THE PEER ASSESSMENT PROCESS: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS RECEIVING PEER FEEDBACK

By

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ABSTRACT

The ability to receive regular peer feedback on learning should, in theory, be valuable to learners. A formative view will be presented in this study in which information is collected and used as feedback for student learning. This differs from summative practices where the purpose is to make judgments about the extent to which learning has taken place. This case study takes place in a first year master’s Occupational Therapy (OT) course where the focus is on the development of communication skills. These skills are developed through interviewing and assessment strategies. This case focuses on the feedback received by students from their peers based on the clinical interviews that were conducted.

Peers in this study are members of the same learning team who have been divided into these groups for the purpose of learning together. Students in this course receive both written and oral peer feedback during peer assessment exercises. This feedback is formally reflected on by students as self-assessment. Although, both peer and self-assessments are used for formative purposes in this course, the primary focus of this study is on peer assessment.

Six participants were recruited for this study. The data for this inquiry consisted of transcripts from six semi-structured interviews and a focus group as well as written artifacts from the course. The data analysis revealed three core themes related to both the peer assessment process and peer feedback. Motivation for Learning and Awareness of Growth or Development were identified as two key themes relating to student learning. The third theme identified was Factors that Impacted the Learning Experience which had to do with how students felt about having engaged in the peer assessment process. A unique finding regarding the latter theme centered around the time factor required to take on the roles inherent in peer assessment.
activities. Students offered insights into the relationship between stress and motivation for learning when taking on peer assessment responsibilities.

This study contributes to our understanding of the meaning and consequences of implementing peer assessment into the communication module of the OT course. Insights on the implications of this study to higher education in relation to peer assessment are also explored.
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Special thanks and recognition is due to the Occupational Therapy (OT) faculty who trusted me and allowed me the opportunity to conduct my research in one of their first year master’s Occupational Therapy courses. I hope that findings from this study help OT faculty and instructors better understand the needs and challenges that students face when engaging in peer assessment activities.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Peer assessment (PA) appears to be well established theoretically as a strategy for providing learners with unique feedback on the quality of their products and performances (Topping, 2009). Advocates for peer assessment argue that regular feedback on learning not only contributes to skill development but to motivation for learning (Ballantyne, Hughes, & Mylonas, 2002; Shute, 2008; Topping, 2010a; Wiliams, 2011). Advocates for peer assessment also argue that it supports ‘higher order thinking skills’, such as metacognition and reflection (Damon, 1984; McMillian, 2010). Regardless of its reputed benefits there are those who are still leery of these claims. Cassidy (2006) suggested, “the introduction and successful implementation of peer assessment is notoriously problematic, particularly in terms of concerns regarding the reliability, validity, and resistance from students” (p. 510). These concerns are widely shared when the purpose of resulting information is summative, such as the awarding of marks and grades (Falchikov & Goldrinch, 2000; Kaufman & Schunn, 2010; Magin, 2001; Stefani, 1994). This study will focus on peer assessment for formative purposes only.

In many educational contexts, including this one, achievement is typically defined as “student’s academic standing relative to some established criterion” (Dunn & Mulvenon, 2010, pg. 3). In theory, clear criteria make it possible for student to give and receive feedback on growth towards these criteria. What makes any assessment purely a peer assessment is that the giver and receiver of feedback are both peers. The focus of this study is on the experiences of the students receiving feedback only.

Previous empirical research on the implementation of peer assessment in educational contexts has produced conflicting and inconsistent findings (Shute, 2008; Van Zundert,
Sluijsmans, & Van Merrienboer, 2010). Topping (2010a) argued that “these equivocal results partly stem from the great variety of forms of feedback, contexts for feedback, learner characteristics, and outcomes measured” (p.61). As a result, it has been difficult to say what has conclusively contributed to educational gains due to formative peer assessment practices. Empirical research needs to produce efficient methodologies and designs to gain a better understanding of what constitutes effective formative peer assessment practices (Dunn & Mulvenon, 2010). Thus, Strijbos & Sluijsman (2010) have put a call out to researchers “to address the gap between what we know about peer assessment and what we claim in general about the benefits of peer assessment for learners” (p.266).

**Purpose and Research Questions**

For peer assessment to be considered effective, the goals, practices and outcomes of the practice must align. It is relatively common to assess the congruence between the goals of a practice, as described theoretically, and the instructional activities used to implement it. Findings from this kind of inquiry are especially beneficial for instructors who have little or no experience in planning for or implementing a practice. This research goes beyond a look at implementation intentionally focusing directly on the experiences of the learners expected to use and benefit from the practice. A better understanding of the meanings that the peer assessment activities and feedback have for these students can shed light on the difficulty of orchestrating congruence between intentions and outcomes. Findings from this study can help instructors better understand the needs that students have and the challenges they face when attempting to learn outside the conventional pattern of student/teacher interaction. The purpose of this study was to understand the meaning and consequences of implementing peer assessment into the communication module
of an occupational therapy (OT) course from the perspective of the university students who were expected to receive and act on peer feedback in support of their learning.

To accomplish this purpose, the study was guided by three major research questions:

1. What was the nature of the peer assessment process in the Occupational Therapy (OT) communication module as described by the students who participated in it?
2. How did students describe, receive and use the feedback they were offered through the peer assessment process?
3. To what extent did peer assessment and peer feedback in the OT module reach the potential described by current assessment theory and research?

Rationale

Research in the area of peer assessment is still relatively sparse. Research in peer assessment in higher education has focused on the use of peer assessment in the writing process, and in particular, in the context of peer editing (Topping, 2010a). Despite the popularity of peer assessment in education, it is difficult to describe what exactly constitutes effective peer assessment. Van Zundert, Sluijsmans, & Van Merrinboer (2010) claimed that “the literature usually describes peer assessment in a holistic fashion, that is, without specifying all the variables present in term of conditions, methods, and outcomes” (Van Zundert et al., 2010, p.270). Consequently, there have been inconsistent and contradictory findings in the research where it pertains to its effectiveness as a method of formative peer assessment. Research that begins to elucidate these factors is critical to bring clarity to peer assessment.
Context

This study takes place in a first year master’s occupational therapy course at a major Canadian research university. The focus of this course is the development of communication skills. One feature of the course is the requirement that student begin to use interviewing skills as a way to establish a therapeutic relationship. The class is divided into four learning groups and each group is assigned a preceptor. Each preceptor has 17 to 18 students in their learning group. Each learning group is further divided into learning teams consisting of five to six students. The learning team is then split in half to conduct the clinical interviews. Figure 1 provides an illustration of the structure of the groupings in OT course.

![Figure 1. Structure of the groupings in the OT course](image-url)
Two clinical interviews are conducted by a learning team, at the same time, in two separate rooms, with their preceptor moving between both of these sessions. Members of each team take turns acting as either the interviewer or the peer giving the peer feedback. Each team of three included: the primary observer, the secondary observer, and the peer conducting the interview. Peer observers watch the interview through a one way mirror listening on headsets, while their preceptor sits in a different room watching and listening to both interviews that are running at the same time. The interviewer and the primary observer switch places when the interview was done, so that the primary observer can get feedback on the interview from the volunteer. Once the feedback from the volunteer is obtained, both groups of three peers came together to hear one another’s feedback. This meeting includes their preceptor. These feedback sessions, as well as the clinical interviews were all videotaped as part of these learning exercises. The video tapes are not analyzed in this study since this study explores students’ perceptions of the peer assessment process and the feedback that they received.

**Structure of the Thesis**

In the next chapter, I will first introduce a conceptual framework for peer assessment, which is subdivided into four sections: (a) definitions and concepts addressed by this study; (b) designing peer assessment; (c) a broader conceptual understanding of the learning in PA; and (d) a summary of conceptual framework. In chapter three, I present the methods I employed during my research, which included participant selection, instruments, and how the data was analyzed. I then discuss aspects of assuring trustworthiness to conclude this chapter. Chapter four presents the findings of my work with a description of the nature of the peer assessment process in the Occupational Therapy communication module as described by the students who participated in it. Chapter five provides a description of how students described, received, and used the
feedback they were offered through the peer assessment process. Chapter six is devoted to a re-
analysis of the findings in chapters four and five, whereby the three themes that emerged from
this data are introduced. Chapter six also explores the extent to which the peer assessment and
peer feedback in the OT course reached the potential described by current assessment theory and
research. And my concluding chapter seven discusses the implications of my findings to higher
education and includes recommendations for instructors and concluding remarks.
CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Definitions and Concepts Addressed by this Study

Formative assessment

Michael Scriven (1967) first coined the term *formative* when he introduced the notion of “formative evaluation” as a form of inquiry intended to provide information that could improve programs and school curricula (Black & Williams, 2003; Cizek, 2010; Dunn & Mulvenon, 2010). Bloom, Hastings, & Madaus (1971) later applied this concept of *formative* to inquiry into student learning. The goal of formative inquiry in this context was to learn how best to improve teaching and learning. According to Bloom et al. (1971):

Formative evaluation is for the use of systematic evaluation in the process of curriculum construction, teaching and learning for the purpose of improving any of these three processes….This means that in formative evaluation one must strive to develop the kinds of evidence that will be most useful in the process, seek the most useful method of reporting the evidence, and search for ways of reducing the negative effect associated with evaluation—perhaps by reducing the judgmental aspects of evaluation or, at least, by having the users of the formative evaluation (teachers, students, curriculum makers) make the judgments (1971, p.118)

“Bloom’s work suggested important distinctions between evaluation and assessment that are now widely accepted” (Cizek, 2010, p.6). The notion of having those who need to use formative information also be responsible for making judgments about current performance is one that would also gain credibility over time and eventually underpin the notion of peer and self-assessment.
Black and William (2009) also crafted a definition of formative assessment:

Practice in a classroom is formative to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited (p. 9)

Black and Williams’ description identifies three different activities and three potential stakeholders that can be considered part of the formative assessment process. Activities include those which elicit, interpret, and use evidence about student achievement to inform future instruction. Stakeholders include the teachers, learners, and their peers. This research study focuses on the experiences of students receiving and using the information generated through formative assessment. Alternatively, Cizek (2010) refers to formative assessment in this way:

[It is] the collaborative processes engaged in by educators and students for the purpose of understanding the students’ learning and conceptual organization, identification of strengths, diagnosis of weaknesses, areas of improvement, and as a source of information teachers can use in instructional planning and students can use in deepening their understanding and improving their achievement (2010, p. 6)

This review revisits some of the roots and emergence of formative assessment. For the purposes of this study, the definition of formative assessment offered by Cizek (2010) above is most useful. Understanding these processes and how they work is at the core of this study.

Assessment for learning and as learning

It has more recently been argued that formative assessment can be understood as two unique processes: ‘assessment for learning’ and ‘assessment as learning’. These terms have become ubiquitous in educational systems of Canada and elsewhere (Earl, Volante, & Katz,
In defining ‘assessment for learning’, Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, (2004) include any action that “provides information that teachers and their students can use as feedback in assessing themselves and one another and in modifying the teaching and learning activities in which they engaged (p.10). In contrast, in conducting ‘assessment as learning’ “students develop their capacity to be independent, autonomous learners who are able to set individual goals, monitor their own progress, determine next steps, and reflect on their thinking and learning (Ministry of Education, 2010, p.28). This latter approach focuses on promoting student metacognition (Volante, 2010). Peer feedback, the activity that is central to this study is identified as ‘assessment for learning’ activity.

**Peer assessment.** There appears to be less ambiguous descriptive definitions of peer assessment. Peer assessments can be formative, summative, or both (Dunn & Mulvenon, 2010; Topping, 2010a). In discussing formative peer assessment, Falchikov (1995) stated that peer assessments can focus on either the assessment of a product such as writing, or the performance of a particular skill. According to Falchikov:

> Peer assessment is the process whereby groups of individuals rate their peers. This exercise may or may not entail previous discussion or agreement over criteria. It may involve the use of rating instruments or checklists, which may have been designed, by others, before the peer assessment exercise, or be designed by the user group to meet their particular needs. It is not unusual for programmes of peer assessment to be associated with self-assessment schemes. (1995, p.175)

This definition offered by Falchikov (1995) suggests that this study needs to consider the relationship between peer assessment and self-assessment. Topping (2009) added another critical dimension to be looked at in any study of peer assessment; namely the relationship between the
person giving the feedback and the one receiving it. For Topping, peer assessment is “an arrangement for learners to consider and specify the level, value, or quality of a product or performance of other equal-status learners (p. 20). Equal-status can be defined in exact terms or loosely. In the latter case, a peer is considered a person close in age or schooling.

**Peer feedback.** The product of peer assessment is feedback (Falchikov, 1995). Peer assessment can ask students to provide highly descriptive information; the information can also be as cryptic as a mark or potential grade on a piece of work (Somervell, 1993; Falchikov, 2003). Both types of feedback qualify since “the overriding goal of peer assessment is to provide feedback to learners” (Topping, 2009, p.22). In this study, it will be important to classify the type of feedback that participants are asked to receive.

**Self-assessment.** Andrade (2010) observed that students can simultaneously be a consumer of feedback and a definitive source of their own feedback. To make this claim she drew on the research of both self-assessment and self-regulated learning. “Self-assessment is a process of formative assessment during which students reflect on the quality of their work, judge the degree to which it reflects explicitly stated goals or criteria, and revise accordingly” (p.92). Andrade (2010) also asserted that her self-assessment needs to be task specific rather than some kind of overall judgment (i.e., judging whether your abilities are strong or weak). In this study it will be important to describe the nature of the judgments that receivers of feedback need to make about themselves and the extent to which these judgments help them reset their learning goals—a feature of self-regulated learning.

**Reflective learning.** Simply put, “to reflect means to look back and consider something. While such thoughtfulness can result in insight and learning, it does not automatically lead to high level analysis, questioning, and reframing required for transformative learning” (Aronson,
Critical reflection, by contract, is defined as “the process of analyzing, questioning, and reframing an experience in order to make an assessment of it for the purposes of learning (reflective learning) and/or practice (reflective practice)” (Aronson, 2011, p.201).

**Metacognition.** Metacognition is another term that captures critical reflection. Metacognition by definition happens when:

- Human beings can reflect on their own thinking processes. Experts describe such thinking as an internal conversation—monitoring their own understanding, predicting their performance, deciding what else they need to know, organizing and reorganizing ideas, checking for consistency between different pieces of information, and drawing analogies that help them advance their understanding (Earl, 2003, p.30)

For the purposes of this study, metacognition is the term used in this study to capture critical reflection, if any, by participants.

**Designing Peer Assessment**

In an effort to better understand the meaning that peer assessment and peer feedback activities have for the OT students in this study, attention is first given to how they can be designed. This section begins in search of a theory to guide the design of peer assessment and then moves on to look at some design options for implementing peer assessment. The knowledge gained here will help inform the study about how peer assessment is intended to obtain its positive benefits.

**Developing A Theory**

There is no overarching theory to guide the design of peer assessment (Damon, 1984; Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000; Topping, 1998; Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003). In early discussions Piaget’s notion of “cognitive conflict” was used to explain how peer assessment
worked. Peer feedback was a catalyst for change within the receiver (Damon, 1984). There were a number of reasons presented as to why peers are successful in triggering cognitive conflict. One of particular importance is that any new information motivates the receivers “to reassess their old conceptions of the world and to construct new ones that fit better with the feedback they are receiving” (Damon, 1984, p.332). Using this assumption as a starting point, Damon (1984) then moved to integrate Vygotskian learning theory, especially the element that places value on the thought processes resulting from peer communication. According to Vygotsky, when learners engage in dialogue with peers new patterns of thought emerge. “This is because peer dialogue is by nature a cooperative exchange of ideas between equals and therefore emulates several critical features of rational thinking” (Damon, 1984, p.333). “Equals” in this context refers primarily to the nature of the power relationship between givers and receivers of feedback, not necessarily equals in their understandings or competence. Topping (1998) emphasized the Vygotskian concept of scaffolding and how feedback from a more capable person is central to the scaffolding process. According to Vygotsky, when learning is fostered through collaboration with a more competent other—potentially a peer assessor—the receiver can be said to learning within the zone of proximal development. For peer assessment to create this zone, a student would have to receive feedback not only on identified strengths or weaknesses but also on “how the work could be improved” (Topping, 1998, p.254). In sum, each theory contributes to an explanation about how peer interactions might bring with them unique benefits to learning. In this study, these different theoretical viewpoints—Piaget and Vygotsky—will be seen as complementary—a stance that others have also taken as a way to capture a broader conceptual understanding of how peer assessment works (Damon, 1984). Specially, it will be important to
hear how the receivers of feedback describe both their interactions with those who give them feedback and their assessment of the quality of the feedback they were offered.

**Design Options**

This section looks at some of the variables found in the literature that have been purposefully designed into peer assessment practices. Webb (1992) states that the value of the help students receive about their learning depends on several variables. “To be effective for learning, help must be timely, relevant, of sufficient elaboration, understood by recipient, and applied by the recipient to the problem at hand” (Webb, 1992, p. 103). In a later study by Webb & Farivar (1994), the ‘motivation to act’ was identified as another condition to be added to this list. Webb (1992) suggested that students working in small learning groups would likely meet some of these conditions. It will be important that this study identify which, if any, of these conditions can be confirmed.

