Lecturer perspectives of using technology for student feedback

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Lecturers' experiences of developing feedback practice
using technology

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ABSTRACT

There has been an underrepresentation of academic staff in the discourse around assessment feedback; research has tended to give priority to the student perspective (Evans, 2013). If feedback is to be enhanced, more needs to be done to understand the perspectives of lecturers and others who have responsibility for providing it. This paper begins to explore the experience of academic staff who are working with technology in their own feedback practice. It reports on a narrative interview study of sixteen practitioners in five different UK higher education institutions, who were using a range of tools and technologies. Through their stories of practice lecturers describe the choices that they must make, and they share the factors that shape practice. Influences include underlying beliefs, personal biography, academic identity, and recent experience of family members, collegial networks, and quality management systems. The research reinforces the need for appreciative approaches in developing academic practice. The findings of this paper are especially relevant for academic developers, learning technologists and others who seek to support feedback practices using technology.

KEYWORDS
Feedback assessment technology interviews lecturers
Why feedback and technology?

- The feedback challenge
- Use of technology - *uncritical acceptance* by universities
- **Staff voices missing** in the discourse (Evans, 2013)
- Harper Adams' **own feedback dilemmas**
- **Working better** with colleagues and/or feedback
- Understand as a pretext to change (careful here ....)
“Well meaning as these interventions are, there is little evidence that they have had any effect on student satisfaction ratings in national surveys, and, indeed, there is a growing number of studies now showing that such enhancements of teacher feedback do not result in improved student learning”. (Nicol, Thomson, and Breslin, 2014, p.103)
The problems with feedback (you know what they are!)

Redoubled efforts but more of the same (Robinson, Pope, & Holyoak, 2013).
Technology in feedback

- Feedback technology goes back to early 2000’s
- BUT universities have been slow to adopt
- Small-scale research studies
- Limited criticality
- Self selected researchers
- Conflation
- The risk of romantisizing (Clapham, 2012)
- Representation
- Skewed debate
Methods & Methodology

Tell your story:
Critical realism + narratives
What else?
Why do you use technology for feedback? .......

What factors influence yours (or your colleagues’ approaches to feedback?)
Findings: Why use technology?

- External examiner feedback
- Team choices
- Change of delivery mode
- Realisations about writing
- Change in student group (international)
- Workload increase and a search for efficiency
Dense rationale

- Marketisation
- Students as consumers
- Technology normalisation
- Widening participation
- Requirements for accountability
- Internationalisation
- Fee environment
- Recognition
Feedback beliefs

1. Universal acceptance of feedback importance

2. Varied ‘power’ to influence the impact feedback (affects volume and type and tech choices)

3. Ideas vs structure (degree of negotiation varies according to power)

4. Limited confidence in power of officialised feedback influences choices

5. Professionalism (how much feedback is part if the role)

Challenges the idea that poor feedback is apathy (linked to academic identity and beliefs about feedback impact)
And what about technology?

1. Where it can make a difference to student use (how so? ..... Media, access)

2. Where it can make a difference to upholding professional responsibility

And .... Malcolm and Greta
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category descriptor</th>
<th>Confidence</th>
<th>Frequency of tools use</th>
<th>Connection of technology to identity</th>
<th>Leadership in technology use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Super champion</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technophile</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate native</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a goers</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When it really matters</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“There's only so many hours in a day and you've got to make decisions about what you're going to do with those hours and what's going to be best for both your students and for yourself and your career … I think some colleagues have got kind of drawn into IT, and they do a lot of work with IT, but then five years later, they're wondering why they've not been made [Principal Lecturer], and it's because they've not been putting time into the [research]” (Lecturer 11).
Influences on practice

• Family experiences
• Professional experience
• Media preference (mine)
• Beliefs about student learning preferences of students
• Emotional concern
• Fit with existing practice (rubrics)
• Fit with structure or ‘ideas’ emphasis of feedback intent
• Social practices
  – Training
  – Acculturation
  – Specialist teams
• Quality management
• Efficiency and enhancement
Social process

- **Acculturation** – shown the way
- Informal networks – **corridors of awesomeness** and kitchens of creativity
- Formal networks – the super power of the **course team**
- The **e-learning hub**
Spreading practice

• Acculturation
• Office location, campus location
• Matching (knowing the options)
• Technology first – externality
• Course team
Quality

• Uncertainty
  – Experience and attitude
  – E.g. Requirements for anonymous marking

- I will use stickers on my screen
- I will defer my use of technology
- I’ll press on anyway!
- I’ll find a tech solution
Quality: Responses

• Use of written word:
  – Compliance
  – Negotiation and consultation
  – Change agents

• Second marking
  – Reluctance
  – Change opportunity
  – Persuasion
5 conceptions of time

1. A primary aim
2. An appreciated benefit
3. An aspiration as practice developed
4. A relative concept
5. A veto on innovation; when a technology is too burdensome it is rejected.
Fractured practice

- Alienation of those not involved
- Perceived poor feedback
- Lack of willingness to use technology
- Workload imbalances
• Under the waterline ......
• Ecosystem
What next?

1. **Systems** thinking about change (But systems which complement academic identity)
2. Forming ways to work with (accept or change) different **academic identities**
3. Consider the **fault lines** in practice (tech and feedback) – appreciate them? Build links between?
4. **QA** and clarity (or do we like a murky space?)
5. 6. **STOP** considering efficiencies without consideration of enhancement
6. Develop feedback **consciousness**
7. **Change** as a trigger for reframing practice
Next

- Spaces and feedback practice
- Structure and ideas – orientations
- Critical realism as a methodology
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