Blurring the boundaries of formative and summative assessment for impact on learning

Practitioner Research
In Higher Education

Vol 14(1) pages 28-40

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Abstract
Encouraging all students to meaningfully engage with feedback on summative assessments is a vexing challenge for educators (Watling, 2016). Using formative feedback techniques as a formal part of a summative assessment allows for a guaranteed 'feed forward'. Group crits in the form of students and staff viewing their own and others work in an auditorium, are commonly used in the field of Filmmaking for low stakes, formative assessment purposes only. Students often engage in analysis and evaluation of their work in order to hopefully feedforward into their summative assessments. This paper explores using the 'group crit' for their actual summative assessment instead of simply as a formative activity. The crit then becomes a vehicle that incorporates valuable staff and peer to peer feedback within the assessment process itself, thereby incorporating low stakes formative assessment, as part of high stakes summative. Using my own teaching of Screen Drama (fiction production involving actors) to first year students I reflect on my practice and conclude with recommendations for tutors to draw from. Key conclusions from this research include that more students engage effectively with this type of feedback and with greater feed forward when it takes place within the summative assessment process itself.

Keywords
Higher education; low stakes assessment; pedagogy, filmmaking, film production

Introduction

'Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement'
(Hattie and Timperley, 2007).

As an indie filmmaker I consistently find myself in the middle of two polar opposites: art house and main stream. So it goes with feedback methodology. Do I force the student and correct their mistakes (main stream) or create a spirit of collaborative enquiry and new ways of looking so we discover together (art house). The acknowledged research around feedback in education books and journals is incredibly powerful and empowering, but can be baffling in a creative arts teaching environment where transmissive pedagogy is not widespread. Within our practice we attempt to encourage a spirit of interdependence and co-learning, whilst embracing best practice pedagogy. The intention being to develop their evaluative judgment (Tai et al., 2018) and encourage autonomous, independent, proactive creatives, who through collaborative enquiry allow lived experience of critiquing, to be at the heart of their learning.

Correcting mistakes and engaging in transmissive learning is efficient and effective at level 4 for learning technical skills such as camera operation, lighting, sound equipment. There can be elements of exploring together but learning is predominantly 'mistake correcting' orientated in order to learn speedily and be creative with the learned technical skill. Critique (crit) within higher education allows an opportunity for a verbal exchange between the student, their peers and their tutor, and a critical analysis of the presented work with an explanation of the thinking process they have gone through. This is commonly in the form group crits in filmmaking, where students review their own and others

Citation
Thompson, D. (2021) 'Blurring the boundaries of formative and summative assessment for impact on learning', *Practitioner Research in Higher Education Journal*, 14(1), pp. 28-40.

work in an auditorium, in front of their tutors and peers. This analysis and understanding can be of benefit both to the producer and to their student peers and tutors, as it can allow a clarification of thinking and understanding of the work for all parties and a sharing of process (Oak, 1998). The study analysis revealed that the desired benefits and understanding gained from the verbal assessment feedback received at the crit could also be affected by factors such as the power position of teacher/student (Devas 2004; Sara and Parnell 2004) or the stress factor (Pope, 2005) impacting on student performance.

In my own experience of teaching students Screen Drama, characteristically they have strong personalities, can be both over confident and insecure in the same breath, seek development of their personal voice and have high anxiety of putting themselves forward for open feedback. This makes for a formidable and unwieldy mix. Teaching such students can often be fraught with friction, therefore the dynamic with the students lends itself to a facilitative/apprenticeship style, and less on transmissive teaching (Pratt, 2002).

The way students are guided and supported with feedback is important, as well as the way it is both delivered, engaged with and listened to. Screen Drama students need to know, without doubt and emphatically, how they are communicating to their audience - even if their intention is to be ambiguous. They rarely get an opportunity to explain or contextualise their films in industry and they are at the mercy of their audience, whoever and wherever that audience might be. So it is vital that they get very real and tempered feedback to focus their minds and make them listen as quickly as possible, to develop this key graduate skill. In order to do this, we need to create a space for students to be able to reflect on their creations and look at how this feeds forwards to their next assignments, how it aids their personal development and thus feedback brings their learning to life - and therefore meaningful to them. Something Villarroel et al. (2018) describe as ‘Authentic Learning’ where enhancing employability is achieved through improving problem solving, critical thinking, communication skills and teamwork. As well as emphasising the need for a contemporary approach to feedback which isn’t passive but involves students being active in gathering and responding to feedback.

