Feedback in doctoral supervision: taking a sociomaterial approach in literature review

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deakin.edu.au/learning/enhancing-your-practice/cradle
Studies of doctoral supervision

Four types of studies seen in the literature

• Overbearing supervisors vs student autonomy
• Impact of government and institutional regulation
• Specialised pedagogical practice: research as education
• Post-structural position: supervision as power and reconstitution of academic discourses and structures

(Bastalich 2017)

What about feedback??
What is feedback? What is its purpose? Who is involved? What is involved? Where does it happen?
Changing conceptions of feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As input</th>
<th>As process (learner focus)</th>
<th>As process (process focus)</th>
<th>As process (outcome focus)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one’s performance (Hattie &amp; Timperley 2007)</td>
<td>a state or activity of engaging actively with feedback processes, thus emphasizing the fundamental contribution and responsibility of the learner (Winstone et al. 2017)</td>
<td>a dynamic and co-constructive interaction in the context of a safe and mutually respectful relationship to support learning (Ajjawi and Regehr 2018)</td>
<td>processes in which learners make sense of performance-relevant information about their work to improve their learning (Henderson et al 2019)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Changing conceptions of feedback

What happens
- Information generation
- Process

Where it happens
- Cognitive process
- Relational interaction

Focus
- Teacher does
- Student does
Review aims & methods

- To understand how feedback manifests in PhD supervision
- To synthesise rich descriptions of feedback practices
- To inform feedback pedagogies in PhD supervision

Framework-based synthesis (Dixon-Wood 2011)
Prompting questions to design the framework
A sociomaterial approach to feedback in HDR supervision?
Qualitative synthesis

1. Reflect on what feedback is
2. Discuss framework
3. Extract according to framework
4. Discuss & refine framework
5. More extraction
6. Each researcher conducts synthesis across their own papers according to framework
7. Discuss findings
8. More papers, more synthesis
9. Lead researcher combines syntheses
10. We reflect on findings
## The framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework category</th>
<th>Including rich qualitative insights into …</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social and cultural influences on feedback performances</td>
<td>Disciplinary cultures, PhD context, providing access, tacit criteria, pre-judging, institutional, milestones and standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal perspectives and influences on feedback performances</td>
<td>Prior experiences, including of feedback, traits, conceptions of supervision/research/feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materialities of the feedback performances</td>
<td>Written comments, feedback dialogues and discussions, spaces of feedback, technologies of feedback, avoidances/absences of feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal aspects of the feedback performances</td>
<td>Negotiation, credibility judgements, supervision team dynamics, peers, power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate impact of the feedback performances</td>
<td>Emotions, perceptions, impacts outside candidature, feedback labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporalities, including multiple impacts of the feedback performances</td>
<td>Development of supervisor and candidate, feedback changing over time, longer term aspects of the feedback process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Literature search**

Search terms: supervis* AND (PhD OR doctora*) AND ("higher education" or university)

Databases: Scopus, ProQuest Central, Ebscohost (ERIC, Academic Search Complete, Education Source)

Final search 26 & 27 July 2018

Quality assessment based on rich nature of data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusion</th>
<th>Exclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td>Focuses on the supervisory relationship or relationships;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Subject is a research doctorate (not other higher degrees), on any topic, and from any country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Contains information on feedback;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supervisors or candidates or documents can be source of empirical work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Study design** | Contains rich qualitative data (including case studies); | Conceptual – no data |
| | • Conceptual studies | Quantitative studies, e.g. surveys, scale development |
| | • No rich data to contribute to the synthesis. | |

| **Study characteristics** | Must be in English | No full text |
| | Must be peer reviewed | |
Search process

Total citations 4605
Screened by title 3314
Screened by abstract 1125
Full text read 318
Included in review 56
Duplicates removed 1291
Excluded on title 2189
Excluded on abstract 807
Excluded on full text 262

99 No information about feedback practice
47 No rich data to contribute
46 Does not examine supervisory relationship/primarily about other phenomena
32 Quantitative
19 Undergraduate, or postgraduate other than doctorate
14 Conceptual, no data
2 Duplicate
2 No full text
1 Poor quality research
Contexts of feedback practices

National contexts
• Economic-political agendas led to “fast supervision” & completion rather than “independent agency” (Fitzpatrick & Fitzpatrick 2015, Carter & Kumar 2017)

Academic and disciplinary cultures
• Conventions according to discipline and discourse

Institutional contexts
• Supervisor constellations, progress requirements
How feedback is (not) enacted
“...I printed out the chapter on one side of the paper only and spread it across several tables .. it became clear to her that the chapter lacked a logical structure. This practical strategy had a profound effect on getting Liang to organise her text logically and coherently.”

