

## Framing feedback practices in work placements for student learning

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### Research Domains

Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

### Abstract

There have been major shifts in thinking about feedback practices in university courses but the application of these ideas to the challenges students face on work placements have had far less attention. Typically, in placements there are limited opportunities for students to engage in structured feedback processes and therefore responsibility for feedback processes lies primarily with students. This paper proposes a learning-centred framework for planning and conducting feedback in complex placement settings. It draws on a review of literature on feedback in placements and on ideas from reflection in learning from experience. It attends to the 'before, during, and after' of experience at the level of an overall placement and the level of task performance. It considers time and sequencing in feedback processes, and the role of students in attending to cues and operating with others in environments where work demands often compete with students' learning needs.

### Full paper

Boundaries between university and the world of work are opening further. One way this is happening is in the increasing trend for students to undertake placements in work settings as part of their undergraduate courses. Previously, this only occurred in vocational courses but now placements can be found in any degree within the overall banner of work-integrated learning. This involves credit-bearing, assessed parts of degree programs undertaken in workplaces or the community. Unlike traditional placements which often involved supervised practice in placements, work-integrated learning today is more loosely-coupled to courses (Ajjawi et al 2020) and may not require any direct supervision from the higher education institution. Such arrangements face students with a particular challenge: on a day-to-day basis they must manage their own learning without access to immediate guidance. They may draw on the resources and personnel of the workplace, but in a context in which the dominant priority is work, not learning.

The key feature of courses which adapt to the needs of individual students is that of feedback. Within the academy, feedback is typically structured around formal, often assessed, tasks with a person designated to provide feedback information on students' performance in a timely fashion. Within placements, students find feedback wherever it is to be had, from whoever is prepared to contribute, whenever it suits the exigencies of work. The problem of feedback in placements is not simply the

utilisation of provided information at specific points of time, but managing the whole process in line with what students need to learn. Conventional models of feedback which fit the coursework context do not transfer to the complexities of diverse contexts, responsibilities, relationships and forms of work.

This paper examines this challenge and develops a robust framework to support learners, and the diverse range of others who may help them, to conceptualise and enact worthwhile feedback processes in situ. While basic concepts of feedback do not change, the ways in which they can be deployed and enacted are profoundly influenced by the context. The proposed framework assumes that the main person responsible for initiating and managing feedback encounters is necessarily the learner as while limited organised feedback activities might sometimes be available, these are not sufficient for learning to be effective.

Fortuitously, workplaces are settings in which practitioners commonly use feedback with and for each other. Students need to be able to enter this world and find a meaningful position within it. Drawing on a systematic review of literature on feedback in placements (mostly representing tightly-coupled courses such as medicine and teaching), using ideas from scholarship on feedback, and positioning these within a model of learning from complex experience (Boud and Walker 1990), this paper proposes a framework that draws attention to and prompts action at key points in (a) the setting up of a placement as a whole and (b) engaging in particular sets of tasks within it. The first part builds on new conceptions of feedback that have developed in the last decade (Winstone and Carless 2019) and identifies ways in which they can be mapped on to placement experiences. The second introduces a two-stage framework for decision-making for feedback in placement settings.

It is structured around particular foci: on the notion of feedback, on the affordances of practice and on learners navigating the tensions between working and learning. It considers key occasions: firstly, prior to, during and following the placement at the macro level of feedback and, secondly, at the micro level of the practising of tasks. A particular feature of the framework is its emphasis on how a learner can manage feedback processes through elicitation, processing and enacting outcomes in new situations, and the links that need to be built with other players, learning outcomes and the purposes of the placement.

The elements of the framework are justified and illustrated with examples from the literature or extrapolations from the literature in the case of limited documented evidence from loosely-coupled placements. The aim is to provide a model that learners can use in their preparation for, engagement in and debriefing of feedback encounters. Issues and strategies are discussed for how learners can manage the tensions between immediate expectations of work and their capacity to draw learning from the incidents they meet in the heat of everyday practice.

The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of feedback and needed feedback literacy in placements with working with others in the setting: supervisors, peers and other workers, working with cues and inputs from the environment.

## References

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