Feedback, and therefore the variety of feedback, is paramount to this process for the dramatic filmmaker and needs to be placed at a point where the students’ responses and their ability to listen, are at their most receptive: the summative assessment. The place where Rand points out ‘has the potential to be one of the most powerful influences on student growth’ (2017).

Similar to a formative crit session, the feedback has been designed to be delivered by both tutor and peers in between two linked summative assignments, therefore all the feedback is guaranteed to feed forward. Whereas it is hoped that formative crits will feed into the summative assessment, I designed the formative as part of the summative. As Black (2015) suggests, ‘the value of Assessment for Learning lies in the ways in which it can contribute to the main aim of education, which is to develop in students the capacities of independent, effective and responsible learning.’ But in itself ‘formative assessment is an ‘incomplete’ and ‘optimistic’ vision. Linking summative with formative assessment, even almost marrying formative within summative, can provide a potent and effective mix for student growth.

There is a difference between the ‘Crit’ and students 'critiquing’. The ‘Crit’ is the screening with everyone watching. The students ‘critiquing’ is peer feedback within that screening, and then the receivers of the feedback writing down that feedback, as part of their own submitted critical evaluation, handed in the week after the screening. This process of critique encourages peer-to-peer learning as it is important to first acknowledge the socially situated nature of all learning, as

emphasized by Wenger (1999) among others. Social learning is continually evident in visual art where peer group discussion and crits is 'a signature pedagogic practice' (QAA, 2017:14).
Crucially a community of practice is fostered when the students are guided and given a framework to give feedback at this crucial time. They begin to understand the necessity to provide it for someone else, as much as it needing to be provided for themselves: they create their own community and language of practice in order to grow and learn.

Literature Review
The following is purposefully a review of diverse literature and has two-fold intention. Firstly, to open up the traditionally insular field of art and design practice and secondly, to engage with a breadth of contemporary literature and link it to the art and design field. Secondly, to look at as contemporary as possible breadth of literature and link it to through lines of art and design field, beside influential educational theory.

Assessment for Learning
From the start, the foundation of Assessment for Learning (AfL) was never intended to be dogmatic, 'Far from presenting a tale of overall success – the most optimistic claim amongst them is of partial success'. (Black, 2015:161). However, since then AfL has become international property and influences curriculum across the globe. Researchers such as Taras (2005) have attempted to unpick the theory behind the practice of AfL, which she believes has strongly contributed to summative assessment itself being demonised 'The assessment for learning paradigm may become the new black box itself (2009:67). Combining both formative with summative has an organic connection to the original theory, and allows the freedom for the student to engage in a low stakes assessment exercise, e.g. the Crit, in order to draw out the summative assessment process improving learning impact. With this in mind, this study is built upon the principles of AfL but also acknowledges, as researchers such as Alice Man Sze Lau (2016) propose, that students need to be actively involved in constructing their own learning and be involved in making their own judgements. Therefore, the AfL movement see the reliance on formative assessment alone to be incomplete and optimistic, and so the hoped for value of introducing AfL within this study lie in the ways it could develop in students the capabilities of independent and effective learners through the strengthened tie between their learning and the summative assessment itself.

Summative Assessment and Student Feedback
Harrison (2016) for example, believes that the trend of curriculum changes towards constructivism should be mirrored in the assessment process itself in order to enhance receptivity to their feedback whilst also giving students greater control over their assessment and feedback processes. However, this is not an easy task as Watling (2016) points out that reconciling the 'uneasy bedfellows' of assessment and feedback, specifically in summative assessment, is a vexing challenge for educators. Watling & Ginsburg (2018) argue that we should look towards assessment that **encourages learner growth** and development, not creating student panic. This is a sentiment shared by many researchers such as Yerrabati (2017) who found that **transparency in assessment** is vital for students to be able to effectively assess their own strengths and weaknesses. The **timing** of assessments is also an important factor, or even crucial as Hyland (2005) states that students only have a thirst for feedback if given at the right time in the assessment process. Expanding on this, Rand (2017) calls for summative feedback to be 'reframed for participation' as it risks not only being ignored, but seriously threaten learning as students and lecturers are likely to conceptualise feedback in dramatically different ways. Therefore, students need to be **active agents** in monitoring and evaluating their own learning.

