on discussion and reflection on the work done so far, while tackling feed forward suggestions and next steps, perhaps exploring precedents and potential ideas to inspire future work. Sketching may also take place during the tutorial.

Are there potential difficulties or specific areas of concern?
Yes there are. This year the studio has 7 students with ISAs and at least 7 further students that may require additional learning support but do not have an ISA yet. For some students it is very difficult to engage with critical design thinking and making. This is why 1:1 tutorial time is the preferred format to respond to each student need. I don't know yet which students I will be meeting in tutorial on the 17th of February, but you will notice when more time and support is required. I will probably extend my tutorial time when this will be the case.

Another aspect we struggle with in the studio is low attendance and students arriving late. They are very seldom on time for the start of the session. Let's see if this changes by the time you will join me in the studio.

How will students be informed of the observation/review? *I will inform them via email prior the session and verbally at the beginning of the Studio Day on Tuesday 17th February. I will ensure that students who do not feel comfortable with the observation are scheduled to see me during the afternoon tutorials.*

What would you particularly like feedback on?
Any reflections that arise naturally as you observe the session. I am especially interested in feedback on the balance I strike between being fully myself in the studio and maintaining a sense of authority, without slipping into a more "motherly" dynamic (perhaps that is ok too?). I would also value suggestions on how to address different students' needs without always relying on 1:1 tutorials, particularly ways of opening individual work into fuller studio discussions or collective workshops, yet making everyone feel comfortable and at ease. I am keen to make better use of studio time as an active working space where students learn through doing together, rather than only through 1:1 tutorials. We do incorporate whole studio workshops

when we can, but this does not happen often, as we need to ensure that students work can successfully meet the Learning outcomes.

How will feedback be exchanged? *Using this form and verbally*

Part Two
Reviewer to note down observations, suggestions and questions.

The new 'mini' project briefing was extremely clear and thoughtfully delivered. It was not over-complicated, and the care that had gone into shaping the brief really showed. It felt like a genuinely exciting project proposal, communicated with clarity and confidence.

The physical set-up of the space was lovely – intimate and conducive to collaboration – and immediately created a sense of focus and openness. The delivery throughout was clear, kind, and measured, which helped set a calm and supportive tone for the session.

Carlotta's pep talk at the start was impactful. Acknowledging student emotions and actively trying to lift them felt empathetic and timely, and helped students feel recognised as people rather than just learners. The delivery from both tutors was thoughtful and clear. Although the slides were slightly pixelated, Gaia's confident and engaging delivery more than compensated for this, making it feel completely irrelevant in the moment.

The teaching partnership between Carlotta and Gaia was excellent. They were clearly in sync, supportive of one another, and presented a united, calm presence. This translated into patience with the students and helped build their confidence. Explicitly telling students that it is okay to make mistakes – and that this is the only way to learn – felt especially important at this stage of their studies.

The decision to ban AI in order to see students' handwriting and personal style felt like a really strong pedagogical choice. It reinforced the value of individual voice and process in an AI noisy world. I am going to take inspiration from this (along with many other ideas)

The idea of "what would give a green light" and encouraging students to push boundaries was well framed and motivating. When a student asked how AI use can be identified and whether students need to declare its use, the response was honest and open, reinforcing trust. The real connection between staff and students felt authentic, and this honesty clearly helps to build a safe and trusting learning environment.

Having hard copies of the mini brief was a really nice touch. It made the session feel more tangible and grounded, and likely helped keep students engaged and present. The reassuring rhetoric throughout – offering simple guidelines and clear steps – was supportive without being prescriptive.

Gaia's empathic approach was evident in many small but important ways, particularly in using students' names and acknowledging them even when they arrived late. This helped students feel seen and heard.

The mix of science and design content (Bio Materials) was interesting and well judged, and complex concepts were explained in a clear and accessible way. Visual language, in particular, was explained extremely well.

There were moments where the lead-in questions following the video felt quite broad. For Year 1 students, this may have been a little daunting, especially in a large group. It might be worth considering starting with more specific or smaller questions before expanding out to bigger ideas, to help build confidence. That said, it was encouraging to see students being actively encouraged to share thoughts and ideas regardless of whether they were "right" or practical.

The dissection of the video was particularly strong. Rather than moving on quickly, Gaia and Carlotta unpacked it thoughtfully, giving it context while also being clear that it wasn't presented as a perfect example. This critical framing felt valuable.

The session did run for a long time without a break, and while the content was engaging, some students did begin to look restless. It may be worth considering whether a pause or short break could help maintain focus, especially when discussing such thoughtful topics. Similarly, the exemplar shown at the end was explained beautifully and gave students a clear, relatable reference point. However, there may be value in separating this into another session, allowing students time to digest the brief and ideas first, so they feel more confident trusting their own design handwriting and approaches.

