



Teaching Toolkit

Gathering Feedback 1

Author: Paul Surgenor

Email: teachingandlearning@ucd.ie

Date: January 2010

Gathering Feedback 1:

Formative Vs Summative Feedback

Before gathering feedback on teaching it's essential to establish what this data will be used for. In general, there are two main uses: the first is for personal development and can be described as **formative** evaluation; while the second is to provide a quantitative indicator of your teaching, and can be referred to as **summative** evaluation (Black & Wiliam, 1998). These terms originate from work in assessment though can be equally applied to evaluation of teaching, and an awareness of this distinction has been identified as 'crucial' to improving teaching (Laverie, 2002).

A basic overview of this distinction is presented below in Figure 1.

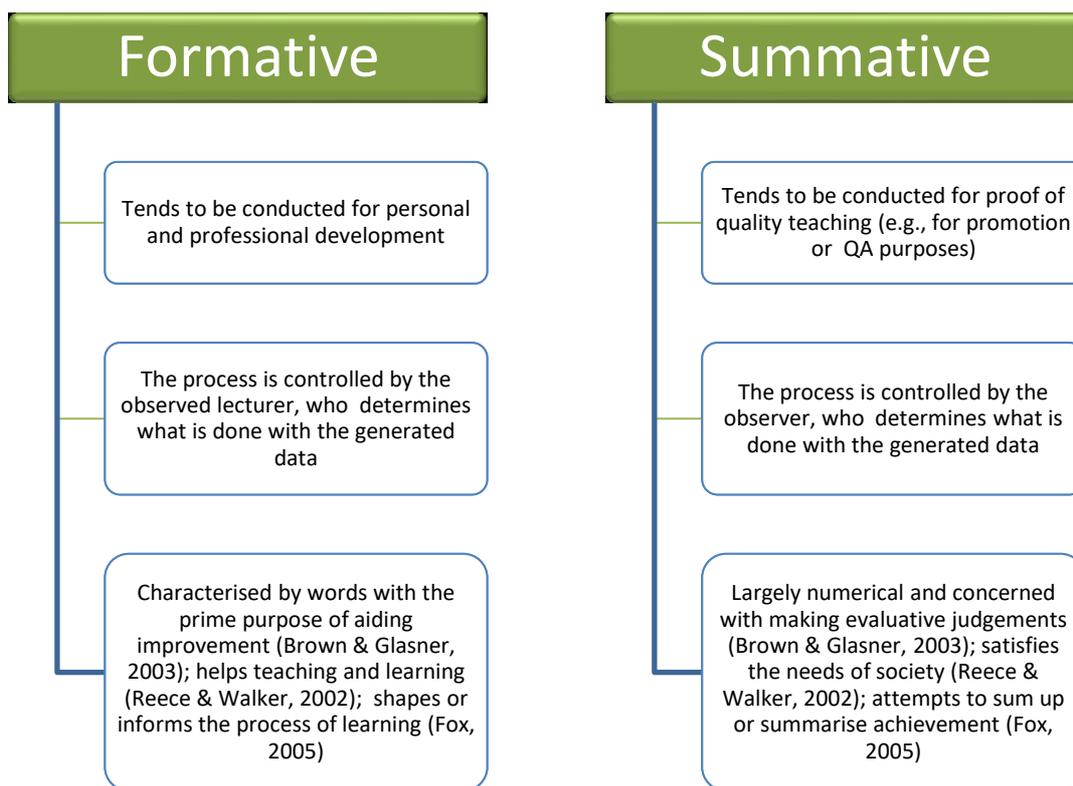


Figure 1: *Distinction between Formative and Summative Observation*

Formative evaluation is largely intrinsically motivated, and relates to engaging in the process to further our understanding and to facilitate future learning. It is generally conducted mid-semester when it's still possible to change or improve elements of the

module. Carmichael, Palmero, Reeve, & Vallenge (2001) found this formative aspects approach offered greatest scope for improvement, primarily because of the issue of control. Since the lecturer knows that they are in control of the information provided (i.e., it cannot be accessed by superiors or used in promotion or resource allocation decisions without their consent) more honest questions can be asked. Rather than striving to elicit comments that would look impressive in a portfolio or to a potential employer, formative evaluation provides an opportunity to find out what may be less effective in your teaching, and to welcome suggestions or comments to rectify this. For this reason feedback from this type of evaluation is used by lecturers develop their teaching (Divoky & Rothermel, 1989; Theall & Franklin, 1991; Marsh & Roche, 1993). Traditionally conducted less frequently and regarded with less importance, formative evaluation has become increasingly widespread in recent years, and should receive as much, if not more, attention than summative assessment (Huxman, Laybourn, Cairncross, Gray, Brown, Goldfinch, & Earl, 2008).