Liu and Carless’s (2006) study focused on peer feedback and its potential for enhanced learning. A total of 1740 university students and 460 academics from Hong Kong participated in a large–scale questionnaire. These researchers referred to “peer assessment as students grading the work or performance of their peers” (p.280) and peer feedback as “primarily about rich detailed comments but without formal marks” (p.280). Issues with these definitions are discussed further at the end of this section but note that peer feedback as it is defined here is closer to the definition of peer assessment used in this study. Lui and Carless argued that “the dominance of peer assessment processes using grades can undermine the potential of peer feedback for improving student learning” (p.279). Their findings showed that there was a resistance from both students and academics for using peer feedback for summative purposes. One factor contributing to this resistance was the time the process consumed given that there was no direct
credit given to students. Two suggestions emerged that could have an influence on the way peer assessment from the perspective of the receiver is understood in the current study. First, the authors recommended that students should be involved in generating assessment criteria, and be exposed to exemplars. Second, they advised that giving and receiving feedback should be part of the normal teaching and learning processes. How the receivers of feedback perceive both the integration of peer assessment into their course and their involvement in establishing the criteria for successful performance will be attended to in this study.

A different stance on student involvement in setting the assessment criteria is offered by Cassidy (2006). Cassidy (2006) looked at students’ attitudes towards peer assessment in higher education with a sample of 41 second-year undergraduate students. Guidelines for feedback were discussed with the students prior to the exercise and blank feedback sheets were provided for them to complete as they saw best. The majority of students reported they understood the assessment criteria and used it when assessing their peers. This is an important finding because of claims made in the literature that students typically fail to understand the assessment criteria when they are not involved in creating it. How students understand and use the assessment criteria will be important to track in this study.

Van den berg, Admiraal, & Pilot’s (2006) study looked at the design of peer assessment in higher education as it occurred in seven writing courses. Peer assessment was designed and implemented at Utrecht University in the history curriculum. A total of nine teachers from the History Department and 131 students from the History program were involved in the study. These authors made a claim early in their study that “peer feedback seems to be most valuable in the collaborative writing process (p. 136). Toppings’ typology (1998) was used as a framework to describe the peer assessment design in each of seven courses. One particular finding of
relevance to the receivers of feedback in this study was that the “written feedback concentrated mainly on evaluative comments, whereas the oral feedback provided suggestions for test revision” (p.146). Thus, both written and oral feedback is recommended to yield the most complete feedback. How students receive feedback will be important to observe in this study.

In a final study examining the design of peer assessment Cho & MacArthur (2010) participants had an opportunity to revise their written work based on the feedback they received. The study identified that the type of feedback influenced the kind of revisions made to writing. Directive feedback involving “explicit suggestions of specific changes in a student’s papers” (p.330) proved to be of most benefit to students. In addition, this study demonstrates that students were able to provide useful feedback to their peers without training and practice in peer assessment. This underscores the need to learn more about the amount of detail students receive about their performance and whether this can be attributed at all to preparation process of receiving feedback.

A Broader Conceptual Understanding of the Learning in Peer Assessment

This section focuses on the experiences of learners expected to use and benefit from the peer assessment activities by turning to the current assessment literature. Discussions in this section begin by first looking at a study that considers the initial reactions of learners who engage in peer assessment activities. The remainder of this section is devoted to gaining a deeper understanding of the positive benefits for learners who engage in peer assessment and peer feedback responsibilities. Discussions here help to inform the research findings of my study in the chapters that follow.
**Initial Reactions to Peer Assessment**

Walker’s (2001) action research project examined students’ perceptions of group work and peer assessment both before and after participating in the assessment project. A total of 113 first year psychology students agreed to participate in the study. There was a lot of uncertainty expressed prior to engaging in the peer assessment exercise. A factor the authors suggested that might have played a role in students early reactions was that many had no previous experience with peer assessment. Once the students carried out the exercise they were a lot more positive about the peer assessment. However, they still felt uncomfortable about assessing their peers. It will be important in my study to identify the role, if any, students’ prior experience with peer assessment has on those receiving peer feedback.

**Benefits for Learners**

**Skill Development.** Research by Ballantyne, Hughes & Mylonas (2002) developed peer assessment procedures for use in large classes using an action research approach. The study was conducted in 3 phases over a 2-year period from 3 departments of the Queensland University of Technology. Thirty staff and 939 students participated in the study. Students completed a questionnaire after having performed peer and self assessments with the selected task. The questionnaire was designed to explore “their perceptions of the experience and ascertain whether they felt that this form of assessment had improved their skills in critical analysis, assessment techniques, and self- reflection” (p.431). Although this study revealed specific concerns with the use of peer assessment in large classes, the majority of the students perceived that the peer assessment exercise had clear benefits for their learning. The students argued that the peer assessment had been “an awareness-raising experience” (p.434) given the opportunity to assess their own work and that of their peers. The experience aided in knowledge and understanding of
the subject matter which helped with their own learning. Furthermore, they acquired skills from the experience that would be valuable to them in the future. Identifying the acquired skills and value learners place on them will be an important part of this study.

Topping, Smith, Swanson, and Elliot’s (2000) study examined formative peer assessment of academic writing between postgraduate students. The study involved 12 postgraduate students (trainees) involved in a professional training course that qualified them as an educational psychologist. They were involved in reciprocal paired formative peer assessment exercise that assessed academic writing. Participation was not optional. Academic Reports consisting of a minimum 5000 words were used for the peer assessment. Trainees had been paired for the reciprocal peer assessment exercise and given 4 weeks to assess their partner’s report. The completed feedback proformas were exchanged between pairs and they were encouraged to discuss the feedback with their partners. During the period allocated for peer assessment, each trainee also attended a two hour session on the critical analysis for research reports. The majority of the trainees found the “peer assessment process time-consuming, intellectually challenging, and socially uncomfortable, but effective in improving the quality of their own subsequent written work and developing transferable skills” (p.163). Specifically, the development of interpersonal communication skills and negotiation skills were noted by students. The peer assessment had also prompted self-assessment in half of students. Trainees in this program “felt that the peer assessment exercise was worthwhile and led to a heightened awareness of the assessment criteria” (p.163). The degree to which receivers of the peer feedback see the peer assessment as an effective example of professional training will be attended to in this study.
Motivation for Learning. Hanrahan and Isaacs (2001) carried out a study to develop an understanding of students’ perceptions regarding self-and peer-assessment. The study recruited 233 third-year university students taking a health psychology course. A written 1500 word research essay was used for the assessment. Students submitted two copies of their assignment: one being marked by their tutor and the other to be assigned to a peer for marking. Only marks given by the tutors counted towards the final mark. Each student was responsible for assessing their own essay and that of another student. The study demonstrated that students felt self-and peer-assessment processes offered positive effect on student learning, even though they felt that there were also some problematic aspects with the assessment. Students developed skills for critical thinking, learned from what others are doing, and were motivated to impress their peers. Students also complained about peer assessment being very time-consuming to complete and that no marks were awarded for completing the process. It will be important in my study to learn about motivation for learning from the receivers of peer feedback.

Vickerman’s (2006) study explored the impact and value of peer assessment as a student learning experience. A total of 90 undergraduate students participated in the study. These participants had been introduced to a formative peer assessment exercise for the first time. They were in their second year of a three-year program in a United Kingdom university. The assessment module involved students producing four annotated bibliographies of which two were formatively peer assessed; the other two were assessed by tutors. The study was based on a questionnaire which contained 4 open and 12 closed ended questions. The study found that over half of the students found the peer assessment process useful and strongly agreed that it had enhanced their subject knowledge and understanding. However, those that had commented to the contrary found it difficult to assess their peers. Only three percent of the students indicated that
they did not enjoy the peer assessment process. In the free responses, many students indicated that they “would have preferred more tutor rather than self-directed support as they did not learn well through independent learning styles” (p.228). This result suggests that “students who are more independent learners may prefer self-assessment rather than peer assessment” (p.229). The extent to which students feel they are independent learners will be important to note in this study.

Xie, Ke, and Sharma’s (2008) study investigated the effect of peer feedback for blogging on college students’ reflective thinking skills and their learning approaches. Data collected from the participants in this study came from: a “weekly weblog journal; a self-report survey on students’ learning approach; and students’ course grades” (p.20). Twenty seven first-year college students enrolled in an introductory political science course participated in the study. The absence of data collected from any one of the three instruments resulted in attrition. One-third of these participants were females. The self-report survey revealed that none of them had used weblog previously. Students were told that part of their course requirement included completion of a reflective journal using Blogger. Students were randomly assigned to two groups: a control or treatment group. Students in the control group blogged for the entire semester without any peer feedback. In the treatment group, students were paired and expected to respond to their paired peer’s journals. Journals were sampled at the beginning and end of the semester for each student. A peer-feedback guide had also been handed out which outlined how to provide constructive feedback. Authors argued that “contrary to the predictions of previous research findings, peer feedback did not promote students’ reflective thinking skills when combined with journaling” (p.23). This suggests that journaling online may have had a counteracting effect when combined with peer feedback. One reason to account for this surprising result may have been there was no face-to-face peer feedback involved. The study revealed that the comments the
students made were more social (such as “good job” or “I agree”) and not meaningful or constructive feedback. In sum, the researchers suggested that scaffolds may have been helpful for these first year students as they may not have been cognitively ready and lacked the experience with self and peer assessment. Xie et al.’s (2008) study suggests that students should be provided with learning experiences that are direct and engaging to stimulate reflection upon experience (Taylor, 2007). In relation to my study, a question still remains whether or not the students felt they were appropriately introduced to the peer assessment and supported through effective scaffolds.

MacLellan’s (2001) study explored the assessment practices as these were perceived by staff and students in one higher education establishment. A total of 80 faculty staff and 130 third-year undergraduate students participated in this study. All participants completed a 40-item questionnaire. With the exception of identity, the remaining variables reflected the range of issues in the research literature. Overall, statistical analysis of the data reflected that there were notable differences of perception between the staff and students. Both students and staff, endorsed grading as the number one purpose for assessment. The second most important purpose for assessment as perceived by staff was motivation to learn. However, most students perceived that assessment only sometimes is motivating; with a quarter of the students answering that assessment never motivates them. Most frequent mode of assessment was essay; 95% reported by staff and 79% by students. However, almost half the students reported that self and peer assessment never happened. “Most students realized the value of feedback although they did not consider the value to be as frequent as staff claimed” (p.309). The majority of the students felt that assessment had been frequently or sometimes carried out using implicit criteria; if they believe “that the criteria are implicit, students will, by definition, by unclear as to what to do to
achieve the desired standard” (p.316). A majority of students also reported that assessment never took place at the beginning of a module, nor could they be assessed when they felt ready. In sum, the students did not feel the purpose of assessment was to improve learning, and therefore, they had a very limited understanding of what assessment is. It is not clear in the MacLellan (2001) study what experience participants had with peer assessment—most likely limited. This may have contributed to their misconceptions about the nature and purpose of peer assessment. It will be important to note the role that mandatory participation in this study has on motivating learners and giving them a learning focus.

**Reflection and Metacognition.** In a four-year action research study McMahon (2010) focused on generating high-quality peer feedback in a university undergraduate program. The study demonstrated that “changes in the structure and process transformed a system that had initially been characterized by a reluctance to criticize fellow students into one that produced immediate, reflective, and useful peer feedback” (p. 273). McMahon found that two key factors placed a role in this transformation. First, when the peer assessment was exclusively formative and focused on deriving quality feedback students’ unease about assessing and being assessed by their peers decreased steeply. Second, the peer assessment became part of the self assessment process. “Students were required to produce their own self assessment statement that incorporated insights gained from the feedback they received from peers, either from the written feedback sheets or verbally during the seminar” (p.282). There was a consensus from the participants that the latter enhanced learning by placing the responsibility on each student to decide what had been learned from the peer assessment process. This is congruent with theories described above that tie the ability to receive feedback from peers to productive self-regulated learning. In addition it was reported that students critically engaged with the assessment criteria
to a point where they develop the kind of tacit understanding. Students also had received training in giving and receiving feedback. Hearing from students who receive peer feedback talk about how they were prepared for and then used the information given to them during the peer assessment will help determine the extent to which the practice reached its potential in this study.

**Summary of Conceptual Framework**

A concern that arose in reviewing the literature was the inconsistency regarding whether or not training in receiving and giving peer feedback was required. Supporters of training and practice for the effective implementation of peer feedback outnumber those who would argue that training was not a prerequisite. Another factor that merits attention in the design of this study is whether peer feedback should be part of the regular course curriculum and introduced early on in the curriculum. Without a clear understanding of formative assessment from the perspective of the user, confusion about what attributed to the effective formative practices will still remain.

Peer assessments appear to enhance the intrinsic motivation of students and this form of assessment offers opportunities for students to learn outside the conventional pattern of student/teacher interaction. There was a split, however, between participants in the studies reviewed in this chapter that felt peer assessment had positive effects on student learning and those that felt it was not their responsibility to assess peers. Another conflicting finding in these studies had to do with motivation. The Hanrahan and Isaacs (2001) study found that students were motivated to impress their peers having been involved in the peer assessment, whereas most of the participants in the MacLellan (2001) study felt that they were only sometimes motivated by the assessment exercise. The latter finding may have been the consequence of students’ misconceptions of the purpose and intended benefits of the peer assessment practices.
In higher education, the context of this study, peer assessment research continues to focus on writing. Much of the literature on formative peer assessment claims that feedback from peers can enhance student learning. The Xie et al. (2008) study raises the question about the need for face-to-face peer feedback to trigger cognitive conflict—a stance others have also taken: “the greatest cognitive and socio-emotional challenges stem from qualitative face-to-face peer assessment” (McLuckie and Topping, 2004, p.566). Another factor that merits attention is the role prior experience in peer feedback, if any, has on the learning experiences of its participants. An argument could also be made that students in professional training programs are more cognitively ready to engage in peer assessment that produces enhanced learning without much training and practice. Another question that still remains is what factors play a role in fostering ‘higher order thinking skills’ in the peer assessment. Are self-directed learners naturally able to engage in deep understanding, or is some combination of both peer and self-assessment necessary to promote metacognition and reflection.

Table 1 on the next page summarizes the important foci observations discussed in this chapter and where in the subsequent chapters they are supported with evidence from the findings of this current study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature Reference</th>
<th>Foci Observations</th>
<th>Current study reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topping (2009)</td>
<td>Classify type of feedback that participant are asked to receive</td>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrade (2010)</td>
<td>Descriptions of the nature of judgments receiver of feedback need to make about themselves and the extent to which these help them reset learning goals-feature of SRL</td>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damon (1984)</td>
<td>Descriptions of interactions with those who give feedback and their assessment of the quality of feedback they received</td>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lui &amp; Carless (2006); Cassidy (2006)</td>
<td>Involvement in establishing the criteria for successful performance vs. not involved in creating it</td>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van den berg et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Both written and oral feedback yields the most complete feedback</td>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cho &amp; MacArthur (2010)</td>
<td>Factors which could attributed back to the preparation process</td>
<td>Chapter 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker (2001)</td>
<td>Role prior experience plays</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballantyne et al. (2002)</td>
<td>Acquired skills and the value learners place on them</td>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topping et al. (2000)</td>
<td>Degree to which receivers of feedback see the peer assessment as an effective example of professional training</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanrahan &amp; Isaacs (2001)</td>
<td>Learn about motivation for learning from the receivers of peer feedback</td>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vickerman (2006)</td>
<td>Extent to which receivers of feedback see the peer assessment as an effective example of professional training</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xie et al. (2008)</td>
<td>Extent to which learners felt they were appropriately introduced to peer assessment and supported through effective scaffolds</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacLellan (2001)</td>
<td>Role mandatory participation has on motivating learners and giving them a learning focus</td>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMahon (2001)</td>
<td>Hearing from students who receive peer feedback talk about how they were prepared for and then used the information given to them</td>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

A Case Study Approach

“A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real life context” (Yin, 2009, p.18). The case in this study was the first-year master’s rehabilitation therapy course entitled “Therapeutic Relationships” at a major Canadian research university. The real-life phenomenon in this study was the peer assessment process. It was examined from the perspective of university students receiving peer feedback and analyzed to investigate what benefits, if any, were identified by students who engage in this process. Answers to the inquiry questions were best illuminated through the use of interviews, a focus group, and written documents. For this reason, the research relied solely on qualitative data for its inquiry.

My research application was approved by The General Research Ethics Board (GREB) in August 2011, and shortly thereafter also from the Faculty of Occupational Therapy at this major Canadian research university to recruit students enrolled in the OT course in my study. See Appendix A for the Ethics Clearance letter.

Research Design

On the next page, Figure 2 demonstrates the logical connection between the major research questions and the chapters that reports the findings to answer each of these questions.
Participant Selection

By the end of September 2011, I had arranged with the course coordinator to come into her class and introduce my study to the Occupational Therapy students. After going over the details of the Letter of Introduction with the class, each student was given a self-addressed envelope that contained the Letter of Introduction and Consent Form: see Appendix B for samples of the Letter of Information and Appendix B for Consent Forms.

