

**REFLECTIVE PAPER #1**  
**TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS - RESPONDING TO FEEDBACK**  
**Chef Julie Montgomery, Baking and Pastry Professor**

Being a part of the New Faculty Academy has afforded me so many unique opportunities to learn and grow as a professor at George Brown College! One of the many lessons I learned this past semester was the importance of reflective pedagogy in teaching. One quote from our NFA lessons really resonated with me:

“To become critically reflective, we need to find some lenses that reflect back to us a stark and differently highlighted picture of who we are and what we do” -Stephen Brookfield

In other words, it is critically important that we openly seek honest feedback from our learners about our teaching practices. We must then reflect on that feedback, and continue or make changes to our teaching practices based on those reflections.

In Week 4, we were asked to gather student feedback from our classes. I kept the questionnaire fairly simple, with only 3 sections:

1. What are some things your chef does in class that help with your learning, and make the class effective/enjoyable?
2. Is there anything you would like to change about the class material, instructor delivery method, etc that could make your learning experience even better?
3. Are there any additional comments you would like to add?

The students were given time to fill these in and submit them anonymously. Students are often shy to be completely forthcoming on feedback forms, so I encouraged them to be as honest as possible, as this is a tool to help me be the most effective instructor I can be for them!

For question 1, there were similar answers from almost all of the students. They responded that they really appreciate my kind and open demeanor, and said they never feel nervous to ask questions or seek clarification. Many commented about how I am always circulating around class, providing feedback/tips as they work, which they find helpful. They also mentioned that they love my thorough but concise demos, and the fact that I set deadlines for each practical task throughout the day, which helps them to stay focused and manage their time effectively. Lastly, they all appreciated my thorough comments that I include alongside their marks on Brightspace each week.

I took some time to really reflect on these comments, and will share my thoughts. When I was working my way up in the industry, the climate in kitchens was very different. Many of the chefs for whom I worked were almost feared, and I did not feel comfortable to ask them questions or to make mistakes. Although that demeanor is not my nature, I have always been fearful that my kindness might be mistaken for weakness. After reading my feedback, I was assured that this is not the case. I can be firm but fair, and my approachable nature is in fact what garners respect from my students, helping them with their success. For example, I had a student this semester who was in a mental health crisis. She felt comfortable enough to approach me outside of class to disclose this, and indicated that she felt

she could not complete the term. With the student's permission, I approached my course coordinator and we developed a support system with all of her instructors to help the student successfully complete the term and get the mental health resources she needed. This student completed all of her course work with outstanding results and a sense of accomplishment, which she relayed to me in a lovely heartfelt note at the end of our last class. To have the ability to help her in this way was truly a gift.

I also plan on continuing my practice of circulating the classroom as often as possible, so I can give feedback to students as issues arise. I think some of the best learning comes when students can see mistakes as they happen, and learn to correct them in the moment. Critical thinking and quick problem resolution is so important in our industry. I was also so glad to see that the students really appreciate my timelines set during class. Time management is imperative for success in the kitchen, and holding students accountable in this way instills best practices early on in their career.

Lastly, I was very pleased to read the positive feedback from my learners regarding the helpfulness of my thorough grading comments. I will continue this practice, and try to encourage higher order thinking in class during grading, by asking students to verbally evaluate their own products as well.

The only comment I received on my questionnaire with regard to what students would change about my class, was a request for slightly shorter demos, to allow more time for their practical work. This gave me pause for much reflection. Although most students were happy with demonstration length, it is so important to take into consideration those who may struggle a bit more with timing. I believe I came up with a very successful compromise. During Covid, a small team of us recorded many of the practical demonstrations to facilitate online delivery. These videos are still included in our Brightspace shells as supplemental resources. So, for the rest of the semester, if there were days that seemed extremely heavy with content, I would omit one or two small live demos (usually something very simple), and required students to view the videos online before class, so they were prepared. This was a very helpful time saving solution, without compromising student learning.

Not all feedback comes in the form of answers on a formal questionnaire. I had a graduating student approach me in the final week of classes to thank me for being one of his favourite teachers. He continued to say that he felt this way not only because of my passion for the material being taught, but also because of my passionate encouragement of student success. I had similarly lovely feedback from a fellow Chef and NFA colleague who came to observe one of my classes. She sent me a message afterward, which read in part, "I cannot thank you enough for having me in your class yesterday. I loved the atmosphere and your students are so lucky to have you. I enjoyed every bit of it, plus learned a few tricks. Thanks. You are kind, attent[ive] and caring with your students and it is very obvious they acknowledge that by seeing the way they look up to you and create beautiful things. I feel very honoured to be in the same team as you." This type of feedback only pushes me to try even harder to be the best instructor I can be for them. There is always something more to learn and always room to grow.

I am committed to continuing to encourage feedback from my learners as I move forward - not only at specific points in each semester, but on an ongoing basis. I want students to feel comfortable to come to me (anonymously or not) with any questions or concerns they have **when** they have them, so I can find a way to address it immediately. They should have no fear of admonishment on my part whatsoever for their transparency. I will continue to seek out honest feedback from my colleagues as well.

“Every teacher needs to improve, not because they are not good enough, but because they can be even better” - Dylan William