

**The assessment of work integrated learning: Symptoms of personal change**

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## **THE ASSESSMENT OF WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING:**

### **Symptoms of Personal Change\***

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## **THE ASSESSMENT OF WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING:**

### **Symptoms of Personal Change**

Work placements are an accepted part of academic curricula. In order to assess their value it is important to clearly identify what such programs offer that is different from existing courses. It is also necessary to develop assessment instruments that take their unique features into account. This analysis, which must be seen as a work-in-progress, advances a number of propositions about experiential learning and then uses them as a framework to establish criteria for evaluating student work. These criteria emphasise experiential learnings and the way academic concepts are applied in the field as individuals move from students to novice professionals.

## **THE ASSESSMENT OF WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING:**

### **Symptoms of Personal Change**

Work placements are used in academic programs to prepare professionals in fields as diverse as social work, nursing, teaching, psychology, business, and environmental science. Its use in criminology programs is legitimised by a number of studies (Breci and Martin 2000; Lersch 1997; Parilla and Smith-Cunnien 1997; Stone and McLaren 1999; Swanson, King and Wolbert 1997) that address curriculum design and the expected learning outcomes for students. What is not found in these studies is an analysis of “how students make sense” of this experience; procedural learning within a workplace needs to be turned into propositional forms if it is to be assessed. Brookfield (1996:62) asserts that understanding the experience of students as they learn provides us with opportunities to construct *connections between what we want them to do and their own concerns and expectations*. Without this, course designs are based on intuitions of what constitutes “good teaching” without testing the efficacy of the process.

Over the last 30 years there has been a marked discounting of the respect in which the professionalism of tertiary teachers is held. The old professionalism meant that a tertiary teacher was expected to make detailed context-specific judgements, and, when this involved the transmission of fine-grained skills, the detailed decisions made by thoughtful practitioners were paramount. Current practices in professional education place procedural knowledge at the centre of the learning process but there is a surprising absence of hard-headed critical analysis into how experiential and practical programs actually work. Stasz and Brewer (1998) have highlighted that most of the literature on work placements focuses on procedural steps rather than on what is achieved for the students for whom it has been established.

What follows is a first step to identify “symptoms of learning” in experiential contexts. It is up to program designers to develop the suggestions offered to fit their own programs and institutional contexts. After a brief introduction to the context from which this data is drawn, it is discussed in a framework that will allow a curriculum to be developed through what Peters (in Stenhouse 1975) has called *principles of practice* rather than the traditional objectives model.

### **The Context**

Field Placement is a final year work placement course offered by the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University, Australia. The degree is designed to provide a liberal social science education, which provides students with a broad understanding of legislative frameworks, social justice and human service operations, as well as enabling them to develop research and conceptual abilities. The work placement subject is structured and requires students to design, implement and critique a negotiated work-related project, in an organisational setting of their choice. This project involves 100 hours, which is managed throughout the semester and students are required to:

1. Develop with their supervisor a *learning plan* that focuses the direction and experiences they desire for their learning.
2. Demonstrate reflective practice through the completion of a journal.
3. Attend compulsory workshops.

Field Placement is designed to enable students to integrate theory and practice and to draw upon the nature of scholarship and knowledge in the human sciences. It is a partnership between the students, the university and the participating organisations. All of the parties involved assume responsibilities and become involved in a joint process similar to that advocated by Palomba and Banta (1999, Chapter 3).

Bates, Hardacre, Gant and Wilkie (1996) claim that such a placement provides an opportunity for students to develop another level of understanding of themselves and the studies they are about to complete. They identify the experience as a time of confidence building that is related to having a skill or completing a task, which is acknowledged by an organisation as valid but is beyond the academic environment. They have found that students report that their greatest learning occurs in non-theoretical areas and involves the correction of misconceptions about workplace “reality,” new skills, time management, the development of self-confidence, and an increased awareness of career options. Baxter Magolda (1999) refers to this process as “self-authorship” as students incorporate their newfound learnings into their existing self-concept.

Student journals indicate that the significant things that happen during a work placement tend to be unpredictable, with each placement providing different challenges. Details of this learning cannot be specified in advance (skill by skill and item by item) because the moments of challenge cannot be predicted and this, in turn, means that specific behavioural objectives cannot be determined before the event. The “content” of the learning is not unimportant but by its nature its detail can only be described in fairly general terms. What is important are the attitudes and values that shape the student’s learning strategies.

### **Assessment**

The assessment of a student’s performance in this particular program involves an evaluation of the ultimate effectiveness of the learning plan that is developed and the way it is expanded and modified as the semester proceeds. The student’s performance in the workshop sessions is evaluated according to the general level of participation, the willingness to share and to offer constructive help to others, and the flexibility and range of communicative responses offered in class. The journal (sometimes referred to as the student’s folio) is also graded on a global assessment based on minimal instructions supplied to the student at the beginning of the

program. At present, this judgement is both subjective and holistic with the lecturer balancing the various criteria with relative weightings varying from student to student. Sometimes a low score on a particular criterion simply indicates a detail that the student has overlooked, whereas in a different context a similar score might show that the student has missed a fundamental point to the whole program.

