

Nursing students' perceptions of and engagement with feedback provided in an undergraduate nursing programme

by
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Declaration

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Acknowledgements

The MPhil in Health Professions Education has been a long and rather tough journey. I am a firm believer that one should study to enrich skills and knowledge and to encourage personal and professional growth; however, this journey should also be filled with fun and enjoyment. It was fun and enjoyable, but it was more challenging than I ever thought it would be. The number of times that I wanted to quit this programme was uncountable. Along this journey there were people that believed in me, people supporting me, people that never stopped praying even when I did not root for myself, even when I did not believe in myself. This has been the most difficult academic “adventure” I ever took; it was also the most transforming journey, personally and professionally. I would, therefore, like to thank a number of key role-players in this journey.

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Abstract

Feedback in the context of higher education, and therefore also in health professions education, is defined as the process where information is given to students about their work and how they then utilise the provided information to acknowledge the appropriate standards for that work to improve the outcomes in performance (Boud & Molloy, 2013a). Feedback may, however, be affected by misunderstanding and, therefore, clear communication is necessary to ensure a clear understanding about the feedback provided (Boud & Molloy, 2013a). In addition, if students have a more positive perception about feedback provided by lecturers, they should be more inclined to utilise the feedback effectively, which could lead to improved results.

Researchers have suggested that feedback must be a dialogic process where lecturers and students are involved in the discussion and construction of feedback (Nicol, 2009). Providing students with feedback that is timely and helpful has also been highlighted as an important area on which higher education institutions have to focus (Brown & Glover, 2006).

Most students seem to regard feedback as an important aspect of learning (Boud & Molloy, 2013a). However, in some contexts students have reported feedback to be problematic and poor, despite lecturers perceiving their feedback as useful (Williams & Kane, 2009). This study seeks to explore nursing students' perceptions of and engagement with feedback that they received in one module of their undergraduate nursing programme.

In this qualitative study, situated in the interpretive paradigm, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Data were analysed using a thematic analysis process adopted from the work of Braun and Clarke (2006).

It was envisaged that the inferences that can be made from the findings of this study can improve feedback practices of nursing students entering the new undergraduate nursing diploma programme. Improved feedback practices can consequently contribute to enhanced student learning. Recommendations from the study can be used to enhance learning experiences for students entering the diploma programme and students that are currently in the programme.

Opsomming

Terugvoer in die hoër-onderwyskonteks, asook in gesondheidsberoep-onderwys, word gedefinieer as die proses waarin terugvoer aan studente oor hulle werk gegee word en hoe hulle daardie terugvoer kan aanwend om erkende standaarde te herken sodat prestasie-uitkomst kan verbeter (Boud & Molloy, 2013a). Terugvoer kan egter deur misverstande beïnvloed word en daarom is deeglike kommunikasie noodsaaklik om die terugvoer sonder twyfel te verstaan (Boud & Molloy, 2013a). Hiermee saam sal studente meer gemotiveer wees om die terugvoer effektief te kan benut (wanneer hulle 'n meer positiewe begrip daarvan het) wat tot beter resultate kan lei.

Navorsers stel voor dat terugvoer 'n dialogiese proses is, rondom die bespreking en konstruksie van terugvoer, waarby beide dosente en studente betrek word (Nicol, 2009). Tydige en bruikbare terugvoer is ook uitgelig as 'n belangrike area waarop hoër-onderwys instansies moet fokus (Brown & Glover, 2006).

Die meeste studente beskou terugvoer as 'n belangrike deel van leer (Boud & Molloy, 2013a). Nietemin, in sommige gevalle rapporteer studente dat terugvoer problematies en swak is, ten spyte daarvan dat dosente hul terugvoer as bruikbaar beskou (Williams & Kane, 2009). Hierdie studie poog om verpleegkunde-studente (in 'n voorgraadse verpleegkunde-program) se persepsies van en betrokkenheid by terugvoer te ondersoek.

In hierdie kwalitatiewe studie, gegrond op die interpretatiewe paradigma, is semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude gevoer om data in te samel. 'n Tematiese analise, gebaseer op die werk van Braun en Clarke (2006), is van die data gedoen.

Daar word verwag dat afleidings wat gebaseer is op die studie se bevindinge, sal gebruik kan word om terugvoerpraktyke van voornemende verpleeg studente in die nuwe voorgraadse verpleegkunde-program te verbeter. 'n Verdere verwagting is dat beter terugvoerpraktyke aangewend sal kan word om waarde toe te voeg tot studente se leerervaring. Aanbevelings uit die studie kan gebruik word om huidige studente en studente wat die nuwe diplomaprogram betree se leerervarings te verryk.