Summative evaluation is predominantly extrinsically motivated and is conducted primarily to obtain a mark or quantitative indicator of teaching performance. This is usually conducted at the end of a course and has less ability to facilitate improvements. The information provides a snapshot of teaching quality which can be used for admin decisions such as pay rise or promotion (Kemp & Kumar, 1990; Cashin & Downey, 1992; Centra, 1994). The data can also be used by students in the selection of courses (Marsh & Roche, 1993) though this is more controversial and is not common practice. While some studies have shown that these can improve modules (Marsh, 1987; Seldin, 1992; Stringer & Finlay, 1993), others have noted that the ratings alone don't automatically lead to module improvements (Murray, 1997; Saroyan & Amundsen, 2001).

In UCD we have piloted a university-wide Student Feedback on Modules project that attempted to include both formative and summative aspects within one questionnaire. This was achieved by including a small number of core questions completed by all participating students (the results of which were made available to Heads of School), and a number of optional questions that lectures could select themselves (the results of which for their own use).

More details on this project can be found at:

http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/projects/Student_Evaluation.html

Sources of information

When gathering information to improve teaching the first (and often only) option many consider is from their students. Brookfield's (1995; 2002) lenses of critically reflective teaching show that more options are available. These are very briefly outlined in Figure 2 below.

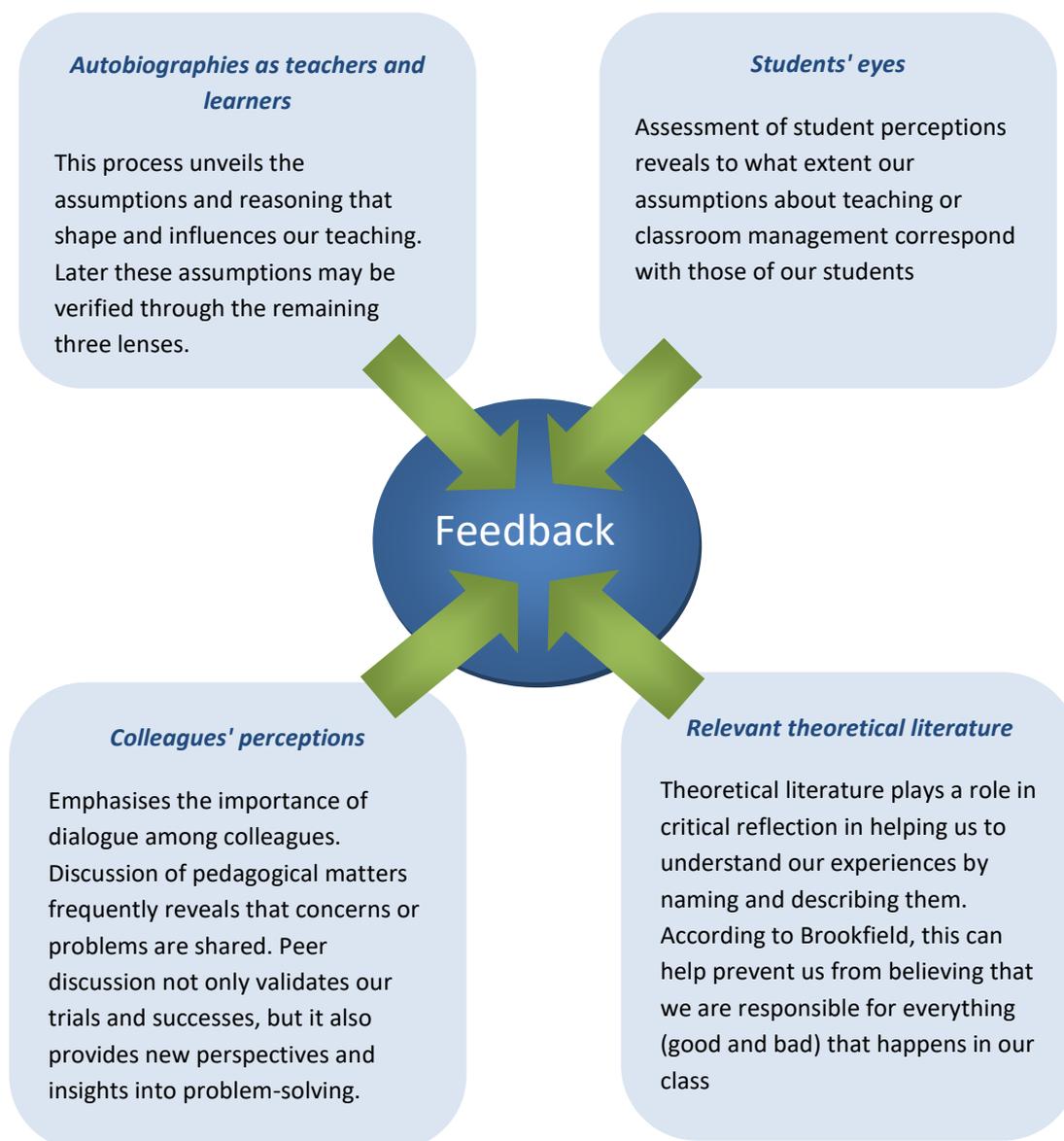


Figure 2: Overview of Brookfield's Four Lenses of Critical Reflection