This subjective assessment has been adequate because the same lecturer has been able to assess all of the students and any doubts about the validity of the assessment or the consistency of the results could be resolved in discussion with others. There are now indications that the program is likely to expand, and, in order for the assessment to be consistent when several staff are involved, it has become necessary for the criteria to be stated more explicitly.

### **Towards Criteria**

The following analysis of practice involves looking in detail at some of the students' journal entries in order to understand what the preconditions are for them to take risks and instigate learning that involves deep personal change. The criteria that follow reflect the values and considerations that have arisen in discussions about the gradings being awarded. It should be noted that these criteria are provisional and will need to be developed further if reliable assessments are to be made by a larger group of markers. In such circumstances criterion statements would need to be specified in scales that offer examples of journal entries that reflect each level of achievement.

There is a personal and emotional dimension to the following analysis that could seem to be too anecdotal, unusual, irrelevant, or just "unscientific" to some readers. However, it is just as important to recognise and acknowledge the significance and importance of emotion as it is to maintain the detachment required to draw binding conclusions. If we are to assess student performance so that this is taken into account, we must be prepared to spend time developing



our instruments. Reid (1989:14) calls what we are attempting to assess *experience knowledge*, and claims that it is *not separate from or opposed to cognition or understanding* (Best 1989:78) but underlies both.

The development of work placement curricula is of necessity a value-based activity and judgements need to be based on propositions about learning rather than on specifically prescribed objectives (Raths 1971). A number of authors who have contributed to the adult learning literature (Friere 1972; Knowles 1979, 1980; Mezirow 1981; Rogers 1969) agree, and the propositions offered by Knowles (1984:55-61) highlight the need to know, the learner's self-concept and the role of the learner's experience and readiness to learn. Biggs (1991:218-221) showed that the person's life-centered orientation to learning and motivation for learning are also critical, and he highlighted four principles: motivation, activity, interpersonal interaction, and knowledge. More recently, Boud, Cohen and Walker (1993:8-16) have advanced five propositions that assist us in understanding the learning that occurs from experience: they claim that (1) experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning; (2) learners actively construct their experience; (3) learning is a holistic process; (4) learning is socially and culturally constructed; and (5) learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs.

It is important that whatever criteria are being used, they should not be thought of as discrete categories but rather as integral aspects of a learning process that encompasses the totality of the experience and becomes a component of the development of deep learning. As a collating tool, Boud et al.'s overlapping propositions are used to illustrate particular aspects of the experiential learning. As they point out:

Learning involves much more than an interaction with an extant body of knowledge; learning is all around us, it shapes and helps create our lives – who we are, what we do. It involves dealing with complex and intractable problems, it requires personal commitment,

it utilises interaction with others, it engages our emotions and feelings, all of which are inseparable from the influence of context and culture (Boud, et al. 1993:1).

For the purposes of this analysis, Boud et al.'s (1993) propositions have been modified so that they can be used to categorise the students' reflections on learning experiences associated with their work placements in the criminology and criminal justice areas. They enable us to group the criteria into five categories as follows.

The journal should provide evidence that:

1. The work placement experience has been the foundation of and the stimulus for learning.
2. The learner has actively constructed the work placement experience as it has evolved.
3. The work placement learning has been a holistic experience.
4. The work placement learning has been socially and culturally constructed during the course of the experience.
5. The work placement learning has been influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it has occurred.

The criteria suggested in Table 1 are in the form of "symptoms of learning" that are likely to appear in the journal. For convenience, the categories have been broken into sub-categories, which deal with similar issues. It should be noted, however, that there is considerable overlap between categories, sub-categories and criteria, and this taxonomy is only one of many that would be equally valid. Journal extracts have been chosen because they illustrate a particular point or because they represent an important insight. As such they are examples that illustrate that a certain kind of learning has been achieved: they do not necessarily represent exemplars of particularly strong work.

**TABLE 1 HERE**

**Category 1 – The journal should provide evidence that the work placement experience has been the foundation of and the stimulus for learning.**

The work placement course design is focused on the integration of theory and practice. Any suggestion that practice is necessarily derived from the theory is avoided; the goal of the course is to encourage students to identify and implement the products of scholarship whilst being aware that practice is more than simply an illustration or an application of theory.

Students tend to compartmentalise their knowledge and see their work placement as “practice.” The intention is to enable the students to use appropriate concepts and language to describe and evaluate the effectiveness of practice, creating their own “theoretical” statements, which in turn can be called “generated theory” (Usher and Bryant 1987). This enables them to include all aspects of the practicum experience, including personal and emotional responses, in their own analysis.

It is important to recognise that each student comes to this experience with his/her own major area of study, his/her own projected career paths, and his/her own individual history and experiences. Each is exposed to different contexts and different challenges, resulting in different learnings and different realities. It has been found that when the work placement demands that the student moves beyond his or her own comfort zone, the need to “make sense” of what is happening becomes pressing and urgent. Reports from students indicate that when this occurs the learnings become deep, transferable and permanent. Bates et al. (1996) claim that in order for learning to be further stimulated, each student needs to be committed, motivated and engaged. Chapman (1992) and Proudman (1992) point out that this is more likely to occur if students are investigating or exploring areas they find relevant and meaningful, again privileging the importance of felt experience.