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Abbreviations

| | |
|------|---|
| CPUT | Cape Peninsula University of Technology |
| HEA | Higher Education Academy |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |
| HPE | Health Professions Education |
| HREC | Health Research Ethics Committee |
| NEI | Nursing Education Institution |
| NPP | Nursing Professional Practice |
| SANC | South African Nursing Council |
| WCCN | Western Cape College of Nursing |

Chapter 1: Orientation to the Study

1.1 Introduction

Feedback processes are intricate, sometimes misunderstood, difficult to execute efficiently and often fail in the goal for which they were meant, namely, to enhance student learning (Boud & Molloy, 2013a; Archer, 2010). The value and usefulness of feedback are mainly determined by students' engagement with it. A crucial question is, therefore, why students do not always engage with feedback that is provided on their work. Some have suggested that this might be related to the degree of student discontent with feedback processes as has been reported by the "National Student Survey in England and Wales" (Higher Education Academy, 2013) and the "Student experience survey in Australia" (Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching, 2017). These surveys have identified feedback as among the most complicated aspect of a student's learning experience. Despite evidence to indicate that students are not content with the feedback that they receive, often as a result of the poor provision of feedback, some educators have ascribed this discontent to an inability on the part of the students to read and use written feedback provided to them (Boud & Molloy, 2013b). The rationale in these discussions is that the students do not understand the concept of feedback.

Feedback ought to be a dialogic process where lecturers and students are involved in the discussion and construction of such feedback (Nicol, 2009). Providing students with feedback that is timely and helpful has also been highlighted as an important area on which higher education institutions have to focus (Brown & Glover, 2006). Boud and Molloy (2013a) have argued that, generally, students regard feedback as an important aspect of learning. However, Williams and Kane (2009) describe how nursing students have reported feedback to be problematic and poor, despite their lecturers perceiving the feedback that they were providing as useful. Their work points to a potential misalignment in the dialogic process between what lecturers believe they are offering to the learning experience through their feedback and how this feedback is received by the students.

Carless and Boud (2018) mention that feedback literacy is a significant obstacle to the effectiveness of feedback. Feedback literacy has been described as the "ability to

read, interpret and use written feedback” (Sutton, 2012:33). The concept of feedback literacy will be discussed in depth in chapter 2. Carless and Boud (2018) have further stated that students respond differently to feedback within specific academic fields, curricula, and circumstantial settings. Students’ past experience and personal attributes also influence the way in which students respond to feedback. It is, therefore, evident that students’ engagement with feedback is likely to be influenced by a number of factors. This study seeks to explore these factors, focusing on nursing students’ perceptions of and engagement with feedback that they received in one module of an undergraduate nursing programme.

It is envisaged that the inferences that can be made from the findings of this study could inform feedback practices of nursing students entering the new undergraduate nursing programmes as well as improve my own feedback practices as a nurse educator within an undergraduate nursing programme. Recommendations made from the study could be used to enhance the learning experiences of undergraduate students, including students that are currently registered for the programme.

1.2 Background and context

The Western Cape College of Nursing (WCCN) is the only public Nursing Education Institution (NEI) in the Western Cape (SANC, 2018). The institution is currently in a process of being registered as a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in its own right and has submitted curricula for the new nursing qualification programmes as stipulated by the South African Nursing Council (SANC) for approval.

The NEI consists of four campuses across the Western Cape, namely the Metro West Campus in Athlone, Metro East Campus in Bellville, Boland Overberg Campus in Worcester, and the Southern Cape Karoo Campus in George. These four campuses are responsible for the training of undergraduate as well as various postgraduate students wishing to obtain a nursing qualification. The NEI offers a range of different nursing programmes including a B-Tech degree in collaboration with the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). This programme is offered at the George, Boland and Athlone campuses of the WCCN.

The B-Tech programme is a four-year degree comprising fourteen modules spread over the four years. Students receive a brief introduction to Nursing Professional

Practice (NPP) in their first year of training. In their third year of training, students complete the NPP module. This study focused on feedback received in this third-year module. The module comprises 50 theoretical class contact hours, which may take many forms, including formal lectures, debates, peer discussions, case studies, and self-study. The core outcomes of the NPP module are outlined in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Core outcomes of the NPP module

| |
|--|
| <p>By this end of this module, students should be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comprehend the legal framework governing the nursing and midwifery practice in South Africa• Evaluate compliance with relevant legislation, codes of conduct and organisational descriptions (job descriptions) governing professional behaviour• Comprehend the complexities of the concept 'professionalism' in the nursing profession in South Africa• Analyse prevalent macro-environmental factors that influence the practice of nursing and midwifery• Consider the impact and management of current modern-day challenges facing the nursing profession• Clarify the scope of practice for different categories of nurses in South Africa• Be conversant with, apply and address shortcomings regarding the professional requirements of responsibility, accountability and advocacy• Understand and apply decision-making and problem-solving as a crucial professional practice skill• Discuss and utilise reflective practice as a critical thinking tool |
|--|

Assessments in this third-year module include both formative and summative activities, evenly spread throughout the year during block periods. For the purpose of this study, formative assessment refers to an assessment task intended as a learning opportunity (e.g., a 'quiz', a draft of an essay or report in a writing process, or a 'mock exam') or as preparation for a subsequent summative assessment task (e.g., an essay, a report, an examination) (Van der Vleuten, 1996; Norcini, Anderson, Bollela, Burch, Costa, Divivier, Galbraith, Hays, Kent, Perrott & Roberst, 2011). Typically, no marks are allocated to formative assessments. Summative assessments, on the other

hand, occur at the end of a section of work. They assess student attainment against course outcomes, happen at particular times or have specific deadlines, and the results of the summative assessment tasks contribute to the students' final mark record (Van der Vleuten, 1996; Norcini et al., 2011).