The areas of effective assessment and feedback above are the foundations of this study design. Looking to find the optimal ways to encourage learner growth through transparency of assessment,

selecting the right timing and enabling mechanisms for student control and participation have been the driving factor for this research.

Students as Partners

There has been a wave of research around students as active participants in the assessment process that have inspired this study and helped inform the decision-making process. Sadler (1989) shows us that students should be supported to progressively let go of their dependence on teachers through formative exercises, learning the standards expected and self-reflection. Research undertaken by Meer & Chapman (2013) utilising Sadler's suggestions, strongly conclude that an effective understanding of their marking criteria through being active participants in the design and grading of their summative assessments leads to a significant gain in learning outcomes and enables a supportive community of practice to form for longer-term learning gains. In the filmmaking industry specifically, the work of Knudsen (2000) emphatically outlines the importance of linking personal experience with craft skills and creative expression. He stresses the importance of individual purpose -stretching beyond simply passing an assessment or getting a job. McDonald agrees that industry teaching is difficult but not because of individual purpose, but because of the lack of clarity within creative industry standards and the difficulties of consensus around this. In order to address this, research undertaken by Ellis (2000) concludes that in order to enable creative students to perform well in assessments and with future work, graduation skills such as those taught within areas such as law and business should be central to creative students learning. These studies have highlighted different ways that students can best engage with assessment and feedback and their research has been incorporated into the planning of this intervention.

Methodology

The research strategy employed in this study is practitioner action research. In a broad sense, pedagogical action research refers to systematic investigation of one's own teaching, including a change or intervention and reflection upon the outcome. The iterative action research process aims to enhance the practitioner's practice (Barraket, 2005; Kolb, 2014). However, this paper reports on the second iteration of the cycles of the practitioner's learning as conceptualised by Riding et al. (1995), this cycle is built on the basis of the insights received from the previous cycle (Thompson, 2018).

Levin (2006) considers action research as research in action as opposed to research about action. This approach therefore provides a framework to explore and develop new elements and understandings of teaching and learning by integrating practice and research through structured inquiry (Reason and Bradbury-Huang, 2013).

Located within an interpretivist paradigm, practitioner action research supports the notion of gaining a better perception of the compound realities occurring within the research setting and the research topic (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Its strength lies in the belief that "knowledge comes from doing" and that theory "can and should be generated through practice" (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003:14).

In undertaking action research, practitioners contribute original and contemporary research to their communities of practice, with the aim of providing evidence-based research to develop practice for educational change.

McNiff (2002) conceptualises action research as an action planning process. This involves the practitioner in reviewing current practice to identify an aspect to investigate. The practitioner then imagines/devises a change of practice, which s/he tries-out whilst simultaneously reflecting upon and evaluating the impacts of change. If the change is beneficial the new way of working is continued, if not, another option is tried and the process repeated.

COBE (2005:5) also highlight the reflective nature of action research emphasising the need for 'critical reflection on both the process and the outcomes'. They (2005:5) conceptualise action research as cyclical; involving four stages: planning, acting, observing and reflecting followed by repetition if necessary (see appendix 1.). COBE (2005:21) points to three typologies of action research: technical, practical and emancipatory; 'Technical Action Research' best describes the approach here:

> typically undertaken by individual practitioners on a relatively short-term basis and aimed at making 'an existing situation more efficient and effective
>
> COBE (2005:21).

Methods

In order to understand the student and tutor experience and perceptions of these changes, qualitative data collection methods were used. The changes were made within a 30 credit, level 4 unit. The interventions were in the form of changes to the summative assessment process in order to include the former formative only crit into their actual summative assessment. The first is the introduction of a class activity which incorporates opportunities for the group to engage in an audience crit of their peers' final film, which subsequently informs their summative critical document.

The intention was to allow for greater facilitated feedback. Film crits, as in many peer feedback methods, tended to be dominated by the same students each time and there was often a sense of 'patting each other on the back' instead of producing organised and industry style feedback, i.e. some form of constructive criticism. In addition, it was a formative exercise, with relaxed conditions and engagement with discussion in small groups, where they can defend and explain their films, converse and create a dialogue. Ultimately, this activity was not part of any summative assessment and so was very low stakes to them.