### 1.1 Selecting the Learning Task

The difficulty with leaving choice entirely in the hands of the students is that sometimes they can become so focused and immersed in the excitement of the experience that they forget, or are not interested in, reflecting on the learning that is occurring. It is the process of reflection that provides the opportunity for students to turn their experience into something more than uncontested procedural knowledge (Mezirow 1981). Without it there can be no integration between experiential and propositional knowledge. When this does occur, it allows the student to actively engage in discussions, which interrogate the basis of their knowledge and lead to the development of deep learning (Boud et al. 1993; Parilla and Smith-Cunnien 1997). For this reason we ask them to articulate why the choice has been made.

*Criterion 1.11*

The journal provides evidence that the student has had significant input into the initial selection of the learning task.

*Criterion 1.21*

The journal provides evidence that the student has clearly understood the relevance of the selected learning task to his or her past experiences.

The experience of being in a work environment they have chosen themselves, and the responsibility of completing a work-related task, is the first step in students' learning. The activities are new or, at the very least, are an adaptation or extension of previously learned material. In all cases the tasks demand that students learn work-specific knowledge such as office rules and behaviour; they begin to understand power relationships, political agendas, networking and researching in a non-academic environment.

## 1.2 Intrinsic Motivation

In order to stimulate the learning beyond the foundation of perceived relevance, it is important that students be motivated (both intrinsically and extrinsically) in their learning. Intrinsic

motivation is regarded by many to be the most powerful force for deep learning (Biggs 1991; Biggs and Telfer 1987) because the desire to learn comes from within the student.

After Rose decided to learn how to use her computer she wrote “As soon as you rang I thought, ‘Oh, I better do something on the Internet,’ and that helped me a lot. I undertook a two-day course on how to use the Internet.” This motivation continued during the course of the work experience and extended to her decision to learn how to use a spreadsheet program: “I have organised to do a two-Saturday course on Excel 97. I was inspired to do this as I have learnt that [the organisation] uses this program.”

This leads to two complementary criteria:

*Criterion 1.21*

The journal provides evidence that the desire to learn some specific new information or skill has arisen as the selected learning task is being completed.

*Criterion 1.22*

The journal provides evidence that the student has acted upon this intrinsic motivation.

### 1.3 Constructing Meaning

The most useful students’ learnings will be those that can be generalised and applied to other situations.

*Criterion 1.31*

The journal provides evidence that the student has constructed and articulated propositional meaning about the learning task in written form and that this meaning is new for the student.

The work experience course demands that students interact on a one-to-one basis with their supervisors and other associated work colleagues. They are also encouraged to initiate interaction with a specified academic advisor. Andrew reported “Having to explain the

project to the academic staff member helped to clarify the issues in my mind. It actually made me think about what I'm doing, put it into words and try and explain it the way that the academic could understand.”

Biggs (1991: 219-220) refers to this “academic languaging” as *hierarchical interaction* as opposed to *lateral interaction*, which is peer discussion and exploration of issues. Many students report being influenced by discussions with each other. These discussions are then more formally extended within the compulsory workshops where semi-structured exercises encourage the students to see more general implications. Alison recorded:

You made us talk about what our positive experiences were as well as our negative ones. I had not thought about it until you raised the issues with us. It made me more aware so that I can critically enlighten myself again. When I went back [to the placement] I thought, ‘Oh, that was my negative experience or my positive experience.’ It’s raised those issues consciously for me.

#### Criterion 1.32

The journal provides evidence that the student has an ability to use an increasingly generalised level of abstraction when articulating specific learnings.

Given that the work placement occurs in the final semester of study, there is an expectation that students will have a foundation of content knowledge and an ability to acquire any additional information that is necessary in the specific context. Students acquire knowledge from their experience, but it is only when they are capable of linking the experience with existing knowledge that the learning can become transferable. After encountering an ethical problem in the workplace Cindy referred to some of her lecture notes. In her journal she wrote: “I have finally realised why we did a subject on Accountability and Ethics as part of our course structure, as accountability is the basic principle on which a harmonious and just social system is based.”

This leads to a further criterion, which may only be achieved by some students.

Criterion 1.33

The journal provides evidence that the student has gained a genuine realisation of a broad governing abstract principle.

**Category 2 – The journal should provide evidence that the learner has actively constructed the work placement experience as it has evolved.**

Experience informs learning and in order to understand what sense the student is making of the experience we need to accept that students are developing their own meanings as the event proceeds. The importance of the student's awareness of his or her own needs has already been discussed in relation to the selection of the task but this needs to be an ongoing cycle of response and feedback. Individual interpretations are based on past history, experiences and knowledge (Boud et al. 1993; McGill and Beaty 1995), but they also involve a modification of the student's expectations and the anticipation of the practice experience (Boud et al. 1993; Solas 1991). Ultimately the process may lead to a redefinition of the task itself.