At the institution where this study is situated, summative assessments are aligned with professional requirements as determined by the SANC and HEI. Summative assessment takes place through an assignment, a written test, and a portfolio as indicated in table 1.2. The written test consists of multiple-choice questions, short answer questions as well as long questions and counts 35% towards the final mark for the module. The assignment is scenario-based with questions related to the scenario and counts 45% towards the final mark. Lastly, the portfolio contributes 20% towards the final mark for the NPP module. Feedback is provided on formative but not always on summative assessments. NPP is a subject that is carried through from first to third year. The assessments as indicated below are the assessments that are done in the third year only.

Table 1.2: Assessment opportunities in the NPP module for the third year

| Assessment Opportunity | Formative or summative | Nature of feedback |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Written Test 1</p> <p>(50 marks)</p> <p>Consists of multiple-choice questions, short answer questions and long questions.</p> <p>Counts 35% towards the final mark</p> | <p>A formative assessment of 25 marks is written one day prior to the summative assessment consisting of ten multiple choice questions and longer questions. This is to prepare the student for the type of questions that will be asked in the summative assessment. This does not count toward the final marks.</p> | <p>The formative assessment is marked in the class with generic feedback provided from the lecturer. Peers can provide input and add relevant content.</p> |
| | <p>Summative assessment: 50 marks that count 35% towards the final mark for the module</p> | <p>The summative assessment is marked by the lecturer. Within five days after marking, the scripts are sent to the internal moderator. When scripts are sent back, the lecturer provides generic face-to-face feedback in the classroom setting. Individual feedback is not given on scripts.</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Written assignment:</p> <p>(75 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formative • Summative <p>Scenario-based with questions related to the scenario</p> <p>Counts 45% towards the final mark</p> | <p>A formative written assignment can be handed in once the student is finished. The assignment is sent out 1 month before the due date. Formative assessment for an assignment is not compulsory. The formative assignment does not differ from the summative assignment.</p> | <p>Each student that does submit a formative assignment gets individual written feedback via email in the form of track changes. Students can discuss feedback informally amongst themselves should they wish to do so.</p> |
| | <p>The summative assignment must be handed in before 16:00 on the due date. It must be submitted electronically and counts 75 marks. This contributes 45% towards the final mark for the semester.</p> | <p>Written individual feedback is provided on each summative assessment in the form of track changes on the document. The summative assignment with track changes is mailed to each student after moderation. The moderator only checks for consistent marking. She does not provide any feedback.</p> |
| <p>Clinical:</p> <p>Portfolio of evidence</p> <p>Contributes 20% towards the final mark</p> | <p>No formative assessment is present in the portfolio. It is completed through the course of the year when students are placed in clinical services. At the end of the year, it is submitted and contributes 20 percent towards the final mark.</p> | <p>Individual feedback is provided on the progress of the portfolio during each clinical placement. No formal written feedback or peer feedback is provided to students.</p> |

The above-mentioned assessments make a total of an accumulative mark out of 100. This is the final mark for the third-year⁸ students, and the student must obtain 50 percent to successfully complete the module. It is important to ensure that all feedback provided is clear, accessible, and understood by individuals. An open line of communication, whereby the students can clarify any issues related to feedback is hence crucial.

It is thus imperative to examine students' perceptions, understanding and expectations of feedback as well as students' engagement with the given feedback. This study is situated in the field of Health Professions Education (HPE). The focus of the study is on feedback provided on formative and summative assessment tasks with reference to the perceptions of and engagement with feedback provided and not on the nursing program *per se*. The study only focused on feedback provided on the written assessments in the third year of the NPP module not on the portfolio as this is directly related to clinical practice.

1.3 Problem statement

Boud and Molloy (2013a) have argued that while lecturers typically recognise the importance of feedback, students in the higher education context often remain dissatisfied with the feedback they receive. In the NPP module, students are provided with opportunities to engage with (as discussed in table 1.2) feedback, for example, responding to feedback provided by the lecturer, clarifying uncertainties, reviewing test results and discussing the latter. Feedback includes verbal and written feedback as well as generic and peer feedback. The required workload in this module is, however, fairly condensed with less time made available to provide detailed feedback on the work of the student. This could result in the provision of delayed feedback that is less valuable, subsequently influencing how the student responds to the feedback. This may also decrease opportunities for student engagement and for feedforward to occur, which would enable the students to build on the feedback and apply it in their work settings (Boud & Molloy, 2013a)

Thus, in spite of the feedback that is provided, it appears that there are aspects of the learning space influencing the uptake of that feedback with third year students seemingly making the same errors in subsequent assessments in the NPP module. While many factors can contribute to this, questions can be asked about the role of feedback, the quality and uptake of the feedback. This seems to suggest that the feedback that was given was not incorporated or applied appropriately in subsequent assessments but does not explain why. This research aimed to explore the current context in terms of how students engage with the feedback provided and how this engagement is influenced by their understanding of feedback, or not, with the intention

of providing guidance to lecturers to enhance feedback practices that could enhance student engagement with feedback during future assessments.

