



## The learner as co-creator: A new peer review and self-assessment feedback form created by student nurses



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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Engagement with peer review and self-assessment is not always regarded by student nurses as an activity that results in a positive learning experience. Literature indicates that withdrawal from the learning process becomes attractive to individuals affected by a negative experience of peer review. Literature also provides examples of student nurses' feeling 'torn to shreds' during the process of peer review, resulting in loss of confidence and self-esteem. An influencing factor in such situations appears to be the absence of specific learner-driven criteria against which student nurses can assess peer and self-performance. The idea was thus ignited, that creation and utilisation of a learner-driven feedback form might potentially prevent, or at least minimise, the possibility of negative peer review experience.

**Context:** Set within the context of a pre-registration nursing programme, within a Higher Education institution, student nurses ( $n = 25$ ), created a peer review/self-assessment feedback form. Its potential cross-discipline, global applicability is reasonably speculated.

**Methods:** Purposive sampling, followed by Stratified Random sampling, maximised participant variation. Data collection took place on 34 occasions, utilising focus group discussions using Nominal Group Technique, a practical task which was video recorded for mediating artefact purposes, and individual interviews. Analysis was concept and theme driven.

**Findings:** The study found that participants desired a new feedback form that specifically asks the evaluator to judge human qualities, such as 'compassion' and 'kindness', in addition to the skills and knowledge criteria that any peer review or self-assessment form used currently had incorporated.

**Conclusion:** Providing the participants with the opportunity to develop criteria, against which performance could be measured, with emphasis being afforded to student inclusivity and resultant shift in power balance from the educator to the learner, embraces the idea of teaching and learning in the 21st Century.

### 1. Introduction

This paper presents a new peer review and self-assessment feedback form, created by student nurses for use by student nurses (Table 1). This new form was developed during a qualitative research study exploring student nurses' ( $n = 25$ ) conceptions and implementation of peer review and self-assessment.

The motivation to undertake research on this particular topic originated from a feeling of disturbance when student nurse participants in an earlier study had verbalised a negative experience of having been "torn to shreds" during engagement with the peer review process (Duers and Brown, 2009). Participants spoke about the subsequent feelings of anxiety and decreased self-esteem resulting from engagement with the peer review process. Indeed, Ecclestone and Pryor (2003) recognised that the impact for those learners who are exposed to negative peer review can be a withdrawal from the learning process

completely. The topic is thus of relevance and importance in relation to student nurse attrition rates.

The decision to co-create this new form, during the research process, stemmed from the idea that participants would learn through active engagement in thinking about achieving outcomes to an agreed standard (Nicol, 2010; Lui and Carless, 2006). Through a partnership approach the full research process could also be brought to life for these individual participants. The study being presented was underpinned with Vygotsky's (1934) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a concept of which, is that a more experienced partner (in this case the researcher) assists the less experienced partner (in this case the student nurse participants) towards fulfilling his/her learning potential (in this case as partners in the learning process and as future researchers themselves).

Positioning of the learner as an active participant in the research process and ultimate co-creator of a contextualised knowledge base and

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**Table 1**  
Participant created feedback form.

Peer review/Self-assessment feedback form		
Peer review: The following review by your peer is provided in the spirit of honesty and sensitivity to assist you in realising your strengths and weaknesses and thus develop your skills.		
Self-assessment: Consider the same aspects of your performance that your peer commented on.		
Peer/Self performance: Tick boxes below (P) when peer reviewing and (S) when self-assessing		
Patient perspective/viewpoint (tick box if demonstrated)	P	S
Polite		
Informative		
Professional		
Kind		
Responsive		
Confident		
Strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of a mentor/senior nurse (tick box if demonstrated)		
Communication		
Caring and Compassion		
Task performance		
Has theory been linked to practice? If so, how? (Tick box if demonstrated)		
Communication		
Task performance		
Prevention and control of infection		
Team working		
Documentation		
What could have been done differently, if anything?		
Peer: Action plan suggestions/Aspects of peer performance that might be adopted in the future:		
Self: Action plan in light of written comments above/Short term and longer term goals:		