Students interested in participating in this study were asked to mail the consent form to me in the pre-addressed envelope that they were provided. The goal was to recruit a learning team in this course to participate in the study. Initially, recruitment of an entire learning team
was planned for ethics and simplicity; as consent to share written feedback would be obtained by both the peer giving the peer feedback and the recipient peer when they belonged to the same learning team. I was successful at recruiting six participants for my study; five of which belonged to the same learning team. Only the peer feedback sheets of the five participants belonging to the same learning team were used as data in this study. Participants who belonged to the same learning team also proved to be beneficial in the focus group session; where group cohesion amongst the majority of the participants helped to foster open discussions. The trust amongst these members of the learning team proved to be beneficial in fostering open discussions and getting answers to the enabling questions of this study.

**Data Collection and Instruments**

The data were collected during the month of November 2011. In an effort to obtain data that is accurate, “some combination of observing what is going on, talking in rather loose, sharing, fashion with the people in the situation, and reading some form of document that they have written” (Glaser, 1965, p. 436) was considered. Participant observation was not used here as the focus of this study was with students’ perspectives. Hence, the following combination of data collection techniques that were employed included: a) individual interviews; b) a focus group; and c) written artifacts, in the form of reflective papers and peer feedback sheets. As stated earlier, the written artifacts were part of the regular course curriculum and also collected for analysis. Thus, only the individual interviews and focus group were above and beyond what was a course requirement for participation in the study. The interview and focus group required approximately 30 minutes for a total of one hour of their time. Both the interview and focus group were held at a time and place convenient to individual participants. These sessions took place after mid-term submissions and scheduled at least one week apart.
Table 2 illustrates the methods that were used to answer each of the major research questions along with the timing of when the data were collected. The table indicates that four interviews were done before the focus group session and two thereafter. This raises the question whether or not the quality of data collected in the last two interviews would be affected by the discussions in the focus group session. The data collected between these two groups did not look any different, although the focus group may have caused additional self-reflection and encouraged further discussions among the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Research Questions</th>
<th>Instrument Protocol Questions</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1: What is the nature of the peer assessment process on the OT communication module as described by students who participated in it?</td>
<td><strong>Interview questions:</strong> Q6 See Appendix D <strong>Focus Group:</strong> Q2 &amp; Q3 See appendix E</td>
<td>Throughout November 2011 (4 interviews before the focus group &amp; 2 following)</td>
<td>Individual Interviews Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2: How did students describe, receive, and use the feedback they were offered through the PA process?</td>
<td><strong>Focus Group Questions:</strong> Q4 See Appendix D <strong>Interview Questions:</strong> Q4 &amp; Q5 See appendix E</td>
<td>November 24th, 2011</td>
<td>Focus Group Individual Interviews Peer Feedback Sheets* Reflective papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3: To what extent does the peer assessment and peer feedback in the OT course reach the potential described by assessment theory?</td>
<td><strong>Focus Group Questions:</strong> Q1 See Appendix D <strong>Interview Questions:</strong> Q1-Q3 See appendix E</td>
<td>November 24th, 2011</td>
<td>Focus Group Individual Interviews Reflective Papers*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These are artifacts that are part of the regular course curriculum that are collected for analysis purposes

**Interviews**

“One of the most important sources of case study information is the interview” (Yin, 2009, p.106). The very nature of an interview is targeted and insightful. It is targeted because it focuses directly on case study topics, while also being insightful in that the interview can provide
casual inferences and explanations (Yin, 2009). The purpose of this study was to understand the nature of peer assessment process in the OT course from individual students’ point of view. For this reason, individual interviews were used for this part of the qualitative inquiry. The first major research question and the accompanying enabling questions would be answered through individual interviews. A place convenient to individual participants was requested at the time of scheduling. It turned out that all interviews and the focus group session were conducted in a study room at a Health Sciences library on campus. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes in length. All interviews were audio recorded so that they could be transcribed verbatim at a later date. Most interviews took place early to mid-November 2011. See Appendix D for sample interview questions.

**Focus Group**

According to Krueger and Casey (2000), the purpose of a focus group is to collect data on the opinions of participants which are of interest to the researcher. “The group must be small enough to share insights and yet large enough to provide diversity of perceptions” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p.10). A focus group can help determine the “perceptions, feelings and thinking of people about issues, products, services, or opportunities” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p.12). A focus group was used in this study to get participants talking freely about questions that were posed to them and spark conversations that may otherwise not have happened in the individual interviews. It is recommended that focus groups consist of five to ten people (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The focus group was organized after the mid-term and at least one week after each individual interview for most participants. The focus group session was audio recorded to allow for verbatim transcriptions. Both a lead facilitator and co-facilitator were used during the focus group. The role of the lead facilitator was taken on by the researcher and responsible for reading
the questions, keeping track of time, and covering the ground rules. Ground rules were made explicit to ensure that no one person dominated the discussion and that everyone participated. The co-facilitator was responsible for audio recording, note taking, and summarizing the key points after each question during the focus group session. See Appendix E for sample of focus group questions.

**Written Artifacts**

Two kind of written artifacts were obtained by this study: a) reflective papers; and b) peer feedback sheets. These written artifacts being part of the regular course curriculum made it relatively easy to obtain from the participants. Participants were asked to bring their written artifacts to their scheduled interviews so that copies could be made and later used for analysis purposes. These artifacts were used as supplementary sources of information to the focus group and individual interviews.

**Reflective Papers.** Reflective papers are an example of personal documents. The collection of these personal documents was a non-interactive way to obtain data from the participants with little exchange of information (McMillan & Shumacher, 2010). The reflective papers collected from participants expressed their beliefs and experiences regarding both their professional development and personal growth. Interpretation of these papers assisted with determining the extent to which the peer feedback was reflected on—insight to answering the third research question.

**Peer Feedback Sheets.** The collected peer feedback sheets reflected the notes taken by peers, acting as primary and secondary observers, during the patient simulation interviews. Standard feedback sheets were used which consisted of the following categories: initiating the interview; gathering the information; communication competencies; building the relationship,
closing, observations of the client, and keep doing. The feedback sheets were used to provide insight to the quality of feedback received. At least three peer feedback sheets were obtained by each participant, and a few of them had provided four feedback sheets for analysis.

Data Analysis

Inductive Analysis

The unit of analysis in the research is the participant. To understand the variability in experiences of the participants, each question was first examined individually across all participants. Findings emerged out of the data, which is considered to be an inductive process (Patton, 2002). As a researcher, I kept a fresh and open mind when looking at the data and tried not to draw on prior knowledge, until later when explanatory power (Patton 2002) was required in chapter 6 of this thesis.

The audio recordings, from both the individual interviews and focus group session, were made into verbatim transcripts: see Appendix G for a sample of a transcribed interview. Completed transcripts of the interviews were then transferred into the qualitative computer software program ATLAS.ti (6.2). Thus, there were six primary documents under one hermeneutic unit, which began the coding process. The focus group transcript and the reflective papers were coded by hand after the coding of the six interviews in ATLAS.ti had been completed. Similar codes appeared when first reading over the focus group transcript, and for that reason, the coding was done by hand so that only the new codes could be added to the pre-existing list. The reflective papers were used to support the findings that emerged from the data and any other new codes that might have surfaced were also added to the list.

Coding. Each interview transcript was assigned a number from 1 to 6, as was the case with the focus group transcript, which also assigned a number 1 through 6 to its participants.
depending on where they sat in the room at the time of the focus group session. Numbers 1 through 6 were used to distinguish individual participants during the coding and actual pseudonym names were only later assigned when quoting participants in the chapters that follow; the chart below highlights these assignments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Number assigned to participants in Interview Transcript</th>
<th>Number assigned to participants in focus group transcript</th>
<th>Pseudonym Names assigned to each Participant in column 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Mia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Lexi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Katie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>#4</td>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Ava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>#5</td>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Ashley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>#6</td>
<td>#6</td>
<td>Beth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The primary documents in ATLAS.ti were carefully read, line by line, and then tagged with a code that described the data to which it was assigned. Coding was done one question at a time, across all participants. Some of the codes had similar names, so combining similar codes was required to avoid redundant repetition. Once the codes had been checked for duplication, a total of 123 codes had been identified across the six interviews. ATLAS.ti was used to print off a list of codes in the hermeneutic unit. This list was then cross referenced with focus group codes and seven additional codes were added to the list, which brought the total number of codes to 130. Once the reflective papers were coded three additional codes needed to be added to the list to bring the total to 133. In reviewing the codes, related codes were further grouped together in
code families, and other unrelated codes were omitted, to bring the final total of codes down to 64. As coding came to an end, relationships among codes became apparent and patterns emerged.

**Finding Patterns and establishing themes.** Next in the analysis was developing patterns from the list of codes. The ability to see patterns in seemingly random information is called pattern recognition (Patton, 2002). In an attempt to find core consistencies and meaning in the code families it was necessary to establish sub-headings for some of the patterns that emerged. A total of 21 patterns and sub-patterns were identified from the list of codes and a total of three themes emerged from the data. See Appendix F for a complete list of codes, patterns and themes.

The findings of this study are presented in chapters 4 through 6 that follow. In chapters five, five of the six participants were grouped together under the heading “The Participants”, whereas one of the participants was isolated from the rest under the heading “Mia’s Experience”. Mia expressed herself in a way that suggested she engaged in meta-cognitive activities. The table 4 indicates participant classification, as well as information on prior experiences with peer assessment and self-reflection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Prior Experience with Reflection</th>
<th>Prior Experience with giving or receiving peer feedback</th>
<th>Suggested engaged meta-cognitive activities</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Mia’s Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants and Mia’s Experience. In order to capture the differences noted in chapters five and six, participants were separated into one of two groupings: “The Participants” and “Mia’s Experience”. These groupings are purposeful in order to isolate Mia from the rest of the participants in this study; Mia suggested that she had engaged in meta-cognitive activities. Isolating how Mia acted and used the peer feedback she received will be meaningful for this study.

The following table indicates how to interpret quotes that will be cited in chapters that follow; pseudonyms have been assigned to ensure confidentiality and anonymity when citing direct quotes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5</th>
<th>Cited Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example of cited quotes</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia said: “…..” (P1, 7)</td>
<td>Participant #1’s interview, line 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate said: “…..” (P3, 10)</td>
<td>Participant #3’s interview, line 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate said: “…..” (FG, P3, 15)</td>
<td>Focus Group, Participant #3, line 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ava said “…..” (SFP, P4, p.7)</td>
<td>Self-reflective paper, Participant #4, p. 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aspects of Trustworthiness

A variety of techniques were employed to increase the trustworthiness of the research; “that is, how much trust can be given that the researcher did everything possible to ensure that the data was appropriately and ethically collected, analyzed, and reported” (Carlson, 2010, p. 1103). The procedures that this study used to increase trust were triangulation, member checking, and inter-rater reliability.

Triangulation. Data triangulation, the use of a variety of data sources, was used in this study. Data was collected using interviews, a focus group, and written artifacts. Earlier on page
28, table two outlined how at least two methods were used to answer each of the major research questions of this study. “The premise is that if the researcher can substantiate these various data sets with each other, the interpretations and conclusions drawn from them are likely to be trustworthy” (Carlson, 2010, p. 1004).

Member checking. The procedure involved having participants review their interview transcripts for accuracy. The six participants were emailed their interview transcripts and invited to clarify, edit, or delete anything in the transcriptions. Participants were asked to email me necessary changes; otherwise it was assumed transcriptions were accurate. Four out of the six participants, regardless, sent an email confirming accuracy.

Inter-rater reliability. This procedure was used to determine the efficacy of my coding process. The co-facilitator used for the focus group also served as the second reader and coder. She was a master’s student of education with extensive knowledge of classroom assessment practices and a familiarity with the context of this study. Two methods were used to test the inter-rater reliability. First, the second coder was given transcripts of the focus group and interviews and asked to code 2 pages of the 8 pages of interview #6 and 2 pages of the 11 pages of focus group data. Within the selected pages I was interested in seeing whether or not my labeling of the codes would be similar in meaning to her codes? Table 2.1 below shows that the coders were in agreement 6 out of the 7 times when each coder came up with their own codes. The one code that we were not in agreement with was something that I had coded as “Preceptor as Expert”. I would not have expected the second coder to come up with this particular code, as it was only assigned to the data once all the interview and focus group transcripts had been fully analyzed.
The second method employed, to test the efficacy of my codes, provided a list of codes to the second coder, and she had to match the codes to text. This time the second coder was asked to code another page of the 8 pages of interview #6 and another 2 pages of the 11 pages of focus group data. Calculations were made to determine the degree to which the coders agreed on the coding of text.

**Table 7**  
*Inter-rater Reliability: Codes Provided*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcripts</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Researcher’s Codes (N1)</th>
<th>Second Reader’s Codes (N2)</th>
<th>Calculating Inter-rater Reliability CR=2M/N1+N2</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group and Interview #6</td>
<td>Builds Confidence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fosters Trust</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6/6</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General Feedback</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8/9</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specific Feedback</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where M= # of times the two coders agree; N1 and N2= # of coding decisions each coder made.
Table 7 above shows these calculations and the average of all percentages found agreement at least 89% or higher between coders. I am pretty confident with the codes that I have selected; as two different methods were used with a second coder and each method found agreement with me at least 86% of the time.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I outlined how participants were selected and the methods used to collect data. I then discussed my methods of inductive analysis which involved coding, finding patterns and establishing themes. Finally, aspects of trustworthiness were discussed which included the procedures used to gain trust in the way I conducted the research. The next chapter will be about the peer assessment process, which offers more details about the nature of the peer assessment process for OT students.
CHAPTER 4

THE PEER ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The Learning Experience

This chapter begins with descriptions of the research context which outlines the preparation process from the first day of class and includes details regarding the interview rounds. The results section which follows answers the first major research question from the data collected during the individual interviews and the focus group session.

The First Day of Class

Students in the OT course were introduced to the peer assessment process on the first day of class when they were shown a demonstration interview, which modeled what each of them would be later expected to do, either as the recipient of the feedback or the peer providing it. The demonstration interview lasted 30 minutes in length, which was the exact amount of time that each of them would be expected to spend interviewing with the community volunteer during the peer assessment exercise. The course coordinator acted as the interviewer during the demonstration interview and a community volunteer as the interviewee. Students were expected to complete the peer feedback sheet that had been provided, while they watched their course coordinator conduct the interview. In addition to the written feedback sheets that were collected from the students, they were also given the opportunity to provide oral feedback to their course coordinator, if they chose to do so. Questions asked by the course coordinator during the demonstration interview followed the OCAIRS Mental Health interview framework, that the students also had been introduced to, in class that day, and expected to follow during their first round of interviews. Due to copyright rules and regulations the OCAIRS interview framework will not included as an appendix item in this thesis.
First Round Interviews

As stated earlier, members of each learning team took turns acting as either the interviewer or the peer giving the peer feedback. Each team of three included: the primary observer, the secondary observer, and the peer conducting the interview. Questions asked by the interviewer followed the OCAIRS Mental Health interview framework. Peer observers used the peer feedback template that had been provided to them to record written peer feedback. The peer feedback sessions immediately followed the interview, whereby the primary and secondary observers offered peer feedback first followed by their preceptor.

Subsequent Interviews

The one thing that changed with the second round of clinical interviews was the interviewing framework that students were expected to follow when doing these interviews. The framework that students followed during the second round of interviews was the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM). Students were introduced to the COPM, in class, during week four, just before the second round of interviews began. The third and fourth round of clinical interviews turned out to be slightly different than the first two. First, students were able to choose which interviewing framework they preferred to use when doing their third and fourth round of interviews. And second, students set learning objectives for themselves that they would receive feedback on. These learning objectives were to be shared with the peers, providing them feedback, in advance of the clinical interviews. Students having set learning objectives for themselves changed: a) their learning experience, and b) the quality of the peer feedback they received during the third and fourth rounds of interviews. Details regarding these phenomena are discussed further in the ‘results’ section of this chapter and in chapter 5.
Earlier on page 13, Figure one depicted how smaller learning teams are formed from the larger learning groups. The letter learning teams were assigned indicated the order in which clinical interviews were conducted. Members of Group A took turns conducting the interviews and giving peer feedback in weeks: one, four, seven, and ten; whereas members of Group B did their interviews in weeks two, five, eight, and eleven; and Group C in weeks three, six, nine, and twelve. There was a two week gap between the timing of the first interviews between members of Group A and Group C. And it was for this reason that the initial learning experiences of the students differed depending on the timing of their first interview. It followed that two patterns emerged from this occurrence: those that got the opportunity to learn by observing others and those that experienced and learned from having been engaged in the peer assessment. Particular findings with respect to these patterns are explored next.