2.1 Modifying the Learning Task

The integrity of the workplace experience depends upon a partnership between the student, the organisation, and the university. The student learns best if he or she is willing and open to the total experience, and McGill and Beaty (1995) argue that by structuring reflection into the process students are provided with a framework. They are then able to make connections and understand implications, and to identify any contradictions between expectations and the reality of what occurs. They can discuss the matter with the workplace supervisor – who is aware of the practical ramifications of any changes to the learning tasks – and then negotiate these changes with their academic advisor. This means that students' interpersonal skills are often a significant focus for the workshop sessions, particularly early in the program. What we

are now interested in is the ‘sense-making’ that occurs for the student in this network of relationships.

Criterion 2.11

The journal provides evidence that the student is open to the totality of the experience and is willing to modify both the learning task and his/her own goals when it is appropriate to do so.

Criterion 2.12

The journal provides evidence that the student has actively sought out at least one productive interpersonal relationship in the workplace context that has allowed appropriate discussions and reflection.

## 2.2 Making Connections and Changing Focus

Students often describe moments of awareness when they had to be flexible and change direction because of external factors or when they made a conscious decision to extend their boundaries for continued personal, and professional learning. Rose’s supervisor was unexpectedly unavailable for a number of weeks and she had expected to learn about research and report writing. “It could have been really disappointing, but working on my own report I learnt a lot more about [the geographical area] and the problems that were there. I was really enjoying what I was doing because it was looking at crime prevention and things that could happen to juveniles. I got a positive experience out of that.”

Criterion 2.21

The journal provides evidence that the student is able to make connections, understand implications, and identify contradictions between his or her own expectations and the reality of the experience.

Criterion 2.22



The journal provides evidence that the student is able to change the focus and direction of his/her learning as circumstances dictate.

### 2.3 Collaboration and the Construction of Knowledge

The practicum structure requires students to address legitimate tasks within the workplace environment and their activity includes constructing the steps leading to the completion of their project in collaboration with their supervisor. Biggs (1991:210) refers to this as generative and procedural learning. Emily needed to understand the content of a policy statement, construct a summary document in an appropriate format, refer it to experts for comment and then assess the feedback and make appropriate changes. She knew this required initiative and that she needed to come across as a professional, moving away from her student role. She generated a rudimentary step-by-step program to achieve the desired result and produced a concrete (propositional) outcome. “Without constructing those experiences of going around and discussing [the policy] with people, it would have been really awful. I would have missed a lot of areas. So you do have to take the initiative...I went back to [the stakeholder] to find out exactly how he envisaged the ideas being incorporated. We came up with some ideas and thought it best that I go away and edit the policy and then bring it back for further review.”

#### Criterion 2.31

The journal provides evidence that the student has been able to construct new or modified propositional knowledge about the workplace context as a result of the experience.

Although students report being conscious of actively constructing their experience at different times, the extent to which this occurs is determined by their level of self-confidence, their relationship with their supervisor and other colleagues, and their willingness to take risks to extend their learning. Observation and discussion allow some students to make

connection with prior studies and demonstrate evidence of an ability to use and apply appropriate theory. Alice reported:

Today I realised that there is an organisational sub culture. The investigative section was a lot different from the conservative research and analysis section. This was itself a learning experience as I have been told that there is police sub-culture by [lecturer] in “Policing in the Community” between the Criminal Investigations Branch, Traffic Branch and General Duties Branch. I was able to identify a similar sub-culture between the research and analysis section and the investigation unit.

Criterion 2.32

The journal provides evidence that the student has been able to correctly apply appropriate existing theory to help understand an aspect of the workplace experience.

**Category 3 – The journal should provide evidence that the work placement learning has been a holistic experience.**

3.1 The Student’s Relationship to the Experience

Proudman (1992: 20-22) describes experiential education as an opportunity “for the student to connect the head with the body, heart, spirit and soul.” In a deep learning experience the student is intent on understanding and sees himself or herself as making a contribution which is seen by others to be consistent in an environment of mutual trust, respect and regard. The overall learning that students are involved in will be determined by a combination of the senses, emotions, cognitions, actions, and physical being (Carver 1996). Proudman (1992) identifies three dynamic and interrelated relationships that are crucial to experiential learning:

- Relationship with the self – an intrapersonal relationship that involves the student “making sense” out of the experience by connection to and analysis of his/her senses, emotions, thoughts, physical responses, and actions.

- Relationship with the supervisor and lecturer – relationships that acknowledge the responsibility for the supervisor and lecturer to establish realistic challenges and boundaries that provide a physically, emotionally and intellectually safe learning environment.
- Relationship with the learning environment – which includes the physical context, the content and relationships with other people.

Felicity wrote:

My interactions with both [my workplace supervisor] and [my academic advisor]...have been growth experiences for me. In having to approach [my supervisor] with my concerns and perceptions it has forced my out of the “student role”. Due to my disappointment with the placement I have had to take positive steps in order to obtain what I want. I have therefore become aware of the need to take control and responsibility for the situation if I want to achieve my goals and desires. This process of change has also enabled me to view the student-lecturer relationship in a different light. It has not only made it easier for me to break down this “status” relationship but has given me confidence to discuss concerns and problems. Further, it has extended a type of relationship that I thought was rather academically defined.

*Criterion 3.11*

The journal provides evidence that the student has developed an increasingly deeper and more comprehensive understanding of his or her senses, emotions, thoughts, physical responses and actions as he or she has related to the experience.