feedback tool proved to be an attractive component of the research design and aligns well to the ideal of the student as a partner in learning (Bovill et al., 2015; Sambell, 2011). Levy (2014) argues that placing emphasis on the learner as a partner in the creation of learning experiences and the potential for this to happen within subject research and inquiry is a progressive step within Higher Education settings. Indeed, Healey et al. (2014a, 2014b) identify how engaging learners with a research study can stimulate deep and retained learning. This paper is therefore timely in adding to the literature base available to the wider global educational and nursing communities, in relation to such active engagement during research and inquiry into the topic of peer review and self-assessment. Perhaps even more so because Healey, Flint, and Harrington, (2014a:p60), suggest that in relation to pedagogies of partnership that ‘...we still know relatively little about the ‘how’ of learning partnerships in practice...’ Sharing of the ‘how’ of the learning partnership in this particular creation of a feedback tool, through the detailing of the steps taken in its development, could therefore be potentially very beneficial to the wider educational and nursing communities.

## 2. Background

There is a wealth of literature available on the topic of peer review and self-assessment and contributions to the academic literature are made by Nicol (2009, 2010, 2011), Sambell (2011), Sadler (2010) and Boud and Associates (2010) who are in agreement that engagement with peer review and self-assessment has the potential to influence the development of self-regulation capability; a capability required at the point of professional registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and therefore an integral component within the preparation of student nurses to attain registered nurse status. However, to develop this self-regulation ability, as Bandura (1991) points out, the ability to self-assess is required. Boud (2007) and Bandura (1991) assert that self-regulation is the monitoring of one's own performance in

relation to set standards.

Contemporary contributions to the literature base on the topic of the student as a partner in the learning process are made by Allin (2014); Baker (2014); Barnett (2014); Borsos et al. (2014); Bovill et al. (2015); Cook-Sather (2013); Dunne and Owen (2013); Guilbault (2016); Healey et al. (2014a, 2014b); Gibbs (2013); Neary (2016). Indeed Neary (2016: 93) maintains that the student as producer should happen ‘not as a matter of choice or even as an alternative, but as an urgent critical practical necessity’.

Rout and Roberts (2007) identified that the topic of peer review and self-assessment within nursing literature is plentiful, but research participants are nurse teachers or practitioners rather than student nurses and this continues to be the case; with a gap in literature base apparent in relation to the sharing of information about student nurses actually co-creating a peer review and self-assessment feedback tool.

For the student nurse being prepared currently for professional registration the future remains unknown within the ever increasing pace of change and 21st Century expectations and in his article about learning for an unknown future, Confidence is identified by Barnett (2014) as an important human quality that can assist individuals to maintain function within a world that he identifies as being increasingly challenging and complex. Barnett (2012) suggests that assisting students, towards becoming practitioners who are able to function and cope with the demands placed on them within this rapidly changing and complex world, a change from emphasising knowledge and skills towards an emphasis on human qualities within Higher Education settings may be required. Interestingly during the development of the new feedback tool, participants identified the desire for the human qualities to be components of the criteria, on the new tool, against which they could measure peer and self-performance.

## 3. Methodology

A researcher's own beliefs can influence adoption of a particular ontological stance (Polit and Beck, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011; Bryman, 2015). Having been immersed in the hectic, unpredictable and subjective world of nursing over many years, the perspective of the constructivist researcher proved to be a logical choice for this study. The study was therefore qualitative in nature and designed in such a way as to explore the research questions, one of which was

‘What would a feedback tool created by student nurses for use during peer review/self-assessment look like?’

The research design was theoretically underpinned by Vygotsky's (1934) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Blumer's (1969) theory of Symbolic Interactionism and the concepts drawn from both provided an analytical lens for the study. Using Vygotsky's (1934, 1978, 1986) concepts of watching and learning from others and sharing values and beliefs with others and Blumer's (1969) concepts of people acting on things according to the importance they place on such things, entering into social interaction with others and potentially amending, abandoning or maintaining their ideas of this importance, participants were provided with the opportunity to verbalise their own ideas about the purpose, value and characteristics of peer review and self-assessment and then enter into a practical activity and view each other and selves, through the use of the video recording of this activity.

Ethical considerations were underpinned by British Educational Research Association (BERA) and Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA) guidance, the Data Protection Act (1998) and also through literature guidance provided by Savin-Baden and Major (2010). Participation in the research was voluntary, with no-one feeling at all obliged to participate or feel that non-participation would affect them in any way. The research was designed with the intention of causing no harm. The intention was to benefit the participant (as intimated previously) and ultimately make a worthwhile contribution to the quality of education. Ethical approval was granted and a decision

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