1.4 Rationale and motivation for the study

The B-Tech undergraduate nursing programme aims to produce competent nursing professionals. Accordingly, the educators in the NPP module have aimed to adopt fair and appropriate assessment practises. Their practice has been informed by the following understanding of assessment, as captured in the assessment policy, namely that over and above the need to assess student learning, a key purpose of the assessment is to motivate learning in students and, secondly, to provide students with the opportunity to evaluate their own learning (Lockyer, Carraccio, Chan, Hart, Smee, Touchie, Holmboe & Frank, 2017).

As mentioned above, feedback is provided during the module throughout the year to students with opportunities to engage with the feedback. Students can clarify feedback that was provided to them and can also revisit written feedback. Students also receive individual written feedback with track changes on assignments and generic feedback after written assessments.

The NPP module is a very abstract module with content that many students find very difficult to understand. The provision of effective feedback (by the lecturer) and active engagement with it (by the students) are of utmost importance to successfully complete the module. If we believe that it is the feedback on the assessment that drives learning (Van der Vleuten, 1996), knowing how students understand and engage with such feedback, could improve future practice.

1.5 Research question

How do nursing students understand and engage with feedback provided in the third year NPP module in the undergraduate nursing programme?

1.6 Aim and objectives

The aim of this research was to explore the perceptions of nursing students about feedback and the way in which they engage with feedback provided on their work in a particular module within the B-Tech nursing programme. The objectives are to

- Explore students' perceptions of the role of feedback and the value thereof
- Understand the factors that influence students' uptake of feedback

1.7 Role of the researcher

I am one of the educators involved in the NPP module. As an insider-researcher, therefore, it was important for me to seek to place my own ideas, perceptions, and attitudes aside in order to gain insight into the phenomenon under investigation while ensuring trustworthiness. My role in, and relationship to, the study, the impact of being an insider-researcher, as well as the importance of reflexivity will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

1.8 Assumptions

It is assumed that all nursing students received feedback after their assessments, both summative and formative, that were conducted as part of the NPP module.

1.9 Outline of the study

The study is presented in five chapters. The first chapter introduced the topic of the research. It provided background and contextual information in support of the aim of the study, which was to explore student's perceptions of and engagement with feedback in a particular module within the B-Tech nursing programme.

Chapter 2 interrogates the concept of feedback through an in-depth literature review. Different forms of feedback, characteristics of effective feedback, constraints and enablers for educators regarding feedback are discussed to motivate why the study is needed and to provide a theoretical foundation for the study.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and research design of the study. This also includes the rationale for the research approach, population and sample, data collection, coding, and data analysis methods. A thematic analysis process was followed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Javadi & Zarea, 2016; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018) to interpret the data and present the findings. Assumptions and limitations for this study as well as the ethical considerations are also set out in Chapter 3. Furthermore, the process of maintaining the trustworthiness of the data (Frambach, Van der Vleuten & Durning, 2013; Bengtsson, 2016) is described in this chapter.

Chapter 4 captures the findings of the study discussing the themes identified in the data through the process of thematic analysis.

Chapter 5 entails the discussion of the research findings as well as the set of principles to support the importance of the provision of feedback during teaching at a public nurse education institution. Furthermore, recommendations are provided on how government nurse education institutions could potentially incorporate the findings to facilitate the development of staff.

This report concludes by connecting the findings with the research question and objectives of the study as well as providing recommendations for possible further research on the topic.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 What is feedback?

Feedback is described as more than just providing the student with rhetorical information after each assessment; it encompasses all exchanges generated within the assessment design, occurring within and beyond the immediate learning context and, importantly, drawing from a range of sources (Burke & Pieterick, 2010; Carless & Boud, 2018; Boud & Molloy, 2013a). Feedback is a response to performance, providing information on that performance (Watling & Ginsberg, 2014). It is also conceived as remedial information provided by the lecturer (Carless & Boud, 2018).

Feedback can be defined as the medium through which learners make sense of information received from various sources and use it to enhance their learning strategies, and indeed their own learning (Burke & Pieterick, 2010). This definition not only highlights the teacher's role in making the students aware of their strengths and areas for improvement, but it also includes students' roles in understanding and using feedback to improve subsequent performance. Importantly, when students receive feedback, they need to get the opportunity to reflect upon received feedback to promote learning and improve performance in future assessments (McCarthy, 2015). Feedback is a complex construct that is a key element to learning and is influenced by multiple factors.

Reflecting on the experiences and perspectives of the students who have received feedback will allow us to start unravelling the complexity of different influences affecting feedback for our students (Watling & Ginsberg, 2014).