Dialogue with students throughout was excellent, and it would be interesting to explore whether there could be even more opportunities for student voices. Asking students about their feelings is a generous invitation, though it may be quite a tall ask; reframing this around worries or uncertainties might feel more accessible.

During the tutorial with Aneesa, it was clear that Gaia communicated expectations very clearly. Aneesa's project title was thoughtful, and Gaia did an excellent job of keeping the student on track within the timeline. Writing notes as the student spoke demonstrated active listening and care. Feedback was clear, direct, and constructive – which felt appropriate and supportive. There was a sense of impatience at moments, possibly linked to the work not being uploaded in advance, and there being a 20 minute time constraint, though this did not undermine the clarity or usefulness of the feedback.

The classroom atmosphere overall was buzzy and inclusive, demonstrating a strong dynamic that has clearly been developed by the teaching team.

Feedback was concise, practical, and actionable, which is particularly impressive given that the work had only just been seen. It raised a useful question for me about how students best record tutorial advice – perhaps suggesting recording tutorials could support this. The student was given a lot of useful advice and I wondered whether she would remember it all.

Support offered was detailed and sophisticated, with clear identification of what was missing and no ambiguity. The openness of the tutorial was striking – the student felt comfortable asking for Gaia's opinion, with no fear of criticism. Gaia approached the student with empathy (no motherly approach that I saw), particularly given the lack of completed work, offering support without judgement. The student's mature response felt like a credit to the environment that has been created.

There was a lot of information shared, and at times this may have felt overwhelming for the student. This became clearer as the student asked questions, and the advice became more focused and specific as the tutorial progressed. The use of clear examples helped the student understand what was relevant for the following week, and by the end, expectations and next steps felt much clearer.

Overall, this was a thoughtful, empathetic, and well-structured teaching session, demonstrating strong relationships with students, clarity of purpose, and a genuinely supportive learning environment.

My main feedback for Gaia is to truly be herself and to not doubt herself. Her approach to the students and their work is the perfect balance of kindness and empathy and constructive and actionable advice. We all thrive when we know we are being seen and heard in any situation and Gaia really made her students feel this way and because of this I am absolutely sure they will thrive and be extremely successful with her guidance.

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.

I am very grateful for your thoughtful, generous, and beautifully written feedback, Lucy. Your comments resonated deeply and were highly constructive. They have given me input on areas I haven't revisited in a long time and can now reflect on meaningfully.

I was very happy to read that you felt there was a real connection between us as tutors and the students, and that together we created a safe and trusting learning environment. The fact that my empathetic, yet constructive approach was evident, and that the students felt seen and heard, means a lot to me. This is how I like to work: meeting the other, where learning and teaching is an exchange where we both grow. Knowing that you recognised this, feels great and affirming.

I agree with you on the fact that the lead-in question after the video was too broad. In fact, we had very few students responding to it, and I can see now why it may have felt overwhelming. In future, we will follow your suggestion and break the first prompt/question into smaller, more tangible questions connected to specific aspects and themes raised in the video.

I am also glad you noticed the length of the presentation. Carlotta and I tend to love to talk, and because we are so passionate about the material, we often go beyond our planned timeframe. Your suggestion to include a short break between the two core parts of the presentation is very helpful. Splitting the session in two weeks would have pushed the second half too far, as students need to act quickly on refining the language and clarity of their portfolios, but a pause would have supported focus and energy. I will implement this idea in future presentations too, ensuring we are succinct and concise in the delivery of content.

I plan to take forward your suggestions around student engagement and presence, and to integrate them into how I structure and lead sessions. I am very keen to explore new ways of enhancing participation and creating more opportunities for student's voice, perhaps through collective or peer-feedback sessions, wider discussions, workshops and structured pin-ups.

I also completely agree that the limited timing of 1:1 tutorial make them feel compact and sometimes overwhelming, with too much information delivered in a. short time. Your idea of offering students the option to record the tutorial on their phones is excellent. I have done this in the past with students with ISAs or those who requested it, but I could make this as an option for all students.

Finally, your encouragement has reminded me of the importance of trusting myself and not doubting my authenticity in the studio. I am committed to applying this more consciously in my work with the students, and more broadly, in life. Trusting that it is ok to be fully myself, open, empathetic and real, without the fear to be 'too motherly' is reassuring. This reminds me of bell hooks' call for vulnerability in the classroom (1994, p.21), which I highly value and which I believe I also mentioned in your feedback. It's funny how the qualities we recognise in others, are often those we ought to recognise in ourselves.

Thank you once again, for the time, care, and clarity of your feedback.

References:

hooks, bell (1994). Teaching to Transgress, Education as the Practice of Freedom *. [online] New York, London: Routledge , p.21. Available at: https://commons.princeton.edu/eng574-s23/wp-content/uploads/sites/348/2023/03/hooks-Teaching-to-Transgress.pdf.*