*Criterion 3.12*

The journal provides evidence that the student has been able to use the relationship with the workplace supervisor and university lecturer to establish an appropriate learning environment.

Criterion 3.13

The journal provides evidence that the student has been able to establish an effective relationship with the workplace learning environment including its organisational structures.

### 3.2 Adaptation and Introspection by the Student

The student is immersed in a learning context in which interpersonal processes are being interpreted according to past history (Boud et al. 1993). Alex found that her supervisor was unexpectedly transferred and as a result she found herself adapting to a new supervisor with different ideas on opportunities for learning. Her reflections highlight her own intrapersonal processes as she adapted to changes in the new interpersonal relationship.

I felt like crying. I was devastated for a number of reasons: I had really started to settle down and I thought my supervisor was really trying hard to make my field placement as interesting as he could. Being halfway through the semester I wondered how it would effect me. The plans that we had made to visit other areas of the organisation were now probably not going to happen. And most of all at any time I hate change. I rely heavily in my life on consistency and avoid change where ever possible. My partner returned home soon after and calmed me down and put things back into perspective. I realised that these things happen and there was nothing that I could do to change it, so I should just make the most of the time that I have there.

An exploration of the evolving cycle from practice to theory and back to practice again becomes another major focus for the workshops. Students become aware that their own

learning styles are important but that there is also a need to contemplate learning within a relational context as well. Experience can be analysed through reflective processes, which bring to bear elements of observation, cognition, action and emotion, and produce new insights. As a part of this process, students are able to articulate a conscious awareness of how they learn, rather than what they learn. The potential for deep learning is significantly increased because the learning process that has been unveiled can be *transferred* to other contexts (Boud et al. 1993; Candy 1991; Carver 1996).

Graham, a mature-aged student with over 15 years in the building industry, reports that his practicum focused his cognitive skills.

The initial stages of the placement were particularly troublesome for me due to the vagueness of the guidelines set out by my supervisor. However, by indulging in a large amount of reflective listening and posing mostly open questions, I was able to form an understanding of what was expected. The effect of the ambiguity on me was a heightened sense of anxiety, which was only released after my supervisor had read my completed report and confirmed that it satisfied his requirements.

#### Criterion 3.21

The journal provides evidence that the student has been able to confront his or her own difficult feelings or anxieties and to articulate these in a coherent and understandable manner.

#### Criterion 3.22

The journal provides evidence that the student has been able to develop a course of action that involves dealing with personal anxiety and adapting to the requirements of the work placement context.

#### Criterion 3.23

The journal provides evidence that the student has been able to abandon certain inaccurate preconceptions about elements of the experience and to adapt his or her expectations and learnings accordingly.

Felicity highlights this when she wrote:

I was impressed by the grounds and the setting within the prison; it was very tidy, open, well kept and seemingly humane. I was surprised however, to see the inmates walking around freely, playing tennis, football and sitting in the grounds. This was because I assumed they would all be in their cells or confined within the blocks. This experience was also quite daunting because I did not think I would be so close to the inmates at first.

Criterion 3.24

The journal provides evidence that the student has been able to articulate a new strategy of learning and is likely to be able to apply it to different contexts in the future.

### 3.3 Understanding the Task

Supervisors are a fundamental source of factual and procedural information for the students. Not only do they clarify points, they are able to model professional behaviour and provide personal and professional feedback. The supervisor's contribution is essential for the design and development of the learning task as Amanda explains.

I think the main process would be discussions with my supervisor. She explains to me what has to be done, and it is then through the practice of my actually trying to meet those guidelines, and then checking back with her – “Is this what I should be doing?” that I am learning how to write reports for that organisation.

Criterion 3.31

The journal provides evidence that the student is acquiring an increasing awareness of how to go about learning in this particular learning context.

Criterion 3.32

The journal provides evidence that the student has been able to collaborate with the supervisor in the design and implementation of appropriate “mini-learning experiences” as a part of the learning task as they become necessary.

Criterion 3.33

The journal provides evidence that the student is able to process feedback from the supervisor at a number of different levels, firstly at the level of content and later at the level of interpersonal functioning.

### 3.4 Understanding Others

Feedback to the student, particularly if it is negative, relies on the degree to which the student is able to relate positively to others in the workplace. When the student understands that the feedback is being offered to help rather than hinder his/her self-confidence it is doubly effective. Emily was able to articulate that her supervisor had used what she called the *sandwich technique* to provide feedback. She explained that her supervisor started with positive feedback, then highlighted the area for development before completing the feedback process with another positive point. She felt this method worked well and she was able to identify that her main method of learning is not only through cognitive processing, it is also through interpersonal interaction.

Criterion 3.41

The journal provides evidence that the student has demonstrated an ability to relate to others in the workplace environment and to accept and explore the feelings as well as the content inherent in his/her communications.

John, who interviewed police officers, remarked:

My skills are developing...I was finding a lot of officers telling me the same thing but...I let them believe that it was the first time I had heard it and appreciated their honesty.

Criterion 3.42

The journal should provide evidence that the student has demonstrated an ability to understand the feelings of others and to respond appropriately.