2.2 Principles of effective feedback

Brown and Glover (2006), among others, described the aim of feedback as seeking to identify weak areas and explore the possible causes for those identified concerns. They recommended that lecturers should concentrate on providing meaningful feedback related to the main areas of an assignment or essay that is aimed at achieving enhanced levels of performance.

Price, Handley, Millar & O'Donovan (2010), on the other hand, summarised the aim of feedback as i) remediation, ii) reinforcement, iii) diagnosing gaps between

demonstrated and expected standards of performance, iv) benchmarking and facilitating ways to fill the gaps, and v) addressing activities to support continuing development.

Effective feedback practices are a key element in the improvement of competency (Boud & Molloy, 2013a). Such feedback should facilitate the development of the required skills, encourage future learning, and should motivate the learner (Killingback, Ahmed & Williams, 2019). Three areas central to effective feedback were identified by Price et al. (2010), namely:

- i) “Where am I going?” – Feed up – The response to this question provides information about the accomplishment of learning goals associated with a specific task or performance. Feedback can be ineffective if the goal is not clearly defined.
- ii) “How am I going?” – Feedback – This aspect of feedback provides information about progress and about how to proceed.
- iii) “Where to next?” – Feed forward – The answer provides specific information regarding more significant challenges, more information about what is not understood, more strategies to promote deeper understanding and more self-regulation over the learning process (Price et al., 2010).

These three questions do not work in isolation; rather, they work together. There is no single best method to provide good feedback; the process remains complex and contains many facets (Archer, 2010). Effective feedback practices should, however, guide learners to follow the desired options or to move forward in a goal-directed manner.

A summary of guiding principles for giving effective feedback, as described by Handley and Williams (2011), is provided in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Principles of effective feedback (Handley & Williams, 2011)

| | |
|----|---|
| 1) | Feedback should target the behaviour or performance and not the personality of the learner. |
| 2) | The assessor should protect the self-esteem of the learner. |
| 3) | Feedback should be given in a private setting, especially if it is negative. |

| | |
|----|--|
| 4) | Feedback should include an emphasis on improving the self-regulatory ability of the learner. |
| 5) | Feedback should provide opportunities for the learner to seek, listen and respond with honesty to feedback. |
| 6) | The student should be encouraged to engage in critical reflection of the performance (self-analysis). |
| 7) | Feedback should be given straight away after the activity except under specific conditions when feedback can be delayed. |
| 8) | The assessor should be credible and experienced. |

2.3 Student engagement with feedback

Many studies have examined student engagement with feedback. For example, in their work undertaken amongst medical students. Parkin, Hepplestone, Holden, Irwin & Thorpe (2011) found that many students read feedback and engage with it in some or other way, but it is not clearly understood which processes students use or whether engagement in feedback leads to the implementation of an action plan. Another study conducted in the United Kingdom amongst nursing and medical students investigated general student practices in using their feedback effectively for future training (Hepplestone & Chikawa, 2014). It was clear from the research that students understood the concept of feedback; however, students did not appear to make a deeper connection between feedback received and future education and training (Hepplestone & Chikawa, 2014).

There are several factors that affect the students' use of feedback. These include the mode of feedback delivery, demographic factors, the gender of the student as well as the student's self-esteem (Jonsson, 2012; Ferguson, 2011). Dweck (2000) highlights that learners' personal attributes determine how the learners perceive feedback. In addition, for students to engage in feedback, they must perceive it as being useful and helpful (Ferguson, 2011; Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2002). It is furthermore suggested that the concept of feedback literacy could enhance feedback uptake, in turn leading to improved future work or learning strategies (Carless & Boud, 2018).

As mentioned in chapter 1, feedback literacy is described as "the ability to read, interpret and use written feedback" (Sutton, 2012:33). Four factors of student feedback

literacy have been emphasised: “appreciating feedback processes; making judgements; managing affect and taking action to use feedback” (Carless & Boud, 2018:1317). “Appreciating feedback” relates to students identifying both the importance of feedback as well as their active participation in the feedback process. “Managing effects” relates to controlling feelings, emotions, and attitudes, and avoiding defensiveness (Carless & Boud, 2018). “Taking action” relates to understanding the essence of information and making use of it to improve performance (Boud & Molloy, 2013b).

On the other hand, a factor leading to poor comprehension and uptake of feedback, is the lack of strategies for productive use of feedback (Jonsson, 2012). It seems that while students may be happy to receive feedback not all students possess the strategies to engage with the feedback effectively (Furnborough & Truman, 2009). Such strategies could include writing down key notes on feedback or writing a reflective analysis on the feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Orsmond & Merry, 2011).

2.4 Different ways in which feedback is provided

There are many ways in which feedback is provided to students. Feedback, in a nurse education context (as is the case in many other contexts), can be either formal (after structured written or clinical assessment), or informal (in daily encounters between teachers and trainees, peers or colleagues). Feedback typically consists of two components: firstly, the type and the method of feedback (whether written or oral); secondly, the content and the depth of the feedback provided (Brown & Glover, 2006).