**Results:** Q1. *What is the nature of Peer Assessment process in the Occupational Therapy communication module as described by students who participated in it?*

**The peer assessment process**

In addition to the descriptions of the peer assessment exercise outlined above, specific details regarding the peer assessment activity from students’ perceptions are explored in this section. During their individual interviews, participants of this study were asked: “what expectations did you have of the peer assessment exercise”. Katie said that she:

> Didn’t have any expectations [but was] worried what [were] my peers going to say….and none of us [were] really trained….[but] watching the preceptor I found that it was really helpful to learn how to properly give criticism” (P3, 139)

The idea of the “preceptor as expert” was a code that often turned up in the data and also expressed by Beth when answering the same question. Beth said “my preceptor would give me a
lot of ideas” (P6, 191). It turned out the preceptor, especially in rounds one and two of the interviews, served as the training piece that the students had felt was missing initially for them. This reinforces the point made earlier in the literature about the need for scaffolds for first year students when they lack the experience (Xie et al. 2008). In this study, participants felt that they had been rushed into the peer assessment process, even though they did get support through effective scaffolding from their preceptor. When asked, Mia replied “I personally didn’t have any expectations ….just that the process was respectful of one another” (P1, 102)

Next participants were asked: “what elements of the peer assessment did you find most useful, if any?” Lexi felt that what was most helpful for her was: a) having set learning objectives “because you’re getting the feedback designed on what you want to be learning, rather than what they [thought] you should be learning” (P2, 112), and b) familiarity with members of your team; which was the case by the third and fourth round of interviews. The latter phenomenon showed up throughout the data and resulted in a pattern which emerged and was called “Group Dynamic”. The group dynamic is explored further in chapters 6.

Mia went on to say that at the beginning of the course she believed that they covered ground rules regarding peer assessment responsibilities and how to ensure no one gets offended in class. This suggests Mia had been adequately introduced to the peer assessment process through scaffolds (Xie et al. 2008). Next, Mia went on to talk about what peer assessment added to her learning experience:

[It was] useful for self-improvement” (P1, 132)…. “it helped me realize the things that I do that I don’t personally see. So when you are actually in the picture you don’t realize possibly the words you say a lot or there are words that you shouldn’t be saying in an interview” (P1, 121)
The biggest learning for Beth came when she ‘video swapped’ with another peer that had interviewed the same client as she had but their interviews turned out to be totally different:

Well, we had the same preceptor but we were in different teams and when my peer finished his interview his preceptor told him like: “Oh Beth had the same client and your interviews were totally different, you should swap videos so you can see it”. So then we swapped videos and [ I was] able to see like how his probing got completely different information that what I was asking, so that was really interesting …[and] it was a big learning experience just to see that (P6, 228)

Both video swapping and the use of learning objectives served as effective scaffolds in the peer assessment process, however these were not directly attributed by students to the preparation process.

Participants were next asked: “what elements of the peer assessment did you find most frustrating, if any”? For the most part, none of the participants found any one thing that was frustrating; rather they offered some suggestions and feedback for their instructors in the course. One comment that had to do with the peer assessment process came from Lexi who suggested that “people should be rotated…cause sometimes you end up seeing the same person” (P2, 123); referring to interviewee or the peer providing you with feedback. Ashley added that “I don’t think that I have ever felt super-frustrated “ (P5, 199)…but my first interview was difficult “but that’s just the learning process so [I needed to] take it with a grain of salt and move on” (P5, 2009). That being said, Mia did have frustrations:

You never know what the interviewee is going to be like. So certain interviews may not ‘pan out’ the way you want it to and it could be frustrating because there are these skills that you want to work on but [can’t]; you may be dealing with someone who had a
traumatic brain injury, and you are more working on what they are trying to say, than improving the things that you wanted to work on. So it is frustrating that you can’t always have an ideal environment to improve your skills (P1, 136).

This suggests that Mia did not feel the peer assessment always presented itself as an effective example of professional training (Topping et al. 2000).

**Contribution to Learning**

It is interesting that discussions on learning were short. Ashley offered that “different perspectives of how you did or how they would have [done] things differently gets you thinking about new areas to focus on that you may have otherwise neglected” (FG, P5, 34). Ava felt that peers picked up on things that she did not realize and offered her helpful suggestions that she could learn from. Both Ashley and Ava suggested that participating in this activity helped them each with self-reflection. Self-reflection appeared as a code throughout the data. Lexi added that “you kind of learn about what you would have done in that situation even if you didn’t get face to face with that person” (FG, P2, 45). Katie agreed, stating that “just from watching other peers doing their interview was really helpful in that you pick up on things that you can add to your own repertoire of skills” (FG, P3, 53). Ashley also agreed by stating that “when you are watching other peoples’ interviews and trying to evaluate them and give them feedback, you are reflecting on some of the things that they are doing [and] you [also] would like to apply” [yourself] (FG, P5, 57).

Two patterns emerged from this data: a) those that were given the opportunity to learn in just observing others, and b) those that experienced and learned from having been directly involved in the peer feedback, either as provider of the feedback or the recipient of it. Findings
here suggest that the peer assessment presented an environment for independent learning for the observers (Vickerman, 2006).

Mia didn’t offer any feedback when this question was posed to the group. It also was an oversight on my part, as the lead facilitator, whose role was to ensure that everyone was given the opportunity to speak and that no one particular participant dominated the discussions.

**Initial Reactions**

Also asked during the focus group session was: “if you were going to coach next year’s students, how might you prepare them to get as much benefit as possible from the peer assessment activities in this course?” The discussions began with the need to be receptive to receiving peer feedback—the focus of the next chapter. However, when conversations were redirected discussions focused on how the course could be improved. A common theme that appeared was “scaffolding tools” that could have help with the initial interviews, such as a guide to “help them look for things in the interview” (FG, P5, 96). Although, participants had been provided scaffolds in preparation for the peer assessment activities, not all participants felt adequately prepared. The fact that four out of six participants had prior experience with peer assessment had no bearing on how prepared they felt and this was inconsistent with what the literature suggested (Walker, 2001).

When asked about preparing next year’s students for the peer assessment activities in this course, Mia’s responses highlighted some of the tensions and frustrations in having been the first group to engage in the peer assessment activities. She said that:

On the second day, they were like you have an interview tomorrow, bring your CV and dress in professional clothing. And for me personally, I didn’t know what the interview was for: Was I being interviewed? Or was I doing the interviewing? (FG, P1, 172)
Mia had felt that it was:

A rushed process, even though they give you all the resources the morning before you do the interviews. So for me I felt like, my head was full of what I wanted to do for this interview and I wasn’t really paying attention to what they told us: you were just trying to prepare for it (FG, P1, 177)

Being motivated to succeed and the peer assessment process being new for Mia may have led to the initial rounds being highly stressful.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter explored the nature of the peer assessment process in the OT course. The peer assessment was a core part of this course curriculum, which began at the start of the course and carried through until the end. There was no formal training and practice in this course. Student talked about the role their preceptor played in this process. Preceptors appeared to fill a void created by a lack of training, especially by modeling how to give constructive criticism in the initial stages. Some students expressed their tensions and anxiety being first to conduct the interview and thought that more ‘hands on’ scaffolding tools would have helped. Overall, students expressed that having engaged in this process helped them reflect on what they had learned.
CHAPTER 5

THE PRODUCT: PEER FEEDBACK

The first section of this chapter brings context to the peer feedback by revisiting the roles and responsibilities, as well as the sources of feedback. The results section that follows answers the second major research question of this study using evidence from the individual interviews and focus group session. The peer feedback sheets and reflective papers were also analyzed in the results section and used as supplementary sources of information. Recall, that the finding presented in this chapter have been separated into one of two groupings: “The Participants” and “Mia’s Experience”. These groupings were purposeful in order to isolate Mia from the rest of the participants. Mia has suggested that she had engaged in meta-cognitive activities which were reinforced when she talked about how she used the peer feedback that had been offered.

Roles and Responsibilities-revisited

Each student in the course conducted and received feedback on four clinical interviews. Individual feedback sheets based on a template are provided to observers for note taking and provide the basis for the feedback sessions. Each member of the learning team took turns giving and receiving feedback. Participation in the peer assessment is mandatory. Students received both written and verbal feedback during the peer feedback sessions. Feedback on the interview was first offered by the interviewer herself, followed by the primary and secondary observers, with the preceptor going last. The preceptor was last to offer any feedback and this was done intentionally to not take away any feedback offered by primary and secondary observers. Peers not involved in the peer feedback session also got the opportunity to provide informal feedback to their peers when they sat in on another team’s peer feedback session. The opportunity to observe another’s interview arose when an interviewee was absent and that team of three joined
the other primary and secondary observers behind their one way mirror. Although, informal peer feedback is not focus on this study, understanding that it does happen was important to note. Table 8 below depicts the roles and responsibilities played by each member in the peer assessment process.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles in the PA Process</th>
<th>Responsible for providing form feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Volunteer: interviewee</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Observer</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Observer</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipient of feedback: interviewer</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Preceptor</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of the other team: observing only</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources of feedback

**Self.** The interviewer was the first up to provide and express her thoughts on how the interview had transpired. Often this feedback dwelled on the negative and what she could or should have alternatively said during her interview. Self-reflecting on all the feedback provided, as well as the interview itself, is another source of feedback for participants. Individual self reflections are explored later in chapter six when looking at the self-reflective papers of the participants.

**Peers.** The primary and secondary observers provided both written and oral feedback to their peer, which was based on the clinical interview they just observed her complete. The peer feedback session was videotaped, so that it could to be reviewed at a later date, along with the written feedback sheets that had been provided.
Preceptor. Oral feedback from the preceptor tended to be last, after all other feedback had been provided. Written feedback was also provided to the interviewer. The preceptor was considered to be an expert in providing constructive feedback, as well as the interview itself.

Community Volunteer. Interestingly enough, the feedback from the volunteer was not mentioned by the participants of this study in any of the methods used to collect data. Because this feedback is not a focus of this study, its impact on the interviewer remains unknown.

Results: Q2. How did students describe, receive, and use the feedback they were offered through the peer assessment process?

Descriptions of the quality of feedback received

The Participants. Participants were asked was the: “second time you received feedback any different for you than the first?” Individual responses showed the fact that each of them were at a slightly different stage in their course; all participants had completed at least three rounds of interviews, and some their fourth. Lexi felt that there was a big difference “because we had each other’s learning objectives so we knew what we wanted to work on and then you [could] target your feedback” (P2, 43). She also said:

The second and third time around we were more comfortable with each other, so we were more honest about it and we weren’t trying to, like, tread likely on anyone’s feelings, so you got a lot more constructive feedback that wasn’t just kind of general feedback. It was more specific (P2, 46)

Lexi reinforced a point made earlier, about the value placed on learning objectives for the peer assessor, as well as for the assesseee. Katie responded by saying that:

I think everyone was kind of worried so there was more positive feedback, maybe? I
was feeling really negative after my first interview, so I don’t know if I fully heard all the positive feedback but it was really good having our preceptor give feedback as well, cause it kind of showed us how to do it properly and actually get the point across (P3, 72)

Ashley felt that “towards the third and fourth interviews we were more aware of what one another’s learning objectives” (FG, P5, 98), as well as “more comfortable with pointing out picky things” (P5, 133). This gave peers direction in providing the feedback that had not been the case with the initial interviews. Ashley also said that knowing what her peers were looking for in the interview made her conscious of things she should be doing during her interview. Ashley also shared that:

  Our preceptor’s feedback [initially] to the people providing the feedback was that we were basically providing a ‘narrative’ in a lot of ways…like we had so much information that we as feedback providers needed to cut down and be a little more clear and concise about the areas that were most important for the person receiving [the feedback] (FG, P5, 163)

Ava said that her “group went the week after Ashley’s and [she] noticed a big difference with the type of feedback we got by the end of the program than the first because we had formed a relationship” (FG, P5, 112). It was apparent that by the third and fourth round of interviews that trust amongst the group had formed which allowed peers to be more open and honest with one another when giving the feedback, as well as being more receptive to peer feedback. For Katie, it was encouraging, in the beginning, to get “positive feedback and then [next] steps on how [she could do] better” (P3, 159). She found it re-assuring to get feedback from her peer when she thought it had not gone so well: “Ok, I know that interview went awful” and then being told “No,
it’s actually wasn’t that bad and here, you can probably do this to make it better” (P3, 161). Ava agreed, that if you felt that the interview did not go well and somebody told you differently “of course that did make [you] feel better but…definitely the more constructive, even harsh criticism [was] welcomed” (P4, 112). Two of the participants preferred to receive feedback from their peer, over that of their preceptor. On the other hand, Ashley felt that “affirmations from your preceptor” was “really motivating”…. especially when you overheard [your preceptor] say “how excited she is for this group” …and [how they are] “doing so well so quickly” (P5, 186). This reinforces the notion that receivers of feedback felt it served as a motivation for learning (Hanrahan & Isaacs, 2001). Ashley also said that having bonded with your team and being comfortable with one another, by the third and fourth round of interviews, allowed them to be more willing to receiving and giving constructive feedback.

Beth felt that watching the video of her own interview and feedback session was really valuable to her:

[As she had] so many things going on in [her mind] that some things just go in through one ear-out the other—or you’re interpreting something totally different than what, in actuality, the person is trying to say (P6, 103)

Beth had similar concerns regarding how much she had retained from the oral peer feedback. This reinforced the importance of having the video and written peer feedback sheets to refer to (Van den berg et al., 2006) when completing self reflections later on in this course. When asked about any differences between the peer feedback sessions, Ava said they were not any different for her. She “personally welcomed all feedback—good or bad—and [even though] the positive feedback made [her] feel great, [she] really wanted to hear the negative feedback. That was what was going to help her” (P4, 54).
Participants were also asked: “the skills you have been developing in this course are communication and professional interactions and responsibilities. Think of the different ways you have developed these skills and talk about those meaningful to you?” Discussions began with Ava who stated that the “best way I have developed the skills is through practicing and getting feedback from other students” (FG, P4, 4). Ava went on to say that getting feedback on questioning strategies you used in your interview was really important for her; developing this skill would help her later as a clinician. Both Lexi and Ashley felt that the video of their feedback session was a useful tool that helped them with self reflection. Beth agreed by stating that watching the video helped her to absorb the feedback. The value placed on watching the peer feedback, opposed to just hearing it orally, is important to note as it has come up several times in the data.

**Mia’s Experience.** When asked, Mia felt self-awareness which came from watching her interview and feedback session was most meaningful for her:

When you are in the interview you don’t realize what you are doing [until later when] you get the feedback and go watch it….and then you ask yourself: why did I ask that question? …or that ya I could have built on that (FG, P3, 15)

By definition, metacognition occurs when individuals reflect on their own thinking processes (Earl, 2003). Experts would describe such thinking as interval conservations with oneself, such as, monitoring their own understanding (Earl, 2003). Mia’s quote above suggested that she had “internal conversations” with herself. A more detailed explanation of metacognition is provided later on in this chapter.

Mia also expressed that the feedback provided by her peers was general. This point had previously been brought up by other participants as well. Mia believed that it was not until much
later, in the third round of interviews, that the feedback had a clear focus when it was based on our learning objectives. Mia also believed that she was not very good at giving good feedback either, when she first started out:

I wasn’t giving good feedback…I was like I didn’t think of that and it didn’t really touch upon me to write [that] down as feedback. …for me I needed examples. But by the second time around, I had a better idea what was expected of me (P1, 52)

Mia draws attention to the differences in the quantity of feedback which is explored next.

**Descriptions of the quantity of Feedback Received**

**The Participants.** This section examines the written feedback sheets provided by the peer assessors. Ava belonged to a different learning team, and having not obtained consent from her peer assessors to share information, her peer feedback sheets were omitted from the analysis in this section. The written feedback sheets were all dated and each of them identified the names of the peer assessor, as well as the assessee. Dates on the feedback sheets confirmed the timing of the interviews and peer feedback sessions that followed. From this information I was able to confirm that the remaining participant data in this section, all belonged to group A— the first group to engage in the peer feedback exercise. The learning objectives of participants were not explicitly noted on the feedback sheets. In order to look for variations in the written feedback provided to participants, two different assessment sessions by the same peer assessor were considered for review. Participants were expected to provide descriptive feedback.

The analysis of the peer feedback sheets begins with Katie. Katie’s peer assessor chosen for the purposes of this review was Lexi. The written feedback sheets from rounds one and two were examined here. In both of these rounds, Lexi offered Katie feedback on a total of 18 things from each interview. The first time four out of the 18 points were constructive feedback. By the
second interview, Lexi increased the amount of constructive feedback offered to six. One of the written comments made by Lexi to Katie on the first interview was “more direction in the interview from your end—really difficult in this case though!” On her second interview, Lexi suggested a prompt that Katie could use when questioning: “Tell me more”[is a] really good tool to expand on things when you are stuck”. This data demonstrates how feedback offered between the first and second interviews improved in quality and quantity.

Next, Ashley offers written feedback to Mia on her first and third round of interviews. The first time round, Ashley had provided Mia with feedback on 11 items from her first interview, all of which were positive remarks. An example of the kind of positive reinforcement offered by Ashley to Mia was: “[you were] patient with her memory difficulties [and you] didn’t [put] pressure [on] her and still kept yourself on topic”. The total number of items offered for feedback by Ashley to Mia on her third interview increased to 16 items. This time, Ashley was able to provide Mia with two items that were constructive feedback. An example of the constructive feedback provided by Ashley was: “shorten your questions, [as] a couple of them had multiple questions in them”. Although Ashley has able to provide detailed positive remarks to Mia from the onset, it wasn’t until much later, that Ashley was more comfortable in providing constructive feedback to her peer.

Katie’s written feedback to Ashley, between the first and fourth interviews are explored next. Katie offered feedback to Ashley on a total of 17 points from interview one, two of which were constructive remarks. An example of general feedback offered to Ashley was: “client needed to be probed more and [interview] didn’t have flow”. By the fourth interview, Katie offered 18 points of feedback and four of these were in the way of constructive criticism. One constructive comment that Katie made to Ashley was that the client “shifted around a lot
(physically in the interview) and seemed a bit uncomfortable”. On the bottom of the feedback form, Katie also gave examples of how three questions could have been asked in the interview. The analysis of these written peer feedback sheets suggested, that with practice, the quality of feedback improved—from being general to more specific—as well as more of it was offered.

