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Developing mentor skills in written feedback on student performance in practice settings : evaluation of a workshop

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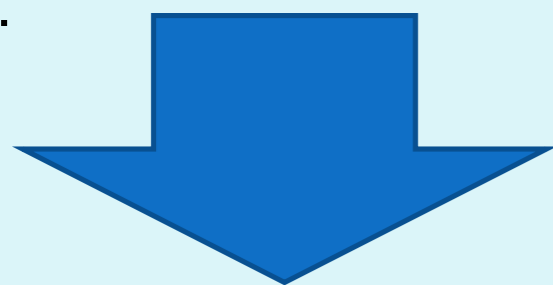
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Introduction

Providing feedback to students has an important and powerful part to play in any future learning. Constructive and timely feedback can support the development of mastery in a subject; helping students to make sense of their achievements, take ownership of their learning, support a student's motivation to move forward and increase self-esteem and confidence (Race 2014).

Nowhere is this more important than in the feedback that mentors provide to students on their performance in practice settings. Mentors are expected to be professionally accountable for providing students with constructive feedback on their achievements (Duffy 2013). Mentor feedback not only acknowledges student achievement and feeds into future development, but more crucially supports assessment processes designed to safeguard the public and uphold the reputation of the profession (Wells & McLaughlin 2014).

A longstanding discourse exists identifying difficulties experienced by mentors in providing feedback, as well as inconsistencies or failures by mentors to provide feedback identifying deficiencies or supporting processes to fail a student (Duffy 2013). More recent empirical data indicates a tendency for mentors to provide verbal, rather than written feedback, which not only fails to provide adequate documented justification for a placement decision, but means that subsequent mentors may not be alerted to a student's development needs or previous areas of concern (Burden 2014).



Workshop development

Examination of free-text comments in student practice assessment documentation (PAD) reveals that comments are unlikely to focus on specific evidence of student behaviours and achievements, and contribute little to student understanding of how to improve their performance (Vivekananda-Schmidt et al 2013, Burden 2014). Use of a structured feedback tool can increase the quantity and quality of feedback and promote dialogue between student and assessor, increasing student self-efficacy for their learning (Newton et al 2012, Allen & Molloy 2017).

A workshop was designed to support neophyte mentors to develop their written feedback skills.

Stage 1

- Introduction to feedback principles and a structured feedback template

Stage 2

- Groupwork - review and evaluation of real world vignettes of documented mentor feedback from student PADs using structured feedback template