John continues:

I noticed during the interviews, if an officer and myself would get talking into a flowing conversation, then I am able to get a lot more detailed information because the police, in my experience so far, love to tell stories and tales.

Criterion 3.43

The journal should provide evidence that the student has demonstrated an ability to act upon such understandings so that his or her relationship with others is both deepened and made more productive.

Phillip tells us that he and his supervisor had developed a strong mutual professional respect during the work placement.

My supervisor was very impressed...at my ability to achieve a high standard of work independently and congratulated me on my determination to acquire constructive feedback...I have worked extremely hard on this project and...I do believe that her comments were deserving and appropriate. She has gladly written me a reference for my application for a cadetship with the Director of Public Prosecutions. I appreciate her help and feel worthwhile and valued.



**Category 4 – The journal should provide evidence that the work placement learning has been socially and culturally constructed during the course of the experience.**

So far excerpts from journals have been used to show that students have actively constructed their own experiences and meaning through intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. In addition to this, students also interpret their experiences within the context of individual cultural values and social relationships. Each student has his or her own history of socialisation. This prior learning influences current learning in an environment of current social values and norms.

**4.1 The Social Construction of Meaning**

Boud et al. (1993) emphasise that learning is a continual process and that often understanding may not come until sometime after the initial learning experience. Experiences build on experiences and each is influenced by its own social and cultural context. Similarly, understanding can be transformed and incrementally developed or can occur as a critical insight. It is the students' interaction with their values and conscious knowing that challenges assumptions, beliefs and perceptions (Weil and McGill 1989). If the practicum environment provides a context where students feel appreciated, there is less fear associated with the re-examination of their own social and value context (Proudman 1992) and the learning is consequently deeper. Boud et al. (1993) reinforce the importance of critical reflective skills which challenge students' assumptions and, in turn, their interpretations of experience.

*Criterion 4.11*

The journal provides evidence that the student has been able to construct a new generalisation that relates the content (i.e., facts and skills) to the social context in which they have been learned.

*Criterion 4.12*

The journal provides evidence that the student has developed the ability to articulate a particular insight or to draw a generalisable “lesson” from a given experience in a way that applies to him or her personally.

Kathy reflects upon her sudden awareness of social inequity in the inner city.

It really agitates me to see these people living so carefree and happy only a few hundred meters down the street from homeless people [that I have been working with]. I realise the world is divided into the “haves” and the “have-nots” but the sad fact is that the “haves” will always have power while the “have nots” have little opportunity to break out of their...poverty cycle. There is no justice in this world. It appears that we come into the world equal, but we never are!

Criterion 4.13

The journal provides evidence that the student has been able to articulate new meanings or to modify an existing set of meanings to fit the socio-cultural context of the workplace.

Danielle tells us:

I knew all sorts of awful experiences happen...to people in prison, but I did not want to believe it...Today though, I sat next to and had a brief encounter with an inmate who had been bashed. I saw the stitches they used to patch her up! She informed me that they had hit her from behind and couldn't and didn't fight back because she too would be breached (breaking a prison regulation, which sometimes results in increased sentence) and be in even more trouble. What sort of environment is this when a person gets into trouble if she defends herself! Granted this is her perception of the story but I have been here long enough to know what she says is pretty close to the truth.

#### Criterion 4.14

The journal provides evidence that the student is aware that the meanings constructed by others may not fit with his or her own constructions because those others have had different socio-cultural experiences.

Danielle relates another encounter:

For about an hour today I sat in a room and was nice and helpful to a child sexual offender although the entire time it felt like someone was banging my head with a hammer... This encounter disturbed me for several days and I was unwilling to discuss it with anyone... Eventually I discussed the matter with [university advisor] and [workplace supervisor] and they assured me my reactions to the situation were normal.

#### 4.2 Critical Self-reflection

Marcia Baxter Magolda (1999) argues that students construct knowledge as they construct ideas they form about themselves. She refers to this process of learning about “self in the world” as self-authorship and believes that it is fundamental to all learning: self-reflection results in the organisation of thoughts and feelings to form an opinion or decision. All learning is ultimately learning about the self.

#### Criterion 4.21

The journal provides evidence that students have been able to articulate a challenge to and the modification of important beliefs about themselves.

Danielle concluded her anecdote about the prisoner with the following comment:

I have to question though, why I was in denial about “the bashing incident”? I didn't want to believe individuals do this to each other although I know now they do. I can accept this but I still need to justify it by saying the individuals in here

are a product of our very cruel society. Perhaps, if I had suffered the same circumstances of their lives, I would behave no differently?

**Category 5 – The journal should provide evidence that the work placement learning has been influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it has occurred.**

It is essential that the socio-emotional context and its influence on learning not be minimised. Boud et al. (1993) emphasise the need for the students to have confidence in their ability to fulfil their commitments within the learning environment. Without the opportunity to continue building confidence and self-esteem there is little to no learning. So there is a need to have appropriate support and appropriate challenge within the context of the practicum learning. Parilla and Smith-Cunnien (1997) and Proudman (1992) explain that the socio-emotional context can be so powerful that the student's ability to critically assess and integrate learning can be blocked. On the other hand, there is an abundance of literature that indicates that when individuals are prepared to confront directly their own anxieties and are able to take risks, both personal and sometimes even physical, the learning experience can be extremely constructive and powerful. An awareness of the socio-emotional experiences of others is also critical. The statements, generalisations and comments of others originate from a personal socio-emotional context that may or may not be shared by the student. The journals should indicate that the student has the ability to understand this and to "read" such emotions even when their expression is indirect.