(Chatterjee & Rosetto, p586 )

“I sat there with him, at the keyboard, I don’t like pen and paper because I believe that using a red pen on a colleague’s work is detrimental.”

(Blicblau 2009, p206)
“I tell my students . . . ‘you must not be offended or shocked, or horrified by the amount of red ink that comes back. It is absolutely and utterly nothing personal’. If you say that to students, they’ll take it on board.”

(Aitchison, Catterall, Ross & Burgin 2012, p440)

“We have a cup of coffee, mull over what he’s been reading, talk about his ideas – basically to embed him in the department and give him a sense of belonging”

(Delamont, Parry & Atkinson 1998, p165)
"We found, without exception, that students refused to comment on their supervisors’ performance and many participants, including the supervisors themselves, were reluctant to put sensitive information on a progress report."

(Mewburn, Tokareva, Cuthbert, Sinclair & Barnacle 2014, p517)
Dynamics of feedback relationships

Power

Co-constructed

Beyond the dyad

Emotional responses
“I always make it clear that anything I say is merely in the nature of advice, it may be good advice which you ignore at your peril but nevertheless if you choose to disagree . . . then that's your responsibility.”

(Acker, Hill & Black 1994, p489)
“...I don’t want to be seen as either defensive or unable to handle criticism. I often feel very frustrated by this because I feel both that she has not put very much effort in reading or understanding my work, but I also often feel ashamed of the quality of my work and overwhelmed with guilt and despair ...”

(Devine & Hunter 2017, p340)
What supervisors and candidates bring to feedback practices

“I could never be the supervisors that I’ve had”

(Robertson 2017, p417)

Student feedback needs intertwined with supervision needs
Supervisors drew on their past experiences (positive and negative)
Supervisors’ interest and expertise on the topic
Less investigation of candidates’ prior experiences of feedback
Feedback as a temporal practice

Student responses to feedback

• Change assumed or taken for granted

Feedback changes over the lifecycle of the candidature

“At first they would offer suggestions, but in the last year would just circle things and expect me to know how to improve”

(Caterall, Aitchison, Ross & Bergin, 2011, p4)
Discussion

Feedback is powerful; power shapes feedback
- Benefits and pitfalls of a single intense relationship
- Mutual negotiation is critical

Pedagogical practices: talk and text
- Written comments closer to traditional notions of feedback
- Discussion more development and less evaluative – ephemerality can be problematic
Conclusions

Taking a sociomaterial perspective on feedback resulted in a different type of literature review

Feedback is a powerful part of doctoral supervision
Function of talk is overlooked
Feedback can promote independence over time
Feedback is a team activity
Candidates, supervisors, and institutions all have important responsibilities and roles to play
Productive feedback practices

Described within the reviewed literature
Talk with texts
Orienting and inducting into the discipline
Relational models
Multi-purposed commentary on work
Multiple perspectives
Productive feedback practices

Described in higher education literature
Orientation to standards
Goal setting
Developing independence through building evaluative judgement
Establishing expectations

Sadler 2010, Boud & Molloy 2013, Tai et al 2018
Productive feedback practices

Sociomaterial interpretations
Half-yearly team review of feedback processes attending to shared responsibility, opportunities and outcomes
Closing the loop to supervisors on effectiveness of textual comments
Institutional implications

- Multi-supervisory teams
- Doctoral groups
- Supervisor & candidate education on feedback
- Mechanisms for review of feedback processes
References


References – included papers


Paper characteristics

Year of publication

- Pre-2000: 2
- 2000 - 2004: 2
- 2005 - 2009: 14
- 2010 - 2014: 15
- 2015 - 2018: 23

@DrJoannaT
Paper characteristics
Paper characteristics

Discipline

- More than one discipline: 22
- Humanities: 12
- Education/psychology: 10
- STEM: 6
- Business: 4
- N/A: 2

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