**Mia’s Experience.** Next, the written feedback offered by Mia to Lexi between her second and third interviews were examined. Mia offered a total of 9 points in the way of feedback to Lexi in both cases. When comparing the total amount of written feedback that was offered amongst peers, Mia tended to provide less. The first time Mia had feedback to offer, she shared only one point of constructive criticism to Lexi. Mia’s feedback to Lexi was that she “[could have] come back to asking about the meds and how she [was] dealing with that.” For the third interview, Mia had two points of constructive criticism to share and offered feedback on the need to use more silence with longer pauses to acknowledge what the client was saying. Later on in this chapter, Mia reflects on her ability to provide constructive feedback to her peers.

**How students received the peer feedback that was offered**

**The Participants.** When asked: “How did you initially feel about the peer feedback exercise?” Katie, Ava, and Ashley all felt that the ‘time factor’ was an issue for them during the peer assessment exercise, when either giving or receiving the peer feedback. Katie felt that she needed more time to reflect before receiving the feedback and this was reflected in the following statement from her:

Well, I guess I found it kind of overwhelming like right after my interview…..and you think it went pretty badly and you have like six or seven people in the same room as you saying: “Oh, you did this but you didn’t do that” and it sometimes it’s kind of overwhelming you know. You just want to sit aside and go through how you even
felt the interview [went]...have your five minutes to process what happened (P3, 174)

On the other hand, Ava felt she needed more time before giving constructive criticism to her peers. Ava also mentioned that the peer feedback should be “anonymous unless you have a closer relationship to the people but like I was saying before: the more I get to know somebody, the more comfortable I feel” (P4, 117) providing them with constructive criticism. Ashley felt that it was “a really good experience uhmm, I don’t think that I’ve ever felt super-frustrated” (P5, 199)...but my first interview was difficult “but that’s just the learning curve process, so [I needed to] take it with a grain of salt and move on” (P5, 209). Ashley also had similar thoughts regarding her peers when she said “sometimes it was nice to hear and other times it’s like: I already knew that” (P5,181), implying that she wanted more constructive criticism. Ava on the other hand:

Was expecting more positive [feedback] just because of the way people are they want to give more positive rather than negative [and ]what surprised [her] the most when [she] was giving people feedback was how difficult it was ….because you weren’t given time to really sit down and think about it” (P5, 96)

Ava suggests that she needed time to reflect before giving peer feedback. The time factor that Ava talks about was a pattern that emerged throughout the data. Lexi felt that it was helpful to have different perspectives during the PA exercise, whereby:

Everyone sees situations differently, so I was kind of expecting that people would pick up on habits that I hadn’t realized I had myself, and uhmm, they’d be able to relay back to me and then you kind of learn about yourself in a way that you can’t really do when you’re just self-reflecting (P2,106)
Lexi said that she felt:

A little bit intimidated with it because you don’t really know your learning team when you start [out] (P2, 31)….but] the experience was a good one because it’s people in the same situation as you giving you feedback and, uhmm, I just found it was definitely helpful to receive it from a peer, [and] maybe more so than [that of her] preceptor, who has a lot of experience and doesn’t understand where you’re coming from (P2, 36)

Lexi placed value on receiving feedback from her “equal” (Damon, 1984). As stated earlier, not everyone in this study would agree with Lexi on this topic. Ava added that not knowing each other, in the beginning, made it uncomfortable to give negative feedback even if it was constructive. This was not the case now, two months later, when she was more open to giving feedback because they all knew each other; “but to somebody [she] just met…and doesn’t know how they’re going to respond, [she] would hold back a bit” (P4, 45). This reinforces a earlier about the difference the group dynamic had made when it came time to providing constructive criticism. Ashley also had similar thoughts by stating that you “didn’t really know each other yet, so I think we were all pretty polite to begin with” (P5, 74) and “I didn’t want to rock the boat or offend anybody right off the bat because I didn’t want to jeopardize future relationships (P5, 78).

Beth felt “nervous at first because, [her] group [was] thrown into interviews on the third day of class, so none of us really knew each other (P6, 58). When asked this question, Katie said that:

You’re kind of a little more self-conscience….as I said before I’m my [own] worst critic like most people…..I’m still trying to apply the techniques and everything they told me that I can work on, so it’s kind consciously being aware of what you do well and what you don’t—which is helpful (P3, 58)
Katie reinforces the point made earlier about the conditions needed for learning within the zone of proximal development (Topping, 1998). Katie also added that:

Learning how to give proper feedback really helped with professionalism because at the beginning of the course we said: “that’s great…you are doing really good; because no one wanted to touch on anything that was negative. By seeing our preceptors give criticism effectively that [then] we were more open to sharing [with our peers]… and give constructive criticism that is not offensive or just glazed over the actual issue (FG, P3, 45)

Mia’s Experience. Mia, not having any prior experience with feedback, felt a bit incompetent. As previously mentioned, Mia felt that she “had difficulty grasping certain concepts right away [and needed] a lot examples before [she] knew what to look for (P1, 33). Mia reminds us that she could:

Give general feedback but I guess my ability to actively listen is still developing. So it makes it really difficult to give really good feedback. [For example], I [would] say “that was really good eye contact” but nothing really [about] the content of the interview; I find that I have a little bit of difficulty with that. So in that sense, it makes me feel this is definitely a skill that I need to develop and learn how to do better (P1, 38).

Mia raised an interesting point: that giving peer feedback is a skill. This emerged from the data as an additional skill to those that this course explicitly aimed to develop through the peer assessment activities. Peer feedback as a skill was identified as one of the headings under the pattern professional development in the data. Mia was aware that she was still developing the skill of giving feedback.
Contribution to Learning

The Participants. During the focus group, participants were asked “to what extent, if any, has the peer feedback you received made any meaningful contribution towards critical thinking and reflection?” Beth began the discussion by saying that:

Being responsible for giving feedback and hearing your feedback has made me a lot more critical in terms of how you ‘phrase’ questions. I was never so reflective on that and I never really thought about how to properly phrase a question when you are talking to a client. I didn’t realize how important it was. It is something that has been developed (FG, P6, 206)

This point reinforces something that Mia said earlier about the skill of giving peer feedback. Beth felt that she had developed this skill, whereas Mia believed she was still developing the skill of giving peer feedback. Katie felt that the peer feedback helped with her self-confidence. Katie thought that her peers were really encouraging by giving her suggestions on how to improve her interview. Builds confidence was linked to the pattern personal growth in the data. Ashley commented about peers “providing you with alternatives is really helpful and then you end up using it in all your classes” (FG. P5, 231). Ashley suggested that what she learned from the peer feedback could be applied it to other contexts; something that I linked to the pattern professional development. Ava said that she prefers the written feedback over the oral. The written feedback served as a guide for her when looking at the video, or when doing her written self-reflections: “you got something to look at opposed to trying to base everything on what you remember” (FG, P4, 255). Ava recalls being tired, stressed and overwhelmed, I couldn’t remember a lot of what was said” (FG, P4, 27. Lexi had this to add:

I know for me, I always wrote more in the written feedback than I actually said in the
verbal feedback, so there would be some things that I wrote down that I didn’t say to
them out loud but I gave it to them on paper (FG, P2, 257)

Katie also commented on how she liked the video recording of the feedback because you could
go back and hear it again.

Individual interviews buttressed participants’ descriptions of how the peer feedback had helped them so far in this course. Beth felt that the peer feedback has:

 Been really valuable because we’re able to learn from everyone else’s mistakes too;
because it’s something that involves everyone within our team and it’s not just like the
three people [discussing] the interview that were watching it. So even if you weren’t
watching the interview, you get to be part of that peer feedback session, [and] able to take
so much information and so much knowledge just from that one peer feedback session
and apply it to your own learning. Uhmm, I think it’s also just—like what I said earlier—
just like editing someone else’s paper: it’s another set of eyes, another perspective
uhmm, and they’re able to pick up on things that you wouldn’t [otherwise have been]
able to pick up on (P6, 246)

Beth reiterates a point made earlier, about the learning that happens from just observing the peer
feedback session. When asked, Ashley says that getting different perspectives was helpful. For
example, “like when your primary observer might not have thought about taking the interview in
that direction”…. but having different perspectives on the interview “ends up working really
well” (P5, 207). Ava thought it was helpful “having two brains working at the same time” (P4,
124) to make up for the “things that were missed in the interview” (P4, 122). These comments
suggest that peer feedback from multiple sources yields the most complete feedback. Lexi stated
that:
I think it’s helped me to realize improvements that I can make in my communication and just in my professionalism, uhmm, by watching other people and giving them feedback you realize like what you could incorporate into your learning and also receiving feedback from other people, uhmm, really helps you to kind of grow in your own direction, uhmm, so when people are looking at your learning objectives—and specifically focusing on that stuff—it kind of helps you to tailor your learning and to get exactly what you want out of the course. I just find that watching other people interview and then giving them feedback, uhmm, it kind of helps to see things from different perspectives and you can incorporate their feedback into your interviews as well (P2, 135)

One thing that Lexi added, that has not been mentioned before was the peer feedback sessions had helped her with two of the OT competencies that this course focuses on. When asked Katie said that the peer feedback sessions have been really supportive and made her feel a little bit more confident in her skills. “The skills that [she] thought were ok [were] actually good and the ones that I know I lack…I have some steps or suggestions of how to get there” (P3, 199).

Mia’s Experience. In the focus group session, Mia said that the peer feedback “helped [her] think about what has just happened” and [how she] could have done [the interview] better. (FG, P3, 236). She was also able to “realize that her peers [were in fact] right; [she] hadn’t focused on this during the interview” (FG, P3, 238). Mia felt that the peer feedback had helped her with self-reflection. During her individual interview, Mia was asked: “how has the peer feedback sessions helped you so far in this course?” Mia reiterated that it helped her with self reflection and “developing the skills that [she] needed as a clinician” (P1, 50). When probed a bit more about self-reflection, Mia said that:
A lot of the course is based on knowing what you are doing and reflecting upon your actions and [how] to improve yourself. So a lot of reflecting…we have to write reflective journals and it is to really keep us on track with what is going on because a lot of times you could go about learning but not truly understanding what you are learning. [So] these reflective journals help you to sit down and think about what has been learned instead of ‘auto piloting it’ (P1, 153)

The explanation offered by Mia here reinforces that Mia had engaged in meta-cognitive activities. Recall that earlier, metacognition happens when a higher level analysis takes place when reflecting back on something.

Evidence of how the peer feedback was used

The self-reflective papers were reviewed to provide insight to how participants used the feedback they were offered. An analysis of this data revealed that not all the participants reflected on the peer feedback they had received in their self-reflective papers

| Table 9 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Tools available for feedback and self-reflection** | Learning Objectives Shared | Written feedback referred to learning objectives | Self-Reflective Papers reflected on written feedback provided |
| Participant | | | |
| Mia | X | Unable to determine | √ (implicit) |
| Lexi | √ | | X |
| Katie | X | Unable to determine | X |
| Ava | √ | No consent obtained to use | √ (explicit) |
| Ashley | X | Unable to determine | X |
| Beth | X | Unable to determine | X |

Table 9 shows that only Ava and Mia reflected on the written feedback which is in “varying degrees”. This conclusion was drawn after having cross referenced the written feedback sheets of participants to their corresponding self-reflective papers.
The Participants. Ava made it explicit that she based her self-reflections on feedback provided to her and had this to say:

I would like to maintain active listening skills. Feedback from others has confirmed that I show actively listening by making direct eye contact, nodding, and responding to clients comments either by paraphrasing what they have said or asking for more clarity (SFP, P4, p4)

Participants were asked to reflect on the greatest challenge of the client-therapist relationship. Katie, Beth, Ashley and Lexi all felt that their biggest challenge was maintaining professional boundaries, while Ava felt it was lack of knowledge. When asked what strategies would be utilized to address these challenges, with the exception of Ava, the rest of them said they would use self-reflection to address this challenge. Although, unable to definitively state whether or not these participants reflected on the written feedback they received, they did however state they would use self-reflection, in varying degrees, as a strategy to address the challenges of the client-therapist relationship. This implies that these participants may be independent learners. Ashley said she would write a “reflective summary for [herself] and jot down [her] thoughts as they happened, so that [she] could go back to them and take in what [she] thought at the time and how [she] felt about the situation after” (SFP, P5, p.7). Beth said she would use self-reflection on a daily basis. “By reflecting on a daily basis, I will be able to effectively monitor my emotions and involvement with my client relationships and better notice instances where I am becoming too attached or too emotionally involved” (SFP, P6, p3).

Mia’s Experience. In her self-reflective paper, Mia said she needed to work on her active listening skills, as well as formulating the right questions to ask. Based on the written feedback received from her peers, it was evident that Mia had reflected on some of this feedback
in her self-reflective paper. Written comments from her peers included: “shorten your sentences [as] a couple of them had multiple questions in them” (Ashley) and “watch some of your questions because they were on the broader side” (Lexi). Mia also reflected on the complexity of the client-therapist relationship and said that her greatest challenge was “not getting too attached to clients and wanting to be their friend” (SFP, P1, p2). The strategies she would utilize to address this challenge included self-awareness and self-reflection. Mia thought it was “really important to be aware of what [she] was doing and consistently reflecting upon [her] actions and thoughts” and that “self-reflection will be an important and vital tool used throughout [her] career” (SFP, P1, p.2). The extent to which these judgments help her re-set learning goals is not explicitly known—a feature needed for self-regulated learning (Andrade, 2000).

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter five focused on the nature of the peer feedback—the product—in the OT course. For some students, giving peer feedback was considered to be a skill that came out of the discussions with them. Written peer feedback was preferred to the oral by most of the participants in this study. An analysis of the written peer feedback across the different sessions determined: a) the amount of constructive criticism increased with practice and time, and b) the feedback tended to be more specific for most of the participants by the third and fourth peer feedback sessions. This latter point was influenced by a stronger sense of group cohesion as time passed in the course, and having learning objectives for the peer assessors to comment on also impacted the quality of feedback by the third and fourth interviews. Group cohesion was a phenomenon referred to as group dynamic in this study. Participants also commented on the learning that happened from just having had the opportunity to observe another peer’s feedback session.
CHAPTER 6

FURTHER ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

This chapter begins with a further analysis of the data from chapters four and five and introduces three themes that emerged from this data. These three themes are then used as evidence derived from the current study to address the third major research question of this study—to what extent does the peer assessment and peer feedback in the OT course reach the potential described by the current assessment theory?

Theme 1: Motivation for Learning

The first theme that emerged from the data in my study was motivation for learning. Motivation for learning arose under two conditions: a) as a non-participant in the peer assessment and peer feedback activities when taking on an observing role; and b) as a direct participant in the peer assessment activities when receiving peer feedback. Three different occasions offered opportunities for learning in observing others. The first opportunity for learning arose in watching peers conduct their interview and/or peer feedback session. Given the opportunity to observe peers not only helped learners prepare for their own interview and peer feedback session but also served as an exemplar of how to give constructive feedback. The following quotation reflected the value in observing others:

Like I know, for example, on my first interview I was the last to interview [that] day and even though I wasn’t interviewing the first two people I was watching, I was able to gain so much from their feedback because you can just pick up little tidbits here and there and apply it to yourself. Uhmm, so like I, I found it to be really valuable and I think that all of my peers found it to be really valuable (P6, 115)
Watching the preceptor give feedback to learners provided another opportunity for learning. The preceptor was perceived to be an expert in giving constructive feedback, as well as the interview itself. The final opportunity for learning arose when swapping videos with another peer that had interviewed the same volunteer. Typically, the interview with the same interviewee turned out to be completely different and self-reflecting on these differences offered yet another opportunity for learning.

Participants receiving feedback during the peer assessment task were presented with different sources of feedback for learning. Three sources of feedback were identified by the participants in my study. The first source of feedback came from oneself, when either self-reflecting and/or becoming self-aware. Self-reflection had to do with self-examination and willingness to learn more. Opportunities to self-reflect occurred when: a) doing reflective journals, as part of the self-assessment assignment for the OT course which followed the peer assessment task, b) in viewing the video of clinical interviews and peer feedback sessions, and c) in setting learning objectives that peers would offer feedback on. Self-awareness was associated with insight that came from: a) watching the video of clinical interviews and feedback sessions; and b) thoughts and feelings that followed thereafter. The second source of feedback came from the preceptor. The preceptor was perceived to be an expert in giving constructive feedback that is specific, as well as offering positive reinforcement which was motivational for the learner. The final source of feedback came from peers. Peers served as a source of feedback and motivation for learning when: a) different perspectives offered by peers were used in self-reflections; b) positive reinforcement offered by peers helped to build confidence; and c) peer relationships were assumed to be equal and reciprocal which meant equal opportunities for learning. Peers as a source of motivation for learning is exemplified by the following quote:
“Wow, that went awful”, “Wow, I’ve got nothing” and then sitting down with my peers and they’re like: “No actually, you got quite a bit of information from that person like, it happened in a round-a-bout kind of way but you actually kind of got it out of them and....” So for me, it’s encouraging ’cause for the first little while I was like: “I can’t do this. I can’t be a clinician” and then actually getting some positive feedback and then like steps on how I can be better. I found like this really re-assuring. It was helpful ‘cause like: “Ok, I know that interview went awfully” and then like being told “No, it’s actually wasn’t that bad and here, you can probably do this to make it better” (P3, 155)

**Theme 2: Awareness of growth or development**

The second theme that emerged from the data in my study was Awareness of Growth or Development. Professional development and personal growth were identified as two aspects of this second theme. The two skills identified under professional development were the OT competencies and peer feedback as a skill. The OT course offered students the opportunity to develop two of the OT competencies: communication and professional interactions. Although this course developed both of these competencies, students felt that the mastering the skill of peer feedback would be of most use to them as a clinician in the future. This included both giving constructive feedback and being receptive to the feedback.

