Author's response to reviews

Title: Developing essential professional skills: a framework for teaching and learning about feedback

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Comments on Reviewer’s suggestions

We are pleased that the reviewer found the paper exciting, and we are grateful for her discretionary suggestions, which were helpful. We have modified the paper responsively as follows (with changes made in the text indicated in red):

"The "concluding remarks" for debate are clear and reflect principles of adult learning as well as the Vygotskian approach to supporting learners in their "zone of proximal development" and Bruner's notion of "scaffolding" learners."

We have made a general comment on this point in the first sentences of the Concluding Remarks final paragraph: These conclusions embody many of the principles identified by educational psychologists as key to adult learning, in which the encouragement of specific social feedback from teachers and peers is used to extend and build the students’ own feedback skills [Palinscar, 1998 #4359].

"I am left a little uncomfortable with the title. First, it is not just skills that you are focusing on and second, although you are provoking debate by asking a question, I think a statement might be more powerful - as in formal debates. Alternatively a descriptive, "Developing essential professional skills: Teaching and learning about feedback"

We have modified the title to Developing essential professional skills: a framework for teaching and learning about feedback

"Make explicit in the summary the breadth of student experiences - written and verbal, in small groups, timing etc. It is possible that different types of feedback formats require different cognitive processes and some formats may be more suited to some students than others."

We have added an extra sentence at the end of the Abstract: These feedback learning opportunities include written and oral, peer to peer and cross-hierarchy, public and private, thereby addressing different cognitive processes and attitudinal difficulties.

"Interesting to hypothesise about the therapeutic role that effective feedback may have with some patients who are embarking on changing behaviours etc. That is, that learning these skills is not just about teaching and learning for students and health care professionals but valuable as a therapeutic strategy."

This comment was particularly insightful and we thank the referee for making it. We
have added an extra sentence in the Concluding Comments section as follows:
Finally, since effective feedback is essentially an aid to change, it may be a particularly useful therapeutic skill for use with patients who are embarking on behaviour change, such as change to dietary, drug or tobacco use. Do readers agree?

Relate to the GMC’s (2003) Tomorrow’s Doctors and the requirements for new graduates to be competent in a range of teaching and learning skills.

The last sentence of para 1 of the background has been modified to read as follows:

Given the importance placed on continuing professional development at all levels of the profession, including specifically the requirement for new doctors to be competent in a range of teaching and learning skills [GMC, 2003 #2371], the skills of giving and receiving feedback effectively both across and within the hierarchy assume particular importance.

Clarify the term self-feedback - Is this reflective writing?

On reflection, we think that the use of this term is potentially confusing since, as the reviewer’s comments suggest, it conflates two skills, and so we have deleted the one use of the term and called it self-evaluation.

I think the claim that “indicating the high quality of the learning about feedback” is too strong because there were no baseline measures. I think it is more accurate to state that "The average mark of 70.4% strongly suggests that students are performing at a high level."

This is an entirely fair point. In fact, our collective memory says that the student scores in this part of the exam have steadily improved over the years as the course has developed, but the data set to support this cannot be obtained. We have therefore changed the statement as follows:

In 2004, the average mark was 70.4% (range 66% to 80%), where 70% is first class, suggesting that students are performing at a high level.

The section on the summative assessment needs clarification. I am correct in understanding that only some students are asked to give feedback to examiners on their examining skills?
Correct. We have changed the text to make this clearer as follows:

Second, within the oral examinations, students receive feedback on their performance from the examiners and some are asked to give oral feedback to the examiners on their examining skills.

_The term self-evaluation is used in the summative assessment section. Is this similar to self-feedback or reflection?_

See above

We have also amended the Acknowledgements as follows:

**Acknowledgements**
We thank our former students for their permission to use quotations from their evaluations, and referee Debra Nestel for her helpful suggestions.

A few other small changes have been made as indicated in the text in red.