Looking at that design for this unit whose format was Screen Drama, I decided to set the rules differently, as in Screen Drama it is vital to have an understanding of how your audience perceives your film without explanation. So I decided that rather than a two-way discussion, the film-maker could not talk or defend their work, but simply make notes and listen to the feedback given by their audience (peers). These notes would then be reflected upon and utilised within their summative critical document as follows:

OLD

Week	*Activity*
6	Pre-production presentation
9	Finished film + Critical document hand-in
10	Film crit (viewing of all films, group introduction followed by Q & A)
12	Tutorial (marks and feedback)

NEW

Week	*Activity*
6	Pre-production presentation
9	Finished film ~~+ Critical document hand-in~~ moves to wk. 10
	Film crit ~~(viewing of all films, group introduction followed by Q & A)~~ is moved forward, the morning after film is handed in. More formal - Q & A removed, groups instead don't speak after film screened, and have to write down their audiences (staff and student) feedback, facilitated by tutor.
10	Critical document hand-in, including audience feedback received during crit.
12	Tutorial (marks and feedback)

Figure 1. Learning activity change

At the crit viewing, instead of being able to discuss their film the group stays silent. Students have not only to listen, but write down the peer and tutor discussion, after each viewing the audience discusses what worked, what didn't work and what they would do differently next time. It is emphasized that these views are not necessarily 'right' but the student is asked to pay attention to what 'chimes' with them, what instinctively they know they do and don't need to work on or create moving forward. Placing the Critical document hand-in after the Film Crit (week 10) means they can with appropriate guidance, use the Critical Document to write up their feedback from the Film Crit, to create a bullet pointed action plan for moving forward in-line with AfL principles and good practice (Sze Lau 2016).

The students were given a brief introduction on Bloom's taxonomy of learning (Bloom, 1956), to motivate them to give feedback and understand the importance of their role as an active audience in the crit, as it was to remain silent when it was your turn and write it down. The intention was to give greater space for students who would not normally speak – to speak, particularly as there was a framework given to give the feedback: what worked, what didn't work, and how you would make it better next time around. In addition, bringing students into their community of practice through greater tacit knowledge and shared knowledge and experiences (Meer & Chapman 2013).

Data collection

Data was gathered in the form of the critical evaluation documents, tutor observations during the process, and informal post intervention student feedback. Although the above change is a simple change in structure, the change in attitude and student behaviour is dramatic. Once the rules are set, the students see the value of their feedback to others, not just an opportunity to criticise or be criticised. The game shifts from competition/criticism here to giving others something to write about in their critical document. If they don't do that, the tutor emphasises they won't be anything for their peers to write down in their critical document! This is supported by tutors to be delivered in the appropriate format: what worked, what didn't work and what you would do next time to improve it. This, I realised, in one exercise included peer-to-peer learning, community of practice, and self-generating feedback.

Tutor obs

The result was clear to see. Students who did not normally speak – did speak. Students who normally spoke – knew they had to keep silent when someone was talking about their film. It made for a totally different dynamic and way of communicating, because they were guided and had a framework in how to do it, the normal domineering voices were more silent, and the lesser heard voices were heard.

Feedback

As it was a summative assessment there was heightened sense of focus, as opposed to previous formative tasks in smaller groups. This was backed up with informal student comments three weeks after the event:

> Student E: Yeah better than the small rooms. (formative crits in prior unit)
> Student D: The small rooms wasn't as effective.
> Student B: And small groups, so there wasn't as much to… yeah...
> Student A: Yeah I preferred that group as well. I usually get bored and I wasn't bored, because I was excited to see people's films as well."

Analysis

As opposed to only the small number of 'keen' students who invite feedback and seek it out from tutors being effected, creative use of crit feedback achieved all students (it was compulsory) going through the feedback process. Writing it themselves meant they had to look at and engage with the feedback they were receiving, in a way they may not have otherwise chosen to, 'We actually see people's reactions' (Student C).

More informal verbal comments after the assessment once they had received their grades backed up the strength of the process, students had begun to weigh up their strengths and weakness':

> I feel like since I wrote this my writing has got so much better (Student A).
> It's just my evaluation that's lacking (Student B).