*Self-reflection and builds confidence* were the two factors identified as promoting personal growth. The conditions that promoted self-reflection in the course were: a) being a spectator during the interview and/or peer feedback session; b) watching the video of both the interview and peer feedback session along with the written feedback sheets; and c) being directly involved in the interview and peer feedback sessions, either as the assessee or the assessor. The
two factors attributed to building confidence were: a) the positive reinforcement from either the peer or preceptor; and b) the constructive feedback itself. Furthermore, two out of the six participants preferred to receive constructive feedback from their peer over that of their preceptor.

**Theme 3: Factors that Impacted the Learning Experience**

The third and most prominent theme of my study was Factors that Impacted the Learning Experience. The three factors identified by the participants that had the most impact on their learning experience were: a) the group dynamic; b) the time factor; and c) scaffolding tools. The group dynamic evolved during the course and two clear distinctions could be made. The first distinction made about the group was that initially they were: a) uncomfortable with critiquing one another; b) there was a lack of trust amongst the group; and c) some preferred anonymous feedback until later when group cohesion had formed. The other distinction had to do with the subsequent feedback sessions and the clear differences amongst the group which included: a) being receptive to constructive feedback; b) it was a constructive learning environment in which to learn; and c) trust amongst the group had formed.

The second factor that had impacted participants’ learning experience was identified as the time factor. There were four aspects that fell under this heading. First, time to reflect before giving peer feedback was one aspect reflected on and identified as something missing. Participants had indicated that they required a bit of time to reflect on the interview before giving feedback to their peer. Similarly, time to reflect before receiving the peer feedback was also something identified as being required but missing from the course. The third aspect was time to observe as a spectator of either the interview or peer feedback session was something that this course did provide. The final aspect under time factor had to do with the group rotation and the
timing of when the group engaged in peer assessment activities. Participants in this study felt that being first up meant that you were not given the opportunity to learn in observing others. It did however, force them get over any of their anxieties and begin learning from the experience.

The third factor that had been identified as having impacted their learning experience was scaffolding tools. Scaffolding tools were further divided into one of two groupings: those that had been provided and those that had not. Scaffolds that had been provided to participants included those provided to them during the preparation process and those implemented later in the course. Participants reflected on the scaffolding tools that they had initially been provided in the course and these included: a) written feedback sheets; b) course readings; and c) and an exemplar of the interview and peer feedback session by their course instructor on the first day of class. Participants in this study understood the assessment criteria (i.e., the written feedback sheets) even though they were not involved in creating it. Scaffolds available beyond the orientation to peer assessment included: a) setting learning objectives to receive and give feedback on; b) watching the preceptor model both how to conduct the interview and give constructive feedback; and c) watching the video for self-reflection which included one’s own video and that of any of their peers. Scaffolding tools that participants felt were required but either not available until later or not available to them at all, included the following items: a) setting learning objectives early on in the process would be helpful; b) more practice in both giving and receiving peer feedback before videotaping; c) more examples of how to both give and receive constructive feedback; b) more time to reflect before giving and receiving peer feedback.

Results: Q3. To what extent does the peer assessment and peer feedback in the OT course reach the potential described by the current assessment theory?
Motivation for Learning

The theme motivation for learning emerged from the data and was also reinforced in the assessment literature as one of the reputed benefits of engaging in peer assessment activities. It appears the following variables may have been factors in this study which contributed to this phenomenon: mandatory participation; the peer assessment was a core part of this course curriculum; and the preceptor took an active part, alongside their peers, in offering face-to-face feedback. The following quotation reinforces this point:

Learning how to give proper feedback really helped with professionalism because at the beginning of this course we [would] say “that is great … and you are doing really good” because no one wanted to touch on anything that was negative and then by seeing your preceptor give constructive criticism effectively that we kinda [are] more open to sharing (FG, P3, 45)

Piaget and Vygotsky were two theorists presented earlier that might explain the benefits to receivers of peer feedback. A Piagetian perspective is considered in relation to this study. Peer feedback proved to be a catalyst for change not only to the receivers of feedback that put it to use, but to the givers and observers of it as well. A question that was posed earlier was whether or not the peer giving the feedback is able to offer valuable feedback that is then put to use by the recipient peer. The Vygotskian learning theory is considered and the conditions which promote learning within the zone of proximal development. As stated earlier, for peer assessment to create this zone, the peer feedback needs to identify strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement (Topping, 1998). In the initial stages, peer feedback often lacked how the work could be improved, whereas it was more common to find that the peer feedback did do so in the later stages of this course. In the end, not all the learners identified that they were learning within
their zone of proximal development as the peer feedback did not offer suggestions for improvement.

**Awareness of growth or development**

Awareness of growth or development emerged as the second theme in this study. The development of interpersonal skills—such as communication skills—that fell under this theme was also found in the assessment literature. Participants also indicated that, in their various roles, the peer assessment activities promoted self-reflection. Both watching and participating in peer feedback promoted self-reflection and this is exemplified by the following quotation:

I think when you give feedback to someone else about their interview you kind of learn about what you would have done in that situation even if you didn’t get face-to-face with that person (FG, P2, 38)

The self-assessment which followed the peer assessment did not force all learners to critically reflect on the peer assessment exercise as previously indicated it would in the literature (McMahon, 2010). Furthermore, metacognition—thinking about thinking—was only identified in one participant in this study. Mia’s experiences were isolated to capture these differences. This finding is contrary to what advocates for peer assessment have argued (Damon, 1984; McMillian, 2010). The assessment literature suggests that both written and oral feedback is necessary to yield the most complete feedback (Van den berg et al., 2006). This study found that the video (i.e., taping of the oral feedback) along with the written feedback yielded the most complete feedback for the participants.

**Factors that Impacted the Learning Experience**

Factors that impacted the learning experience showed up consistently in the data and
these had more do with feelings that processes. Uncertainty prior to engaging in the peer assessment exercise and being uncomfortable assessing their peers emerged from the data and was reinforced in the assessment literature (Walker, 2001). The following quotation reflected these feelings:

    Early on in the program we didn’t know what was expected of us. We weren’t really sure what we were looking for in terms of what kind of feedback to give back. Yes we knew that we had to be professional but at the time we didn’t know what that meant? So it was kinda difficult at the beginning to give constructive feedback and we didn’t know what would be constructive in the situation. I guess….that came with time and just learning more about the program and everything. (FG, P6, 103)

**Other Factors: Design Options**

A review of the assessment literature found that students were able to provide useful feedback without training and practice (Cho & MacArthur, 2010). Although, not formally labeled as ‘training and practice’, the first two rounds of clinical interviews and the peer feedback sessions that followed could be interpreted as practice in both giving and receiving peer feedback. The literature suggesting that learners do not understand the assessment criteria when they are not involved in creating it was unfounded in this study (Lui & Careless, 2006; Cassidy, 20060. Participants of this study understood the assessment criteria regardless of the fact they were not involved in creating it.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter 6 identified the three themes that emerged from this study. Also explored in this chapter was the extent to which the peer assessment and peer feedback in the OT course reached
the potential described by the current assessment theory—the third major research question of this study. This study found that regular feedback on learning contributed to both motivation for learning and reflection. Participants also viewed both giving and receiving peer feedback as skill that they had an opportunity to develop when engaging in the peer assessment activities. In addition to these reputed benefits, this study revealed an additional benefit of employing peer assessment which was Awareness of Growth or Development. The group dynamic, the time factor, and scaffolding tools were Factors that Impacted the Learning Experience for the participants. Scaffolding tools had been identified in the assessment literature as an important part of the preparation process, while the group dynamic and time factor were specific to this study. In the next chapter, I explore the meaning and challenges participants faced, make recommendations for instructors of this course, consider the implications of this study to higher education in relation to peer assessment, and look at areas for future research along with my concluding thoughts.
CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

I began this research with the desire of gaining a better understanding of the meaning and consequences of implementing peer assessment into the communication module of an OT course from the perspective of university students who were expected to receive and act on peer feedback in support of their learning. I had hoped that findings of this study would help instructors better understand the needs and challenges students face when engaging in peer assessment and peer feedback activities. For this reason, this chapter discussion is devoted to highlighting some of the key findings of this study to serve these purposes, as well as considering the implications to higher education in relation to peer assessment along with my concluding remarks.

Meaning and Challenges Participants Faced

Participants of this study valued the opportunity to practice the skill of giving and receiving feedback, which was viewed as a skill they would use in the future as a clinician. The role that their preceptor played in their learning was also another key aspect, whereby the preceptor filled a void in training and practice that was not formally part of the preparation process. Being the first group to both give and receive peer feedback was stressful initially; and posed a challenge more so for the recipients of feedback than the peer providing it. By the third and fourth clinical interviews, setting learning goals brought focus to the feedback and helped reduce anxiety knowing what the feedback would focus on. Another challenge presented to participants was the “time factor”. The time factor came up several times in the data; in terms of needing more time to reflect before giving and receiving peer feedback, as well as the timing of
the clinical interview and peer feedback session. For those first up, given the opportunity to reflect and process what just happened in the interview may help to alleviate stress. Another challenge for the first group was getting oriented to the interview setting (i.e., room), which included knowing how to use the equipment.

**Mia’s Experience**

Mia’s experience was isolated to capture differences noted with how she described and then used the peer written feedback in her self-reflection. Simply put, metacognition is often described as “thinking about thinking”. Mia not only reflected on the written peer feedback from her peers but also verbalized that she had reflected on her own personal thought processes. Mia had no prior experience with reflection or engaging in any peer assessment practices. Thus, prior experience had no bearing on her abilities to self-reflect and engage in meta-cognitive activities.

**Recommendations for this Course**

The two peers who video swapped when having interviewed the same volunteer proved to be a huge learning experience for those that swapped videos. Preceptors should encourage video swapping among peers that interview the same volunteer. Another consideration for future practice is to ensure that the interviewees and peers providing the feedback are regularly rotated so that the recipient of the feedback gets exposure to different people and viewpoints. Although, not likely an intention of the peer assessment practices in this course volunteers and peers were not always rotated between interview rounds. Participants affected by this occurrence expressed an interest in having different peers and interviewees between each interview round. Earlier participants had outlined the benefits of having set learning objectives by the third and fourth clinical interviews. Another consideration for this course would be to consider setting learning
objectives earlier on in the course. A final comment has to do with the unknown role, if any, that the feedback from the volunteer interviewee has. Feedback from the volunteer is part of the peer assessment process but currently not reflected on by the recipients. I would recommend that students in this course by asked a question about the feedback that came from the community volunteer when completing their self-reflections.

**Implications of this study to Higher Education**

The following structures and supports outline some of the implications of this study to higher education in relation to peer assessment. First, the peer assessment was part of the core curriculum and introduced early on in the course. Students had the opportunity to engage in peer assessment activities every four weeks during a four month term. A combination of both peer assessment and self-assessment offered benefits to learners when used for formative purposes. I would caution the application of peer assessment practices for summative purposes. The written feedback along with the video taping of the oral feedback yielded the most complete feedback. Peer feedback from multiple sources—which included two peers and their preceptor—also provided the most complete feedback. A limitation of this study would be larger class sizes and not having the facilities and resources to carry out videotaped clinical interviews with community volunteers.

**Areas for Future Research**

The participants of this study were all female. The relationship between peer and self-assessment may be something to explore further in relation to gender. There is a body of evidence that suggests females are more self-critical of their work than their male counterparts (Pope, 2005). “Females are more stressed by self-assessment than males and that being subjected
to self-and peer assessment, while more stressful, leads to improvement in summative tasks” (Pope, 2005, p.51). It appears that the self-assessments may be more stressful for females and further research in this area may be warranted.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Participants of this study were initially nervous and not receptive to giving constructive feedback to their peers. Being nervous also meant that participants did not hear or couldn’t recall the oral peer feedback they had received. The peer feedback being videotaped, then, along with the written peer feedback sheets became important tools for reflecting on the peer assessment and peer feedback. Students in this course were highly motivated in this master’s program which led to opening interview rounds being highly stressful. The peer feedback also tended to be general initially and it was not until the third and fourth round of clinical interviews that peers were more at ease with giving each other constructive feedback. Group cohesion by the third and fourth peer feedback session also played a role in fostering a constructive learning environment. This case was able to confirm that the peer assessment practices did promote reflection and skill development for those who engaged in this process. The ability to reflect did not automatically lead to higher level thinking, such as metacognition and critical reflection. These higher order thinking skills are more difficult in practice and not always articulated by all learners.
References


APPENDIX A

August 30, 2011

Ms. Eleni Katsoulas, Master’s Student
Faculty of Education, Duncan McArthur Hall
Queen's University
511 Union Street
Kingston, ON K7M 5R7

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-572-11; Romeo # 6006241
Title: “GEDUC-572-11 Students' Perspective of Formative Peer Feedback: A Case Study in a University Rehabilitation Therapy Course”

Dear Ms. Katsoulas,

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GEDUC-572-11 Students' Perspective of Formative Peer Feedback: A Case Study in a University Rehabilitation Therapy Course" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Adverse Event Report). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementations of new procedures. To make an amendment, access the application at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Amendment to Approved Study Form. These changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queensu.ca for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, PhD
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

cc: Dr. Lyn Shulha, Faculty Supervisor
Dr. Lesly Wade-Woolley, Chair, Unit REB
Celina Caswell, c/o Graduate Studies & Bureau of Research
APPENDIX B

Letter of Information (for Student Participant)

Dear Participant:

The title of this Master’s of Education research is Students’ Perspectives of formative peer feedback: A case study in a university rehabilitation therapy course and is being conducted by Eleni Katsoulas. This study was granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian Ethics guidelines, and Queen’s policies. The Chair of the Department and the Course Coordinator/Instructor has granted permission for this research to be conducted in their course.

The reason for this letter is two-fold. First, it will outline the purpose and method of the research study. And second, it will request that you consent, in writing, to participate in the research.

**What is this study about?** The purpose of this research is to find out what can be learned about the conditions that optimize peer feedback from the perspective of students both providing and receiving peer feedback and to investigate the benefits to these students who engaged in this process. This study will address three questions to meet this purpose: (a) how students’ describe the peer feedback experience and the conditions that had an effect on this experience; (b) how students’ perceive the feedback experience has aided in skill development and in understanding of the objectives of the task; and (c) did the feedback session make any meaningful contribution towards critical thinking and reflection?.

**What does this study involve?** The goal of this study is to recruit a learning team in your class to participate in this study. Consent from every team member of a learning team and its preceptor is required for participation in this study. Should more than one learning team volunteer to participate in this study, then the researcher will randomly select one learning team. Potential participants will be asked to complete one semi-structured interview and one focus group session, each will require approximately 30 minutes for a total of one hour of your time. Both the interview and focus group will be held at a time and place convenient to individual participants. These sessions will take place at mid-term after the submission of your course mid-term assignments and be at least one week apart. The interview and focus group will both be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. As well, potential participants will be asked to share their written feedback sheets, one reflective paper, and give permission for their image and audio to be viewed by the researcher as they appear during another participant’s video peer feedback sessions. These requested items are part of your regular course curriculum and considered artifacts that will be collected for analysis at mid-term. Potential participants will permit the researcher to make a copy of their peer feedback sheets and reflective paper for analysis purposes. The viewing of the videotape recordings of the peer feedback session will be done at the School at Rehabilitation. Participating in this study involves no more risk than your normal daily activities. There are no known physical, psychological, economic or social risks to you associated with agreeing to this research. Participation in this study may involve all or part of these activities.

**Is my involvement voluntary?** Your participation is entirely voluntary and agreement on your part in no way obligates you to remain a part of the study should you wish to withdraw. You are not obligated to answer any questions that you find objectionable or feel uncomfortable answering. You may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without consequence. Should you choose to withdraw from the
study, you may request that all or part of your data be destroyed. Please be advised that if you choose to
decline participation in this research this will in no way affect your coursework or participation as
outlined in the course syllabus. Similarly, students who withdraw from the study will also not be
penalized in the course.