Feedback should be detailed and specific, timely, personal to the student, encouraging, motivational, and constructive (Nicol, 2009). Gibbs and Simpson (2004) propose ten conditions under which assessment supports learning. The last seven of these conditions relate to feedback. This is significant as it again emphasises the relationship that exists between feedback and learning, including the role of assessment. These conditions focus on 1) the amount and detail of the feedback, 2) the importance of feedback focussing on the performance and not the individual, 3) how timeously the feedback is given, 4) the appropriateness and relevance of the feedback, 5) how understandable the feedback is, 6) how the feedback is received, and 7) the impact of the feedback. Effective feedback should provide information that

enables a student to reach their goals as well as to build on existing goals to make better progress towards future goals (Arts, Jaspers & Joosten-ten Brinke, 2016).

Feedback is considered a multi-faceted issue as there are many forms of feedback. Lecturers should, however, explore different approaches to giving feedback and ensure that feedback is facilitative rather than directive (Archer, 2010). Some of the approaches that lecturers could use are summarised below:

- i) **“Feedback sandwich” model:** The feedback starts and ends with positive and appreciative feedback. However, the crucial component of the feedback is “sandwiched” between the positive aspects (Tabar, Sohrabi & Taheri, 2019). This approach is useful for students with a low self-esteem. However, if it is used frequently, its effectiveness can be lost, as the learners start ignoring the crucial middle component of the feedback (Tabar et al., 2019).
- i) **Pendleton Rules:** The students are encouraged to reflect on positive areas (What was done well?). The facilitator reinforces those positive aspects. Further, the weaknesses (What could have been done differently?) and the strategies to overcome weaknesses are discussed (How can these be achieved?). Finally, an action plan is developed to fill the gap between the real and the intended results. This method helps to create a safe environment and prevent a defensive attitude on the part of the learner.
- ii) **Educational Alliance Framework:** This bidirectional educational alliance framework emphasises the formation of a cordial relationship between the educator and the learner (Telio, Aiiawi & Regehr, 2015). This transformed feedback approach allows a collaborative understanding of performance objectives and a jointly settled action plan (Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1: Educational alliance feedback process (Telio et al., 2015)

- iii) **Ask-Tell-Ask model:** The ask-tell-ask model is a simple, bidirectional, learner-centred model that fosters students' self-assessment abilities and provides assessors with the opportunity to share constructive feedback with the students (Figure 2.2).

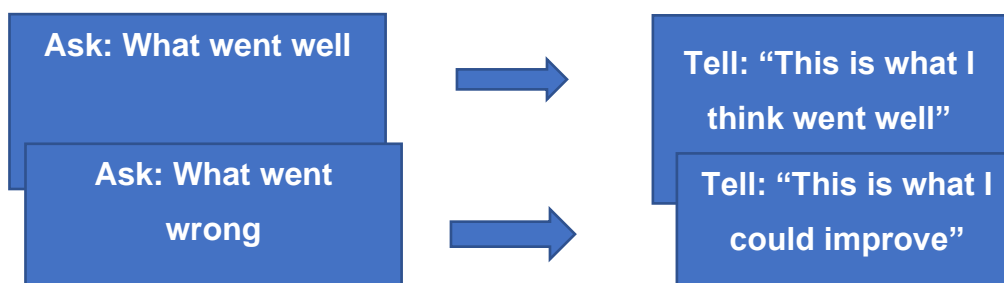


Figure 2.2: Ask-tell-ask model (French, Colben, Pien, Dannefer & Taylor, 2015)

- iv) **Alternative models of feedback:** Several different models of feedback, such as: “a five micro skills model of clinical teaching” (Neher, Gordon, Meyer & Stevens, 1992) one-minute preceptor (Neher et al., 1992), and the “six-step problem-solving model” (Wall, 2004) are also used for clinical assessment feedback as opposed to feedback given on written assessments, which are the focus of this study.

2.5 Strengthening students' feedback literacy

It is evident that strengthening students' feedback literacy could be of value. One way in which feedback literacy can be improved, is through peer feedback or peer review. It is reported that peer review assists the student with comparing their work with that of others and, through this exposure, students develop the competence of self-evaluation (McConolgue, 2015). Feedback that seeks behaviour change can be generated if the students are appraised of the benefits of feedback through appropriate activities and are offered opportunities to engage in meaningful tasks with peers and others (Boud & Molloy, 2013a). Student feedback literacy can also be improved by using selected samples of student work that illustrate the standard and coherence of feedback expectations (Carless, Salter, Yang & Lam, 2011). However, sometimes assessors have reservations regarding the role of 'exemplars' in that they feel that students may consider them as models to be emulated (Handley & Williams, 2011). To create feedback literacy might be a mechanism to facilitate effective feedback.