5.1 Awareness of the Feelings of Both Self and Others and Preparedness to Explore These

Criterion 5.11

The journal provides evidence that the student has been able to openly express both superficial and deeper feelings aroused by the experience.

Criterion 5.12

The journal provides evidence that the student reflects accurately and explores the feelings of others.

## 5.2 Understanding How the Feelings of Both Self and Others Impact on the Task at Hand

### Criterion 5.21

The journal provides evidence that the student demonstrates the ability to relate the feelings of both self and others to the context of the task at hand.

At one point Felicity exclaims, “This isn’t what I want! Should I tell him [my supervisor] I don’t want to continue? Maybe I should stick it out a bit longer and see what happens. It might not be that bad.”

### Criterion 5.22

The journal provides evidence that the student demonstrates an ability to understand the ways in which socio-emotional feelings can be channelled into appropriate action.

Felicity also says,

[My Supervisor] acknowledged that I could not only learn a great deal from him but that he could learn a great deal from me...this was pleasing to hear. ...I was very pleased with the welcome change in [his] behaviour and attitude.

## 5.3 Willingness to Modify and then Engage in the Task in Order to Accommodate Socio-emotional Experiences

### Criterion 5.31

The journal provides evidence that the student is able to confront his or her own fears and other negative feelings by taking risks.

Danielle had to do this every morning.

I experience intense anxiety feelings as my bus approaches the stop nearest the prison. I attribute these intense feelings to my unfamiliarity with the correctional centre. In other words I am afraid of the experiences I may encounter and that I

may not be able to deal with them. This is of course all part of the learning experience of Field Placement!...I feel the need to stereotype because it offers me security with these people...I realise though that nothing ever happens in a neat package...Human behaviour can never actually be successfully predicted!

### **Conclusion**

The material students present for assessment in their reflective journals is complex, deep and persuasive. It is my considered opinion that there are very few attempts at fabricating reflections or indeed real experiences in these journals because this is not an issue with the students. They are anxious to articulate the depth and complexity of their reactions to the experience and their writing bears a strong stamp of authenticity. These exploratory reflections are often incomplete and one has the sense that the student is groping towards a deeper understanding of what has happened. Students seem actually to enjoy putting their reflections into words and appreciate the opportunity to do so – an opportunity denied them in programs that demand that they produce correct answers to prescribed questions. The assessment of reflective journals and the associated feedback of supervisors are a very important confirmation of the learning process. Indeed, the learning is often not complete without it.

In summary, students report a positive learning experience through their work experience practicum. They describe their learning as occurring at the personal, professional, and academic levels and utilise observations, thoughts, feelings, discussions and actions to support this. They report that their learning is influenced by their motivation but enhanced by their ability to reflect on their experiences. They also indicate that resolving dilemmas challenges them out of their comfort zone, which in turn increases their learning opportunities and contributes to increased self-confidence.

Much assessment has been plagued by rules and generalisations drawn from the assumption that we are looking for simple propositional (factual) knowledge rather than much more complex skills. Such reductionism can mean that the important indicators of learning and of change in the student's perceptions are either de-valued or ignored.

This paper has focused mainly on the assessment of written material presented by students as journal entries made during the period of their work experience placement. But, it must be noted that the written word does not contain all of the information that a marker is looking for. Nor do markers necessarily have the ability to search out and identify specific indicators from the text submitted by students in their writing. We should expect that when we are endeavouring to measure these much more elusive professional skills the actual construction of our measuring instruments will be quite difficult.

It is true that, ultimately, judgements about a given student's abilities must be left to the professional discretion of the lecturer and that the attempts at creating "objective" assessment criteria are likely to produce vague and fairly meaningless statements. However, it remains true that evidence of complex professional skills and the ability and willingness to use them in specific contexts can be taken from behavioural data when it is appropriately analysed.

A full and final assessment schedule for a given program is likely to be a goal towards which we continually move but which we never really arrive at. In the construction and delivery of professional programs, continuing attention needs to be paid to the details of the assessment procedures being used as well as to the relevance of the teaching methods.

Boud et al.'s (1993) propositions about learning from experience seem to serve as useful categories for assessment criteria and confirm the findings of Bates et al. (1996). They enable us to develop and gain an understanding of how students assimilate and reflect upon their learning within a work placement program.