**What will happen to my responses?** Your responses will be kept confidential to the extent possible and
at no time will your actual identity be disclosed. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access
to your responses. The data will be part of my written thesis in conformity with the requirements for
degree of Masters of Education at Queen’s University. The data may also be published in professional
journal, presented at educational conferences, or shared with the Occupational Therapy (OT) faculty at
Queen’s University, after the course marks have been successfully submitted and while ensuring that
participants will not be named and/or identified in any way. Your identity will be kept confidential to the
extent possible. To protect your identity a pseudonym will replace your name on all data. Should you
decide to participate, it is important that you do not divulge the discussions of the focus group session
when it is complete in order to maintain the confidentiality of others that might have participated in the
session. Data collected which diverts from the purpose and which does not address the research questions
of this study may be not included in the study. The data obtained in this study will not be used for
secondary analysis. The data from this study will be retained for five years after which time is will be
destroyed. Should you wish and are interested in the findings of this study you are entitled to a copy of it
results.

**Will I be compensated for my participation?** You will not receive any monetary compensation for your
time.

**What if I have concerns?** Any questions about study participation may be directed to the researcher,
Eleni Katsoulas at oek@queensu.ca or 613-389-3144 or her supervisor Lyn Shulha at
lyn.shulha@queensu.ca or 613-533-6000 ext. 36222. Any ethical concerns about the study may be
directed to Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

**What do I do if I am interested in participating in this study?** Please indicate your decision to
participate in the study by signing one copy of the Consent Form and return it sealed in the enclosed, pre-
addressed envelope to your preceptor before next class. Retain the second copy for your records.

Yours sincerely,

Eleni Katsoulas
Master’s of Education Candidate
Queen’s University
Dear Participant:

The title of this Master’s of Education research is Students’ Perspectives of formative peer feedback: A case study in a university rehabilitation therapy course and is being conducted by Eleni Katsoulas. This study was granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen’s policies. The Chair of the Department and the Course Coordinator/Instructor has granted permission for this research to be conducted in their course.

The reason for this letter is two-fold. First, it will outline the purpose and method of the research study. And second, it will request that you consent, in writing, to have your learning group participate in the research.

**What is this study about?** The purpose of this research is to find out what can be learned about the conditions that optimize peer feedback from the perspective of students both providing and receiving peer feedback and to investigate the benefits to these students who engaged in this process. This study will address three questions to meet this purpose: (a) how students’ describe the peer feedback experience and the conditions that had an effect on this experience; (b) how students’ perceive the feedback experience has aided in skill development and in understanding of the objectives of the task; and (c) did the feedback session make any meaningful contribution towards critical thinking and reflection?

**What does this study involve?** The goal of this study is to recruit a learning team in this course to participate in this study. Consent from every team member of a learning team and its preceptor is required for participation in this study. Should more than one learning team volunteer to participate in this study, then the researcher will randomly select a learning team. Potential participants will be asked to complete one semi-structured interview and one focus group, each taking approximately 30 minutes for a total of one hour of your time. Both the interview and focus group will be held at a time and place convenient to individual participants. These sessions will take place at mid-term after the submission of your course mid-term assignments and be at least one week apart. The interview and focus group will both be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. As well, potential participants will be asked to share their written feedback sheets, one reflective paper, and give permission for their image and audio to be viewed by the researcher as they appear during another participant’s video peer feedback sessions. These requested items are part of your regular course curriculum and considered artifacts that will be collected for analysis at mid-term. Potential participants will permit the researcher to make a copy of their peer feedback sheets and reflective paper for analysis purposes. The viewing of the videotape recordings of the peer feedback session will be done at the School at Rehabilitation. As a preceptor, your participation and feedback during the viewing of the videotape recordings will be omitted from the data and only feedback among peers will be collected. Participating in this study involves no more risk to the participants’ normal daily activities. There are no known physical, psychological, economic or social risks to them or you associated with agreeing to this research. Participation in this study may involve all or part of these activities.

**Is my involvement voluntary?** The participation of your learning team is entirely voluntary and agreement on your part in no way obligates any one of the member of the learning team to remain a part of the study should they wish to withdraw. Members of your learning team are not obligated to answer
any questions that they find objectionable or feel uncomfortable answering. You may withdraw the learning team or any individual member of the team from the study at any time for any reason without consequence. Should you choose to withdraw your learning team from the study, you may request that all or part of the data collected for analysis be destroyed. Please be advised that if you choose to decline participation in this research there is no consequence to you or any member of your learning team.

What will happen to the responses of the learning team? The responses of members of your learning group will be kept confidential to the extent possible and at no time will their actual identity be disclosed; only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to this information. The data collected will be part of my written thesis in conformity with the requirements for degree of Masters of Education at Queen’s. The data may also be published in professional journal, presented at educational conferences, or shared with the Occupational Therapy (OT) faculty at Queen’s University, after the course marks have been successfully submitted and while ensuring that participants will not be named and/or identified in any way. Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent possible. To protect the identity of members of your learning group pseudonyms will replace names on all data. Should your learning team participate in this study, each of them will be advised that it is important to not divulge the discussions of the focus group session when it is complete in order to maintain the confidentiality of others that might have participated in the session. Data collected which diverts from the purpose and which does not address the research questions of this study may not be included in the study. The data obtained in this study will not be used for secondary analysis. The data from this study will be retained for five years after which time is will be destroyed. Should you wish and are interested in the findings of this study you are entitled to a copy of it results.

Will I be compensated for participation in this study? You and your learning team will not receive any monetary compensation for your time.

What if I have concerns? Any questions about study participation may be directed to the researcher, Eleni Katsoulas at oek@queensu.ca or 613-389-3144 or her supervisor Lyn Shulha at lyn.shulha@queensu.ca or 613-533-6000 ext. 36222. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

What do I do if I am interested in participating in this study? Please indicate your decision to participate in the study by signing one copy of the Consent Form and return it sealed in the enclosed, pre-addressed envelope along with the collected sealed envelopes from your our learning group and give them to the course instructor before next class. Retain the second copy of your consent form for your records.

Yours sincerely,

Eleni Katsoulas
Master’s of Education Candidate
Queen’s University
Letter of Information (OT Faculty: Course Coordinator)

Dear XXXX:

I am requesting your permission to allow a research study, entitled Students’ Perspectives of formative peer feedback: a case study in a university Rehabilitation Therapy course, being conducted in the OT COURSE course in fall of 2011. This study was granted clearance by the General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans”, and Queen’s policies.

The reason for this letter is two-fold. First, it will outline the purpose and method of the research study. And second, it will request that you agree, in writing, to allow research to be conducted in OT 851 class.

**What is this study about?** The purpose of this research is to find out what can be learned about the conditions that optimize peer feedback in the course OT 851 from a student perceptive, whilst specifically investigating the following: (a) how students’ describe the peer feedback experience and the conditions that had an effect on this experience; (b) how students’ perceive the feedback experience has aided in skill development and in understanding of the objectives of the task; and (c) did the feedback session make any meaningful contribution towards critical thinking and reflection.

**What does this study involve?** The study requires potential participants in the class to complete one semi-structured interview and one focus group session; each taking approximately 30 minutes in length to complete and held at a place convenient to individual participants. These sessions will take place at mid-term after the submission of the course mid-term assignments and be at least one week apart. The interview and focus group will both be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. As well, potential participants will be asked to share their written feedback sheets, one reflective paper, and the videotapes of their peer feedback sessions; that are part of your regular course curriculum and considered artifacts that will be collected for analysis at mid-term; and that the peer feedback sheets and reflective paper will be provided to the researcher so that copies could be made. The viewing of the videotape recordings of the peer feedback session will be done at the School at Rehabilitation. Granting access to the students in OT 851 involves no more risk than your normal daily activities. There are no known physical, psychological, economic or social risks to the students associated with you agreeing to this research.

**Is my participation voluntary?** Agreement is entirely voluntary and agreement on your part in no way obligates you to remain a part of the study should you wish to withdraw. You may withdraw the class from the study at any time for any reason, without pressure or consequence to you of any kind. Should you choose to withdraw the class from the study, you may request that all or part of your data be destroyed. Similarly, if you choose to decline participation in this research this will have no consequence to you of any kind.

**What will happen to the responses?** The responses will be kept confidential to the extent possible and at no time will the actual identity be disclosed; only the researcher will have access to this information. The data will be part of my written thesis in conformity with the requirements for degree of Masters of Education at Queen’s. The data may also be published in professional journal, presented at educational conferences, or shared with the OT faculty. The individual identity of participants once again kept
confidential to the extent possible. To protect the identity of the students a pseudonym will replace their name on all data. Anyone participating in this study will be asked to not divulge the discussions of the focus group session when it is complete in order to maintain the confidentiality of themselves and others that might have participated in the session. The data obtained in this study will not be used for secondary analysis. The data from this study will be retained for five years after which time is will be properly destroyed. Should you wish and are interested in the findings of this study you are entitled to a copy of it results.

**Will I be compensated for my participation?** You will not receive any monetary compensation for your time.

**What if I have concerns?** Any questions about study participation may be directed to the researcher, Eleni Katsoulas at oek@queensu.ca or 613-389-3144 or my supervisor Lyn Shulha at lyn.shulha@queensu.ca or 613-533-6000 ext. 36222. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca

**What do I do if I am interested in participating in this study?** Please indicate your decision to participate in the study by signing one copy of the Consent Form and returning it to me in the enclosed stamped, self-addressed envelope. Retain the second copy for your records.

Yours sincerely,

Eleni Katsoulas  
Masters of Education Candidate  
Queen’s University
Dear XXXX:

I am requesting your permission to allow a research study, entitled Students’ Perspectives of formative peer feedback: a case study in a university Rehabilitation Therapy course, being conducted in the OT 851 course in fall of 2011. This study was granted clearance by the General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans”, and Queen’s policies.

The reason for this letter is two-fold. First, it will outline the purpose and method of the research study. And second, it will request that you agree, in writing, to allow research to be conducted in OT 851 class.

What is this study about? The purpose of this research is to find out what can be learned about the conditions that optimize peer feedback in the course OT 851 from a student perceptive, whilst specifically investigating the following: (a) how students’ describe the peer feedback experience and the conditions that had an effect on this experience; (b) how students’ perceive the feedback experience has aided in skill development and in understanding of the objectives of the task; and (c) did the feedback session make any meaningful contribution towards critical thinking and reflection.

What does this study involve? The study requires potential participants in the class to complete one semi-structured interview and one focus group session; each taking approximately 30 minutes in length to complete and held at a place convenient to individual participants. These sessions will take place at mid-term after the submission of the course mid-term assignments and be at least one week apart. The interview and focus group will both be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. As well, potential participants will be asked to share their written feedback sheets, one reflective paper, and the videotapes of their peer feedback sessions; that are part of your regular course curriculum and considered artifacts that will be collected for analysis at mid-term; and that the peer feedback sheets and reflective paper will be provided to the researcher so that copies could be made. The viewing of the videotape recordings of the peer feedback session will be done at the School at Rehabilitation. Granting access to the students in OT 851 involves no more risk than your normal daily activities. There are no known physical, psychological, economic or social risks to the students associated with you agreeing to this research.

Is my participation voluntary? Agreement is entirely voluntary and agreement on your part in no way obligates you to remain a part of the study should you wish to withdraw. You may withdraw the class from the study at any time for any reason, without pressure or consequence to you of any kind. Should you choose to withdraw the class from the study, you may request that all or part of your data be destroyed. Similarly, if you choose to decline participation in this research this will have no consequence to you of any kind.

What will happen to the responses? The responses will be kept confidential to the extent possible and at no time will the actual identity be disclosed; only the researcher will have access to this information. The data will be part of my written thesis in conformity with the requirements for degree of Masters of Education at Queen’s. The data may also be published in professional journal, presented at educational conferences, or shared with the OT faculty. The individual identity of participants once again kept
confidential to the extent possible. To protect the identity of the students a pseudonym will replace their name on all data. Anyone participating in this study will be asked to not divulge the discussions of the focus group session when it is complete in order to maintain the confidentiality of themselves and others that might have participated in the session. The data obtained in this study will not be used for secondary analysis. The data from this study will be retained for five years after which time it will be properly destroyed. Should you wish and are interested in the findings of this study you are entitled to a copy of it results.

**Will I be compensated for my participation?** You will not receive any monetary compensation for your time.

**What if I have concerns?** Any questions about study participation may be directed to the researcher, Eleni Katsoulas at oek@queensu.ca or 613-389-3144 or my supervisor Lyn Shulha at lyn.shulha@queensu.ca or 613-533-6000 ext. 36222. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca

**What do I do if I am interested in participating in this study?** Please indicate your decision to participate in the study by signing one copy of the Consent Form and returning it to me in the enclosed stamped, self-addressed envelope. Retain the second copy for your records.

Yours sincerely,

Eleni Katsoulas
Masters of Education Candidate
Queen’s University
APPENDIX C

Consent Form-Student Participant

Name (please print clearly):_______________________________________________________

1. I agree to participate in the study entitled Students’ Perspectives of formative peer feedback: A case study in a university rehabilitation therapy course, being conducted by Eleni Katsoulas through the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University.

2. I have read the Letter of Information and the purpose of the study is explained to my satisfaction.

3. I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

4. I understand that my participation involves:
   - taking part in an individual semi-structured interview where I will be asked about the peer feedback experience
   - taking part in a focus group with my learning team and preceptor where I will be asked how I perceive the peer feedback experience has aided in skill development, critical thinking, and reflection
   - sharing my written feedback sheets from course entitled “Therapeutic Relationships” under course number OT 851
   - providing a reflective paper for review from course entitled “Therapeutic Relationships” under course number OT 851
   - give permission for my image and audio to be reviewed by the researcher as they appear during another participant’s video peer feedback sessions.

I understand I may be asked to participate in all or part of these activities for this study. I understand that the interview and focus group session will both be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. I also understand that these activities will take place at mid-term after the submission of my course mid-term assignments and each will require approximately 30 minutes for a total of one hour of my time. I understand that the interview and focus group will be held at a time and place convenient to individual participants and be held at least one week apart. I understand that I will be sharing my written peer feedback sheets, a reflective paper, and giving permission for my image and audio to be reviewed by the researcher as they appear during another participant’s video peer feedback sessions. These requested items are part of my regular course curriculum and considered artifacts that will be also collected for analysis at mid-term. I understand that the researcher will be making copies of my peer feedback sheets and reflective paper for analysis purposes. I understand that viewing of the videotape recordings of the peer feedback session will be done at the School at Rehabilitation.

5. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without consequence. If I do withdraw from the study I may request
that all data with my participation is destroyed. I understand that the researcher will maintain confidentially to the extent possible.

6. I understand that the goal of this study is to recruit a learning team in my class and should more than one learning team volunteer to participate in this study, then the researcher will randomly select one learning team. I also understand that consent from every team member of a learning team and its preceptor is required for participation in this study.

7. I understand that the data will be part of the written thesis of the researcher in conformity with the requirements for degree of Masters of Education at Queen’s. I understand that the data may also be published in professional journals, presented at educational conferences, or shared with the Occupational Therapy (OT) faculty at Queen’s University, after the course marks have been successfully submitted and while ensuring that participants will not be named and/or identified in any way.

8. I am aware that any questions about study participation may be directed to the researcher, Eleni Katsoulas at oek@queensu.ca or 613-389-3144 or her supervisor Lyn Shulha at lyn.shulha@queensu.ca or 613-533-6000 ext. 36222. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca

9. I have read and understood the above statements and freely consent to participation

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return it sealed in the enclosed, pre-addressed envelope to your preceptor before next class. Retain one copy for my records.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ________________

*Please provide either an email address or a postal address in the space below if you would like a copy of a report on the findings of this study.
Consent Form-Preceptor

Name (please print clearly): _______________________________________________________

1. I agree to have my learning team participate in this study entitled Students’ Perspectives of formative peer feedback: A case study in a university rehabilitation therapy course, being conducted by Eleni Katsoulas through the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University.

2. I have read the Letter of Information and the purpose of the study is explained to my satisfaction.

3. I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

4. I understand that consenting to my learning team participating in this study involves them:
   - taking part in an individual semi-structured interview where they will be asked about the peer feedback experience
   - taking part in a focus group with their learning team and preceptor where they will be asked how they perceive the peer feedback experience has aided in skill development, critical thinking, and reflection
   - sharing their written feedback sheets from course entitled “Therapeutic Relationships” under course number OT 851
   - providing their reflective paper for review from course entitled “Therapeutic Relationships” under course number OT 851
   - give permission for their image and audio to be reviewed by the researcher as they appear during another participant’s video peer feedback sessions.

I understand they may be asked to participate in all or part of these activities for this study. I understand that the interview and focus group session will both be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. I also understand that these activities will take place at mid-term after the submission of participant’s mid-term assignments and each will require approximately 30 minutes for a total of one hour of their time. I understand that the interview and focus group will be held at a time and place convenient to individual participants and be held at least one week apart. I understand that participants will be asked to share their written peer feedback sheets, a reflective paper, and give permission for their image and audio to be reviewed by the researcher as they appear during another participant’s video peer feedback sessions. These requested items are part of their regular course curriculum and considered artifacts that will be also collected for analysis at mid-term. I also understand the researcher will be making copies of their peer feedback sheets and reflective paper for analysis purposes. I understand that viewing of the videotape recordings of the peer feedback session will be done at the School at Rehabilitation.

5. I understand that the participation of my learning team is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw them or any one member from the study at any time for any reason without consequence. If I do withdraw the learning team or any individual member from the study I may request that all data with their participation is destroyed. I understand that the researcher will maintain confidentiality to the extent possible.
6. I understand that the goal of this study is to recruit a learning team in this course and should more than one learning team volunteer to participate in this study, then the researcher will randomly select one learning team. I also understand that consent from every team member of a learning team and its preceptor is required for participation in this study.