2.6 Barriers to effective engagement with feedback

As has been argued above, feedback has been widely shown as an intervention to promote learning (Hesketh & Laidlaw, 2002). However, research also highlights those learners do not necessarily acknowledge/recognise the potential value of feedback (Hesketh & Laidlaw, 2002; Mulliner & Tucker, 2011). These findings have led researchers to explore why this might be the case and which factors affect students' practices regarding feedback. From the literature, it becomes clear that students tend to renounce or overlook comments if they raise emotional responses (Mulliner & Tucker, 2011; Ryan & Henderson, 2018). Feedback that focuses on "personality" rather than "behaviour" is likely to impact negatively on the motivation and performance of the learner (Shute, 2008:167).

A lack of dialogue between assessor and student about what is expected of them can result in the student ignoring and not acting on feedback (Mulliner & Tucker, 2011). Students are often not skilled to act on comments competently. Therefore, important information may remain obscure (Sadler, 2010). The student's prior experience of feedback also determines the effectiveness of feedback. Robinson (2014) mentioned that students fail to use feedback provided in the higher education environment because it may be dissimilar from what they have previously received. Students are generally not familiar with what constitutes feedback at a tertiary level in comparison with feedback they received in school. These issues all point to the importance of developing feedback literacy among students.

A teacher's credibility (Poulos & Mahony, 2008) and authority (Jonsson, 2012) may also affect a student's use of feedback. In addition, many researchers have identified improper timing as impacting the effectiveness of feedback (Ghazal, Gul, Hanzala, Jessop & Tharani, 2014; Yang & Carless, 2013). For example, feedback received after the completion of the module makes it problematic for the students to use it (Holmes & Papageorgiou, 2009; Price et al., 2010). Furthermore, Stothart (2008) has suggested that dissatisfaction with the nature or extent of the feedback provided can also influence its efficacy. This author argues, for example, that such dissatisfaction can be a sign that students now have higher expectations from feedback provided. Some barriers to useful feedback are highlighted in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Barriers to effective feedback practices

| | |
|----|--|
| 1) | Fear of upsetting the student or sabotaging the student-teacher relationship (Mulliner & Tucker, 2011; Ryan & Henderson, 2018) |
| 2) | Fear of doing more damage than good (Mulliner & Tucker, 2011; Ryan & Henderson, 2018) |
| 3) | Inability to handle emotional responses of students against negative feedback (Shute, 2008) |
| 4) | Non-specific or generalised feedback (Shute, 2008) |
| 5) | Lack of consistency of feedback (Hesketh & Laidlaw, 2002) |
| 6) | Lack of respect for the facilitator (Poulos & Mahony, 2008) |

2.7 Summary

Feedback is a vital component in the cycle of learning. Constructive feedback can improve learning and sets the momentum for future development. In the field of Nursing Education, feedback extends beyond enabling student learning in that it ultimately affects patient care. This emphasises how important it is to provide effective feedback, and then also close the feedback process as students respond appropriately to the feedback they have received. To be effective, feedback ought to be actionable, non-judgemental, descriptive, specific, based on observable behaviour, and should be given at a collaboratively settled reasonable time and place.

Each of these elements can impose impediments to effective feedback exchange. Continuing student and lecturer dissatisfaction with feedback necessitates the development of learning-centred sustainable feedback approaches to satisfy both the students and the assessors. Adapting the feedback process and improving student feedback literacy might help students to understand and make effective use of feedback.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore the way in which nursing students engage with feedback they receive in a particular module within the B-Tech nursing programme, namely Nursing Professional Practice (NPP). The findings of the study would be used to identify possible factors that enable or constrain active engagement with feedback provided in the undergraduate programme.

This chapter sets out the methodology that was adopted during this study. It, firstly, outlines my role as a researcher, specifically as an insider-researcher. Thereafter, the research design that guided this study is outlined. The research approach, population, and sample as well as the process of data collection and analysis are also discussed.

3.2 Role of the researcher

3.2.1 The researcher

I am a registered Professional Nurse and have been practicing as a Nurse Educator at a government Nursing Education Institution (NEI) in the Western Cape since 2019. The South African Nursing Council (SANC) defines a Nurse Educator as someone who is registered at the SANC as a professional nurse with additional qualifications in Nursing Education (SANC, 2014). I have been registered in this capacity since December 2018 and have been additionally registered as a Nurse Administrator since 2005. This allows me to work in general nursing, psychiatric nursing, community nursing, and in education fields as lecturer, clinical educator, education manager, and researcher.

As a Nurse Educator one needs to comply with the competencies as set out by the SANC (2014) of which there are seven domains. Although all the domains are important for nurse educators, the domain referring to scholarship of teaching is of relevance for my role as researcher in this study. The specific competencies speaking to the topic of this study are, firstly, that nurse educators should provide students with extensive and timely feedback after each assessment. This forms an important part of teaching and learning. Secondly, nurse educators need to be able to demonstrate

verbal and written communication skills, teach and provide feedback, as well as employ electronic communication skills as a method to enhance feedback provision.

3.2.2 Researcher's role as insider-researcher

It is important to note that this study was conducted at the institution where I work amongst the fourth-year nursing students. I was, therefore, an insider-researcher. I previously taught these students but at the time of conducting the study, I was no longer responsible for their assessment.