Student A evidenced hunger for feedback:

> I think there should be actually more criticism… (Student A).

There was also a sense formulating plans for the future:

> Do we have opportunities to come to you and show you our work? I didn't know that to be fair, maybe I leave too the last minute, to write (Student A).

Students agreed they could very clearly remember their crit feedback. By Level 6 students are beginning to embrace this so to have a student begin to broach this at level 4 was exciting. A deeper more meaningful process of reflection was fostered at this early stage L4 and was evidenced by critical document reflections:

Crit evaluation

> The feedback received during the crit… was very useful, it's made a significant impact and has allowed me to develop further… The idea itself was specifically important to me and I feel with further development it has the potential to be more emotionally impacting and engaging for the audience
>
> (Student B).
>
> I will strive to create something that pushes me out of my comfort zone and forces me to think creatively when problem solving any issues I face"
>
> (Student E)
>
> It was very beneficial to hear the critiques, as they pointed out things I wouldn't have thought of and didn't notice things I thought weren't as good as they could be, which showed how different people interpret the film. It definitely showed how important the technical editing aspects are to the outcome of the film, which I am not very knowledgeable on, so I will try and improve on that
>
> (Student G).
>
> When watching the film back myself at the crit screening, I agreed with the comments on sound that were made. I am pleased that the parts intended to be funny had the desired effect, as this shows that I have developed greater understanding for the genre and target audience of the short film
>
> (Student J).
>
> A few of the comments made me think about my approach to making films, a few people said that the characters seemed to lack motivation for the actions they did… In future I would spend more time in choosing actions… and so allow the audience to understand the story more fully
>
> (Student L).

The depth and focus of the reflections reminded me of the positive influence that role reversal can bring and that as a tutor I should not be scared of giving up my role and engage students in tutor activities, as it enabled them to grasp and take charge albeit in a supervised environment (Campbell, 2015).

Conclusions and recommendations

Other staff have subsequently tested the same technique with similarly positive results. In one instance in a second year unit, a student left his crit, marched straight up to the staff office, and demanded MORE feedback! The adjustment in design gave a sense that they had really engaged with the format of the summative group crit, the formal atmosphere, their instruction not to talk, and write down their audience's reaction. A real conclusion was a vivid sense that they remembered the event clearly and knew what they had to do in future. In this case of Screen Drama, this assessment process

gave me a unique opportunity to use the high stakes nature of the event, to focus them on a process attached to audience reaction. Whilst I feel this would be less effective in experimental film and documentary, similarly creative assessment and feedback should be applied.

The observations and interviews of this research study noted a second problem of the crit. This lay in the crit's relationship with assessment. In the students' perception, the crit (irrespective of whether it was at a formative or summative stage of learning) was always closely associated with the moment of assessment and the conferment of grades. This is perhaps not surprising in that the crits were always arranged and led by members of the academic staff and the members of staff who led the crits were also responsible for assessment.

This is an important opportunity for an assessment dialogue, which allows the student an opportunity to practise and develop presentation skills and a verbal articulation of their thoughts to an audience. (Orr, 2005).

The thematic analysis of the data highlighted two key themes from this intervention. The first theme is about the changes in student perception of feedback as there was a sense three weeks later after the event, a growing confidence and understanding that feedback was crucial:

> There didn't seem to be much criticism, what can I improve on? (Student F).

The second theme was student engagement. Once the rules of the crit were laid out, that framework definitely gave a greater number of students the 'freedom' to speak and engage with the process. Too often students are asked to give feedback without guidelines or no sign of payoff for the student whose working they are critiquing. Flipping the process so the students are encouraged to critique so that the student simply has something to write about, creates a platform for wider contributions from normally silent students. We would believe that media students would engage effectively in crits, unfortunately, as Bryan (2004) notes, both staff and students tend to avoid conflict. This can be particularly fraught in creative subjects, which require a certain amount of vulnerability (Austerlitz 2008, Miell and Littleton, 2004). Perhaps greater awareness around group dynamics would allow 'Constructive Controversy' to take place, resulting in more interesting outcomes and preparing students to take an active part in communities within and beyond the workplace (Roberts, 2009, Young and Henquinet, 2000). Observation clearly showed that students with high anxiety and apprehensive, did speak. By taking them through Blooms taxonomy to take them through the process, laying out the rules, and the benefits to the student receiving the feedback, the process created more equality and gained much greater engagement, especially those who are less forward or prone to class engagement.