7. I understand that the data will be part of the written thesis of the researcher in conformity with the requirements for degree of Masters of Education at Queen’s. I understand that the data may also be published in professional journals, presented at educational conferences, or shared with the Occupational Therapy (OT) faculty at Queen’s University, after the course marks have been successfully submitted and while ensuring that participants will not be named and/or identified in any way.

8. I am aware that any questions about study participation may be directed to the researcher, Eleni Katsoulas at oek@queensu.ca or 613-389-3144 or her supervisor Lyn Shulha at lyn.shulha@queensu.ca or 613-533-6000 ext. 36222. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca

9. I have read and understood the above statements and freely consent to participation

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return it sealed in the enclosed, pre-addressed envelope along with the collected sealed envelopes from your learning group and give them to the course instructor before next class. Retain the second copy of your consent form for your records.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: _____________

*Please provide either an email address or a postal address in the space below if you would like a copy of a report on the findings of this study.
Consent Form-Course Coordinator

Name (please print clearly):_______________________________________________________

1. I agree to allow Eleni Katsoulas access to OT 851 in order to conduct the study entitled Students’ Perspectives of formative peer feedback: a case study in a university Rehabilitation Therapy course, being conducted at Queen’s University, conducted through the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University.

2. I have read the Letter of Information and the purpose of the study is explained to my satisfaction.

3. I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

4. I understand giving my permission means that class participants may participate in: (a) a semi-structured interview where they will be asked to describe the peer feedback experience and the conditions that had an effect on this experience; (b) a focus group where they will be asked how they perceive the peer feedback experience has aided in skill development, understanding, critical thinking, and reflection; and (c) the sharing of their written feedback sheets, one reflective paper, and videotapes of their peer feedback sessions. I understand that the interview and focus group session will both be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, held in a place convenient to individual participants, and take place at mid-term after the submission of their course mid-term assignments; each taking approximately 30 minutes to complete and at least one week apart. I understand that they will be sharing their written peer feedback sheets, a reflective paper, and videotapes of their peer feedback sessions at mid-term for analysis; and that their peer feedback sheets and reflective paper will be provided to the researcher so that copies could be made at mid-term. I understand that viewing of the videotape recordings of the peer feedback session will be done at the School at Rehabilitation.

5. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my class from the study at any time without any negative consequences. I understand that the researcher will maintain confidentially to the extent possible. If I do withdraw the class from the study I may request that all the data associated with my participation is destroyed.

6. I understand that the data will be part of the written thesis of the researcher in conformity with the requirements for degree of Masters of Education at Queen’s. I understand that the data may also be published in professional journals, presented at educational conferences, or shared with the OT faculty at Queen’s and my individual identity once again kept confidential to the extent possible.

7. I am aware that any questions about study participation may be directed to the researcher, Eleni Katsoulas at oek@queensu.ca or 613-389-3144 or her supervisor Lyn Shulha at lyn.shulha@queensu.ca or 613-533-6000 ext. 36222. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca
8. I have read and understood the above statements and freely consent to participation.

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return it to me in the enclosed stamped, self addressed envelope. Retain one copy for my records.

Signature: ________________________________ Date: _____________

*Please provide either an email address or a postal address in the space below if you would like a copy of a report on the findings of this study.
Consent Form-Chair

Name (please print clearly): ____________________________________________________________

1. I agree to allow Eleni Katsoulas access to OT 851 in order to conduct the study entitled Students’ Perspectives of formative peer feedback: a case study in a university Rehabilitation Therapy course, being conducted at Queen’s University, conducted through the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University.

2. I have read the Letter of Information and the purpose of the study is explained to my satisfaction.

3. I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

4. I understand giving my permission means that class participants may participate in: (a) a semi-structured interview where they will be asked to describe the peer feedback experience and the conditions that had an effect on this experience; (b) a focus group where they will be asked how they perceive the peer feedback experience has aided in skill development, understanding, critical thinking, and reflection; and (c) the sharing of their written feedback sheets, one reflective paper, and videotapes of their peer feedback sessions. I understand that the interview and focus group session will both be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, held in a place convenient to individual participants, and take place at mid-term after the submission of their course mid-term assignments; each taking approximately 30 minutes to complete and at least one week apart. I understand that they will be sharing their written peer feedback sheets, a reflective paper, and videotapes of their peer feedback sessions at mid-term for analysis; and that their peer feedback sheets and reflective paper will be provided to the researcher so that copies could be made at mid-term. I understand that viewing of the videotape recordings of the peer feedback session will be done at the School at Rehabilitation.

5. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my class from the study at any time without any negative consequences. I understand that the researcher will maintain confidentially to the extent possible. If I do withdraw the class from the study I may request that all the data associated with my participation is destroyed.

6. I understand that the data will be part of the written thesis of the researcher in conformity with the requirements for degree of Masters of Education at Queen’s. I understand that the data may also be published in professional journals, presented at educational conferences, or shared with the OT faculty at Queen’s and my individual identity once again kept confidential to the extent possible.

7. I am aware that any questions about study participation may be directed to the researcher, Eleni Katsoulas at oek@queensu.ca or 613-389-3144 or her supervisor Lyn Shulha at lyn.shulha@queensu.ca or 613-533-6000 ext. 36222. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca
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Signature: ________________________________ Date: ____________

*Please provide either an email address or a postal address in the space below if you would like a copy of a report on the findings of this study.
APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

Q1: Tell me about your background in terms of school and work experience?

Q2: Have you had previous experience working with peers either in giving or receiving feedback? If so, explain and how did you feel?

Q3: Have you had prior experience in school doing any type of reflection? If so, explain and how did you feel?

Q4: How has the peer feedback sessions helped you so far in this course?

Q5: a) How did you initially feel about the peer feedback exercise?
b) Was the second time you received and gave feedback any different for you than the first?

Q6: What is the nature of the peer assessment experience for participants who receive feedback? And what does the peer assessment look like?
   Probes:
   b) What expectations did you have of the peer assessment exercise?
c) What elements of receiving peer assessment did you find most useful, if any?
d) What elements of receiving peer assessment did you find most frustrating, if any?
APPENDIX E

Focus Group Questions

Q1: The skill you have been developing is the ‘clinical documentation’. Think of the different ways you have developed that skill and talk about those most meaningful to you.

Q2: You were asked to receive peer feedback on this skill as part of your learning. What contribution, if any, did participating in this activity have in shaping your learning?

Q3: If you were going to coach next year’s students, how might you prepare them to get as much benefit as possible from the peer assessment activities in this course?

Q4: a) How has the peer feedback session(s) helped you so far in this course?
b) To what extent, if any, has the peer feedback you received made any meaningful contribution toward critical thinking and reflection?
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EK: Ok, great. So, I’m going to begin my interview. My first question – uhmm… and the first three are just background and then the last three questions – so I have six in total – but the last three really pertain to the course and the peer feedback.

#2: Ok.

EK: So my first question - ahh - begins by asking: Can you tell me about your background in terms of school and work experience?

#2: So I did my undergraduate degree in Psychology at the University of Alberta, uhmm, and for work experience I’ve worked, uhmm, I’ve done a lot of marketing work in the past and then more relevant to this, I worked with, uhmm, autistic children as an aid, so, uhmm, I’d work in their homes and just kind of come up with my own programs for them, ahh, based on their family’s goals and, ahh, work with other specialists, like I worked with occupational therapists and speech therapists to kind of meet their goals and I also volunteered with a man with a stroke and I followed a physiotherapy, uhmm, occupational therapy and speech therapy program with him as well.

EK: Ok. I’m going to start my next question. Uhm… Have you had previous experience working with peers either giving or receiving feedback? If so, explain and how did you feel?

#2: Uhmm, I had a little bit of experience with my last job working with autistic children because I trained some of the incoming aids and so I was supposed to give them feedback as I watched them, uhmm, they kind of shadowed me then they had their own trial period and I’d give them feedback about that. Uhmm, I felt it was helpful for me because it kind of consolidates your learning when you’re teaching someone else, uhmm, but I found it was difficult to give feedback in the negative way. Like it’s difficult to tell someone that they’re doing something wrong. I found that part was… that part was hard but, uhmm, I found that most people like responded really well to it and they wanted the feedback so it worked out - it worked out well.

EK: Ok, great. Ahh, my third question is, uhmm: Have you had previous experience in school doing any type of reflection? If so, explain and how did you feel?

#2: No, I don’t think I’ve had any past experience in school doing reflective activities. Not that I can recall, anyways.

EK: Ok. So, my next three questions are more specific to the course that you’re taking. And so, my first question, uhmm, is: How did you initially feel about the peer feedback exercise when you were, I guess, presented it in class or on your syllabus?
#2: Uhmm, at first I was a little bit intimidated with it because you don’t really know your learning team when you start and so you don’t know, uhmm, how they’re gonna… like they don’t know you and you don’t know them, so they’re kinda giving you blind feedback but, uhmm, I found like the first - the first time that we did it - it went really well and, uhmm, people caught things that I didn’t realize I was doing which was really helpful and I think that, overall, uhmm, the experience was a good one because it’s people in the same situation as you giving you feedback and, uhmm, I… I just found like it was… it was definitely helpful to receive it from a peer, uhmm, maybe more than preceptor who has a lot of experience and doesn’t understand where you’re coming from.

EK: Ok. Uhmm… and then you’ve done three I’ve discovered now. I thought only you’ve only done two, ahh, peer feedback sessions. So, you’ve done three up to this point in the course, uhmm… now, I guess the second or the third time – you can comment on either or both – uhmm, was the experience any different than the first?

#2: Yeah, I think it was a lot different because we had each other’s learning objectives so we knew what we wanted to work on and then you can target your feedback, uhmm, towards that, so that if someone wanted to work on say, using silence, you could let them know how that went during the interview and vice-versa - they could let you know how you were doing on your learning objectives and I think also the second and third time around we were more comfortable with each other so we were more honest about it and we weren’t trying to, like, tread lightly on anyone’s feeling, uhmm, so you got a lot more constructive feedback that wasn’t just kind of general feedback. It was more specific.

EK: I’m going to ask you just to explain a little bit further.

#2: Sure.

EK: Uhmm, so the first time you gave feedback - it was just general?

#2: Yeah. It was kind of… I found the first time it was more of a summary of how the interview went, uhmm…

EK: Ok.

#2: And it was… People were trying to give more positives, I found, than negatives, uhmm, because we didn’t know each other and nobody wants to say, like: “You did a really bad job with this” and we didn’t really know what we were doing so you couldn’t realistically say that you knew that they were doing a bad job, uhmm, but I found that the second and third time we knew what they wanted us to look for so we could specifically tell them if they were doing that or not and it was more targeted at things to work on or things that they did really well that they can, uhmm, kind of check off their list. So it wasn’t just a summary of how the interview went, it was specifically good and bad things that they were doing.

EK: So, when did you… So you developed learning goals and you did that between the first and the second and you gave it to them?

#2: Yes.

EK: And it was one specific goal? Or a couple? Or…

#2: Uhmm, we were supposed to do about two or three but it depended on you. How many you wanted to design it. It was basically just, uhmm, just goals that you’d set for yourself, uhmm…
EK: And it was it based on the first interview? Or just as…

#2: Uhhmm… Yeah, kind of based on the first interview and also just in general what you wanted to get out of the course.

EK: Ok.

#2: So, a lot of them are communication, uhhm… So for instance, some of mine were just to slow down the speed at which I was asking questions and to ask more open-ended questions. So those are things that your peers can like, really pick out when they’re watching you and it’s helpful because I find that sometimes I don’t know when I’m not asking an open-ended question ’cause I just don’t think about it. Uhhmm, so it’s really helpful when you have someone watching for that kind of stuff.

EK: Ok. Perfect. Uhhmm… My fifth question is: What is the nature… just assume that I don’t know… I wasn’t present but I do have an idea of how it looks, but pretend I know nothing and to help me write this portion of my report for my thesis. Could you tell me what the nature of the peer assessment experience for participants who receive the feedback in this course is and what does it look like?

#2: Ok, so we have, uhhm, we have the one person interviewing and they have two person… two people watching them. So, one person is the primary, uhhmm, observer and the other person is the secondary observer and you just take notes about their interview. Uhhmm, there’s a whole list of things to watch for like, their introduction, and uhhmm, how they’re asking questions, how the volunteer looks when they’re asking questions and you just fill out the form while you’re watching them and then after the interview is done, we all gather into a room and uhhmm, the person who was interviewing goes first and says how they think the interview went and then the primary observer gives their feedback first and lets them know how they think it went and then the secondary observer and then the preceptor gives her feedback.

EK: Ok. Very good. Uhhmm… I’m just going to probe a little bit deeper with this question. So, what things or experience did you feel help - helped you prepare, ahh, to receive peer feedback in this course?

#2: Uhhmm…

EK: Is there anything specific?

#2: I think there was a couple of readings that were in the course pack that were just how to receive and give peer feedback, uhhm… I think that was – that was somewhat helpful but I find that the process of giving and receiving peer feedback – maybe it’s just for me – but I find it’s kind of intuitive as long as you have an open mind, uhhmm, and you’re not judgmental. You are able to give someone feedback that’s not, uhhmm, that’s constructive but not hurtful and you are also able to receive it and not take it, uhhmm, too much as an insult to yourself. Like you use it to work towards becoming something better not as someone telling you you’re doing something wrong, uhhmm, but I also think that, for me for the first interview, I gave feedback before I received it and helps to kind of see how the process works with someone else before – before it happens for you.

EK: Uhm hum. Ok. What expectations did you have, uhhmm, with regards to the peer assessment exercise going into this course?

#2: Hmmm. I… I think I expected it to be what it was. That it would be, uhhmm, really helpful to have things from a couple of different perspectives because I think everyone sees situations differently, so, uhhmm, I was kind of expecting that people would pick up on habits that I hadn’t realized I had of myself and, uhhmm, they’d be able to relay that back to me and then you kind of learn about yourself in a new
way that you can’t really do when you’re just self-reflecting, so in that way, I think that the expectation
did match up with what actually happens.

EK: Ok. Uhmm, what elements of receiving, uhmm, peer assessment did you find most helpful if any?

#2: I found that tailoring the assessments to the learning objectives is probably the most helpful element
because you’re getting the feedback designed on what you want to be learning, uhmm, rather than what
they think you should be learning, so I think that was really helpful and also I like that it’s in a team that
you’re familiar with, like our… we do everything with our learning team so it’s like a really comfortable
environment and you don’t feel like it’s judgmental feedback and, uhmm, people are considerate of how
you are as a person and kind of tailor it towards that.

EK: Ok. And what elements of receiving, uhmm, peer assessment did you find frustrating, if any?

#2: I actually don’t think I found any of it frustrating, uhmm… If anything, it’s kind of enlightening
because people give me feed and I go: “Oh, I didn’t even realize I did that”, so I don’t really find any of it
frustrating. If, I guess… One thing I wish I would happen is that people would rotate, uhmm, viewing
different people each time ‘cause sometimes you end up seeing the same person a couple of different
times and then you’re only getting…

EK: The interviewee?

#2: Yeah.

EK: Ok.

#2: Uhmm, and also just people who are watching you to give you feedback. Sometimes they’re always
the same.

EK: Oh, ok.

#2: So it’s helpful to get, uhmm, just perspectives from the other people but just because of the way the
interview process works out, it doesn’t always happen that way.

EK: Ok. This is the last question. Uhmm… How has the peer feedback sessions helped you so far in this
course?

#2: Uhmm… I think it’s helped me to realize improvements that I can make in my communication and
just in my professionalism, uhmm, by watching other people and giving them feedback you realize like
what you could incorporate into your own learning and also receiving feedback from other people, uhmm,
really helps you to kind of grow in your own direction, uhmm, so when people are looking at your
learning objectives – and specifically focusing on that stuff – uhmm, it kind of helps you to… to tailor
your learning and to get exactly what you want out of the course and I just find that watching other people
interview and then giving them feedback, uhmm… it kind of helps to see things from the diff… from
different perspectives and you can incorporate their feedback into your interviews as well.

EK: Ok, yup. Anything else with the course?

#2: Uhmm… Nothing that I can think of right now.
EK: Ok. How about, uhmm, just to probe a little bit more… To what extent, if any, has the peer feedback you received helped you with maybe any of the competencies, ahh, for an OT?

#2: Uhmm… I think it’s helped a lot because some of… one of the competencies is communication. So to be able to communicate, uhmm, feedback to someone is important especially when you’re gonna be on your placements and you have to deal with that with your preceptor if you’re want to give them feedback or if you have to receive feedback from them, it helps to do it in kind of a less, ahh, formal environment first and then go out and receive it from someone you might not know as well and, uhmm… I think just overall like in our profession we’re always going to be working in an inter-professional team or with, uhmm, other OTs so it’s helpful to be able to learn how to give feedback and receive it so that you can like work effectively on those teams ‘cause it’s not always as easy as it seems like it would be.

EK: I think that’s it. Uhmm… Anything else for me that you want to add to anything?

#2: I don’t think so, no.

EK: Ok. That’s perfect. I’m going to stop everything. I’m going to…