Stage 3

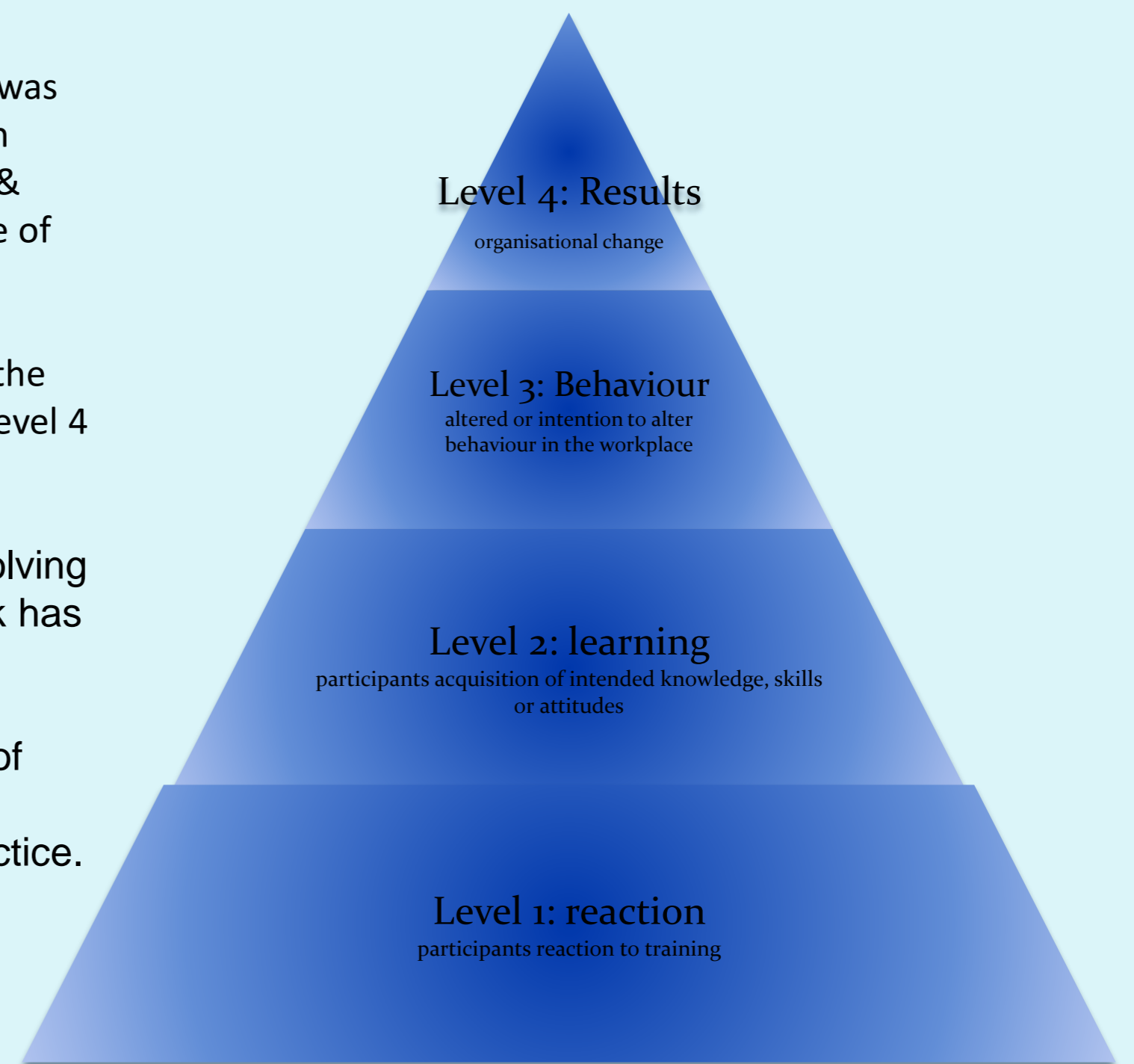
- Peer discussion of evaluations, identification of learning and action planning for future assessment practice

Evaluation of the workshop

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the workshop was conducted using a recognised training evaluation framework – The Kirkpatrick Model (Kirkpatrick & Kayser-Kirkpatrick 2014). Adopted across a range of educational and training sessions, this has been shown to be a useful tool for evaluation of an educational innovation (Paull et al 2016). Given the discrete nature of the workshop, evaluation at Level 4 of the model was not conducted at this time

Two workshops have been run currently involving approximately 90 trainee mentors. Feedback has been received from 77 participants.

Trainee mentors identify a number of areas of valuable learning and behaviour change to support constructive feedback activity in practice.



Level 1 Reaction

'surprised at how little is written in student books'
'liked the examples of feedback to work through'
'useful, specific, very relevant'
'do more practical feeding back on giving feedback'

Thematic Analysis revealed four areas of learning & two areas of intended behaviour change.

Level 2 Learning

Evidence: 'provide evidence & examples of student learning'
'show evidence of why placement passed'

Effect of feedback: 'Good informative feedback reassuring for students'
'feedback can be a key to any student development'
'how this helps student identify their learning needs, as well as identifying problems with potentially failing students'

Nature of feedback: 'include measurable information and enable the student & future mentors the ability to quantify development'
'be more specific and don't make generic statements, but make feedback more individual'
'a generic, nice piece of feedback isn't constructive'

Mentor skills for feedback: 'how to give constructive feedback e.g. elaborating on vague feedback'
'understanding what constructive criticism looks like and how to give it'
'write more specifically what they have done well and progressed with, not just write 'progressed and done well''

Level 3 Behaviour (intended)

Feedback goals:

'support, build and elaborate more on aims, goals for next placement'
'highlight the positive aspects of the student's performance and care but ensure that I provide outcomes for the future placement based on achievements so far'
'identify negatives as well as positives when giving feedback so that students can progress with areas that need improvement'

Student interviews: 'make an effort to ensure interviews are conducted on time'
'have a clear plan in interviews'
'interview prep - need to be detailed in interview and documentation'