**Case Study 3: Assessing learning and exchanging feedback**

**Contextual Background**

As a Photography Specialist Technician, we don’t partake in assessment or formal written feedback and our role is more aligned with positive reinforcement, pastoral care and verbal anecdotal feedback. Often, we work with students throughout their studies to support them in their own undertaking. The challenge is to work alongside academic requirements to help students achieve the skillset required and hit the assessment criteria.

**Evaluation**

When teaching a technical workshop, we use a ‘constructive aligned’ approach in lesson planning and teach our students to assess their own work practically as part of their learning. Biggs highlights in ‘*Using constructive alignment in outcomes-based teaching and learning’* [[1]](#footnote-1)‘The importance of students constructing their learning through relevant activities’ in art and design higher education. I have always found technical workshops most successful when they feel ‘course aligned’ and are embedded within the academic curriculum, scaffolded from a library study making mood boards prior to studio workshop or a shooting challenge prior to an analogue printing workshop. Students are more prepared and have the tools required to get the most out of the learning experience.

**Moving forwards**

As technicians aren’t required to do any formal feedback, our anecdotal exchanges mentioned above are a vital part of cheerleading our students work, regardless of quality or assessment criteria. This is where the technical and academic roles differ. Often, we aren’t even aware of timetable blocks, units, assessment requirements. To move forward, communication between academic and technical staff would massively improve our overall understanding of student’s workload, and how best to support this. We have instigated multiple meetings with course leaders, in hope to improve our alignment, and will continue to do so. Whilst looking at ‘assessing learning and exchanging feedback’ I thought about how within the framework of a technical workshop, there is group guidance hopefully supporting and building a space for ‘exchanging feedback’ amongst peers – often across courses. I often see this reflected in the community feel that our technical spaces have. There is an expectation that students will then return to the facility independently to hone their skills, built into the ‘authentic assessment’ framework, more designed around ‘professional practice’ and ‘real world tasks’ and focused on employability, working with live briefs and external factors, often students are then found weaving their professional and learning environments, using our facilities when required. I have also noticed a shift in student’s mentality surrounding gaining technical skills, I feel like there is a sense that our workshops are a ‘tick box exercise’ and once completed they then move on to the next venture, never focused on improving. This is frustrating and, of course, not true for all, but I think it aligns with an overall lack of attention span, I see it in myself unfortunately, and not understanding how this skill relates directly to their course and their professional life outside of university. I think we must do more on the technical side to ensure the skillset built upon is reflected in the assessment criteria, particularly where constructive alignment and authentic assessment are embedded.

**References**

Biggs, 2007 Ch 4, Using Constructive Alignment in outcomes-based teaching and learning p. 50

1. Biggs, 2007 Ch 4, Using Constructive Alignment in outcomes-based teaching and learning [↑](#footnote-ref-1)