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**Table 1. Criteria for “symptoms of learning”**

Category	Criteria	The journal provides evidence that
<p>1. The journal should provide evidence that the work placement experience has been the foundation of and the stimulus for learning.</p>	<p>1.1 Selecting the learning task</p>	<p>1.11 the student has had significant input into the initial selection of the learning task.</p> <p>1.12 the student has clearly understood the relevance of the selected learning task to his or her past experiences.</p>
	<p>1.2 Intrinsic motivation</p>	<p>1.21 the desire to learn some specific new information or skill has arisen as the selected learning task is being completed.</p> <p>1.22 the student has acted upon this intrinsic motivation.</p>
	<p>1.3 Constructing meaning</p>	<p>1.31 the student has constructed and articulated propositional meaning about the learning task in written form; and that this meaning is new for the student.</p> <p>1.32 the student has an ability to use an increasingly generalised level of abstraction when articulating specific learnings.</p> <p>1.33 the student has gained a genuine realisation of a broad governing abstract principle.</p>

<p>2. The journal should provide evidence that the learner has actively constructed the work placement experience as it has evolved.</p>	<p>2.1 Modifying the learning task</p>	<p>2.11 the student is open to the totality of the experience and is willing to modify both the learning task and his/her own goals when it is appropriate to do so.</p> <p>2.12 the student has actively sought out at least one productive interpersonal relationship in the workplace context that has allowed appropriate discussions and reflection.</p>
	<p>2.2 Making connections and changing focus</p>	<p>2.21 the student is able to make connections, understand implications, and identify contradictions between his or her own expectations and the reality of the experience.</p> <p>2.22 The student is able to change the focus and direction of his/her learning as circumstances dictate.</p>
	<p>2.3 Collaboration and the construction of knowledge</p>	<p>2.31 the student has been able to construct new or modified propositional knowledge about the workplace context as a result of the experience.</p> <p>2.32 the student has been able to correctly apply appropriate existing theory to help understand an aspect of the work placement experience.</p>

<p>3. The journal should provide evidence that the work placement learning has been a holistic experience.</p>	<p>3.1 The student's relationship to the experience</p>	<p>3.11 the student has developed an increasingly deeper and more comprehensive understanding of his or her senses, emotions, thoughts, physical responses and actions as he or she has related to the experience.</p> <p>3.12 the student has been able to use the relationship with the workplace supervisor and the university lecturer to establish an appropriate learning environment.</p> <p>3.13 the student has been able to establish an effective relationship with the workplace learning environment, including its organisational structures.</p>
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	<p>3.2 Adaptation and introspection by the student</p>	<p>3.21 the student has been able to confront his or her own difficult feelings or anxieties and to articulate these in a coherent and understandable manner.</p> <p>3.22 the student has been able to develop a course of action that involves dealing with personal anxiety and adapting to the requirements of the work placement context.</p> <p>3.23 the student has been able to abandon certain inaccurate preconceptions about the elements of the experience and to adapt his or her expectations and learnings accordingly.</p> <p>3.24 the student has been able to articulate a new strategy of learning and is likely to be able to apply it to different contexts in the future.</p>
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	3.3 Understanding the task	<p>3.31 the student is acquiring an increasing awareness of how to go about learning in this particular learning context.</p> <p>3.32 the student has been able to collaborate with the supervisor in the design and implementation of appropriate “mini-learning experiences” as a part of the Learning Task as they become necessary.</p> <p>3.33 the student is able to process feedback from the supervisor at a number of different levels, firstly at the level of content and later at the level of interpersonal functioning.</p>
	3.4 Understanding others	<p>3.41 the student has demonstrated an ability to relate to others in the workplace environment and to accept and explore the feelings as well as the content inherent in his/her communications.</p> <p>3.42 the student has demonstrated an ability to understand the feelings of others and to respond appropriately.</p> <p>3.43 the student has demonstrated an ability to act upon such understandings so that his or her relationship with others is both deepened and made more productive.</p>



<p>4. The journal should provide evidence that the work placement learning has been socially and culturally constructed during the course of the experience.</p>	<p>4.1 The social construction of meaning</p>	<p>4.11 the student has been able to construct a new generalisation that relates the content (i.e., facts and skills) to the social context in which they have been learned.</p> <p>4.12 the student has developed the ability to articulate a particular insight or to draw a generalisable “lesson” from a given experience in a way that applies to him or her personally.</p> <p>4.13 the student has been able to articulate new meanings or to modify an existing set of meanings to fit the socio-cultural context of the workplace.</p> <p>4.14 the student is aware that the meanings constructed by others may not fit with his or her own constructions because those others may have had different socio-cultural experiences.</p>
	<p>4.2 Critical self-reflection</p>	<p>4.21 the students have been able to articulate a challenge to and the modification of important beliefs about themselves.</p>

<p>5. The journal should provide evidence that the work placement learning has been influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it has occurred.</p>	<p>5.1 Awareness of the feelings of both self and others and preparedness to explore these</p>	<p>5.11 the student has been able to openly express both superficial and deeper feelings aroused by the experience.</p> <p>5.12 The student reflects accurately and explores the feelings of others.</p>
	<p>5.2 Understanding how the feelings of both self and others impact on the task at hand</p>	<p>5.21 the student demonstrates the ability to relate the feelings of both self and others to the context of the task at hand</p> <p>5.22 the student demonstrates an ability to understand the ways in which socio-emotional feelings can be channelled into appropriate action.</p>
	<p>5.3 Willingness to modify and then engage in the task in order to accommodate socio-emotional experiences</p>	<p>3.34 the student is able to confront his or her own fears and other negative feelings by taking risks.</p>