Limits of Design and success

A large element flawed in the new design was that students gained a lot in learning but were then left to feel their work was not important (student F). This was a shock to me and in my desire to make the unit work, I had forgotten about ending the unit on a high and celebration in the great work created. I had been too focused on the outcome and not the journey – a great reminder from my students.

There was an underlying tacit observation that students looked more ready to progress, they had learned the lesson and they were hungry for more. The study definitely made them think deeper and consider their brief more purposefully: needing to proof read in future was a theme. The fact the intervention was 'live' and at the summative assessment (as opposed to formative) worked because there was a sense of enhanced listening and application. Students were less combative in terms of agreement with their grade. Whilst the design did not give them immediate opportunity to increase their grades like in a formative exercise design like AFL (Assessment for Learning). What it did give an

opportunity for was deep learning as it was a summative assessment, so the learning had greater magnitude. Whilst not actually contributing to their final degree marks, as this was a level 4 assessment, its staging gave weight to what they were learning and how they would remember it.

Key findings

The power of the feedback depends on the context as much as the content. To blur the lines between formative and summative in whatever form that may take can engage the student as an active participant able to give, receive, reflect and write their own feedback. Something transformational they can take with them for their lives.

Whereas some students have an apprentice style of learning suitable to a group co-learning dynamic, other students, particularly in our large cohorts will learn more 'developmentally'. Some through more literal 'transmission' teaching and others may need some 'social reform' styles (Pringle, 2009; Pratt 2002). Some students wanted feedback to apply specifically to certain things, not just learning outcomes – as specific as possible and not general. Some students wanted actual verbal feedback sessions after their marks and feedback issued. Others wanted more specific tick box areas - where you can win marks and where you don't.

Future thoughts for change

Moving forward I am considering bringing the group crit forward a week prior before their actual hand in. That way it can combine the assessment for learning with 'occasion' of the crit. A crit 'rough cut' if you will. That way still enables for a screening and celebration once the unit has finished – possibly with student-led awards.

This is one example of how feedback can be creatively used in a way appropriate and subject specific to, in this case your audience, in screen drama. Similar applications to other immersive, documentary, experimental or installation circumstances, may give scope to change the way students perceive and use feedback.

At a time when the variety of technologies available to be creative with and store feedback (e.g. Turnitin, Moodle, Blackboard), it would be useful to begin thinking about summative feedback collectively across years and units, almost as subject on its own, to enable students to actually look at and engage with it, therefore enabling them to evaluate better and use their judgement to bring greater creativity in to their next project.

Conclusion

The key problem in engaging students in summative assessment feedback, is that it is after they have received their grade. Making mandatory assessment points and attendance at certain events such as specifically designed crits, brings that summative feedback in to the assessment itself. Greater creativity is needed to design different opportunities. Even beginning new units/modules which maybe in unconnected subjects, would be a creative and connected way of using feedback, to the immense benefit of students who can then access the power of feedback on learning and assessment (Hattie and Timperley, 2007).

My change is about creating low stakes formative assessment as part of high stakes summative assessment, in this case by doing the crit a week earlier and giving students a chance to reflect and respond.

Summative feedback has traditionally been given a methodical outlook, usually in written form on completion of work and/or verbally if taken up, encouraging the student to be passive. Varied and creative application of feedback both during as well as after, throughout the summative

process/project, can support practice pedagogy to come to life for the student, owing to the stakes being raised and the student attention and engagement being peaked. This makes the student active in the feedback process.

Even a cohort who don't like reading their feedback or engaging in feedback process', can be supported to do so when given parameters of mandatory engagement. Support is needed to put students in situations where they are challenged yet guided through that challenge with these parameters (e.g. rules for how to give feedback, and therefore how to communicate in collaboration/disagree).

The benefit to students are clear when I am willing to make myself more uncomfortable as a tutor. That means managing their emotions by increasing them in a measured manor in an organised environment, with clear parameters. This enables the tutor to encourage the spirit of the student, engage their passion whilst having boundaries and guidance to consciously steer and focus. As a tutor it is therefore vital that I engage with that feedback in my own professional life, to make me a better and more cooperative collaborator and therefore as supportive as possible teacher for my students.

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