Researchers are warned that knowing one's participants can lead to a loss of objectivity and unconsciously making incorrect assumptions (Unluer, 2012; Holloway & Galvin, 2016). However, being an insider-researcher can also be to the advantage of the study. For example, I have developed a close relationship with the participants and Unluer (2012) has argued that such a level of intimacy can help towards establishing if the truth is told. I also have a good understanding about how things work at the institution and how to approach the participants. Thus, I became a co-creator of the knowledge that were generated because of the study. Acting as a researcher in one's area of work can lead to revealing issues or challenges that otherwise would have remained unresolved or unmentioned (Locke, 2019).

3.2.3 Importance of reflexivity

The aim of reflexivity is to critically look at one's role as researcher and critically analyse oneself throughout the process. Reflexivity also ensures the study's rigour and trustworthiness (Watling & Ginsberg, 2014). A process of self-reflection and introspection during the research constantly made me aware of my own personal feelings and experiences.

I know I am a teacher in the programme that is the focus of this research and I have a stake in the study. It was, therefore, important for me to remain reflexive about my actions during this research. Reflexivity, therefore, allowed me to locate myself in the research project and analyse my role in it (Holloway & Galvin, 2016). It was necessary to keep myself aware of how the findings will affect the main aim and outcomes of the study (Holloway & Galvin, 2016).

3.3 Research approach

3.3.1 Qualitative approach

The aim of the study was to understand students' perceptions of feedback and how students engaged with feedback. The research investigated a specific phenomenon among a group of people about a particular topic. Therefore, a qualitative research method was selected. In this study the participants were encouraged to speak for themselves and share their own experiences and perceptions of the feedback received (Orsmond, Merry & Reiling, 2005). To improve feedback practices and shape educational practice (Polit & Beck, 2012) it is necessary to extrapolate and interpret rich data from the participants' experiences. Qualitative data generated through using authentic and trustworthy methods is recognised and valued as being 'rich data' (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

The focus of qualitative research is to provide a narrative report related to the human experience (Green & Thorogood, 2014) and concentrates on aspects such as meaning and understanding. For this reason, a series of interviews was conducted to enable the generation of narratives by the students with regards to their perceptions of and engagement with feedback received on formative and summative assessments in a test and assignment in the third year NPP module.

3.3.2 Interpretative paradigm

This study was situated within an interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm is characterised by a need to understand the world as it is from a subjective point of view and seeks an explanation within the frame of reference of the participant rather than the objective observer of the action (Green & Thorogood, 2014). This research aimed to make meaning of the data by drawing inferences or by judging the match between the information and some abstract pattern (Green & Thorogood, 2014). The study followed an exploratory approach.

3.4 Population and sampling

Sampling is defined as a process where elements, events, behaviours, and subjects are selected for a study (Burns & Grove, 2011). A sample represents the whole or a

subset of a larger set (Burns & Grove, 2011). Currently the Boland Overberg Campus in Worcester has fifty-six (N=56) fourth-year nursing students. The study was conducted at this one campus focusing on the students who successfully completed the NPP module during the third year of the students' training. The Worcester campus was chosen to conduct the study for pragmatic reasons, including restrictions on movement due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The intention was to conduct purposive sampling in the hope that this would provide a range of perspectives; however, due to the Covid-19 pandemic this was not possible. Ultimately, all fourth-year nursing students, in other words, students who had completed the module the previous year, were invited to participate in the study (discussed later in this chapter) and those who agreed were interviewed. Initially only four students responded to the invitation. After a second invitation, six more students indicated that they were willing to participate.

3.5 Data collection and management

Data were generated by means of semi-structured interviews that followed a set of open-ended questions (Table 3.1). This allowed the participants to share any information they perceived as important rather than just answering what was being asked. The intent was that it would also allow for pursuing additional relevant ideas should any be raised (Burns & Grove, 2007). The pre-set questions were developed based on the literature discussed in chapter two as well as on my experience at the NEI and my interest in the research topic. Ten interviews were conducted.

Table 3.1: Pre-set questions

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Question 1: What is your understanding of the concept "feedback"?</p> | |
| <p>Question 2: How did you react to the feedback provided to you?</p> | <p>Prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you engage in the feedback process? If yes, how did you engage? |
| <p>Question 3: Was the feedback that you received helpful? If yes, why? If not, why not?</p> | <p>Prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were you able to apply the feedback you received in future modules.? If yes, motivate your answer. If not, what was a possible reason for that? • Were you given the opportunity to clarify any uncertainties regarding the feedback provided? |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you like about the feedback received and what did you dislike? • Are there any general comments on the feedback on your NPP module? |
| <p>Question 4: What sort of feedback do you find most valuable to enhance your learning?</p> | |

Prior to conducting each interview, I explained the purpose and process of the study to the participant and obtained written informed consent from them (Addendum A).

Potential participants (N=56) were invited via email to participate in the study (Addendum A). The email introduced the participants to the topic that was being studied and provided detailed descriptions of the study background and methods. I aimed to conduct 12 interviews, but only ten students were interviewed due to poor response (discussed in the population and sample section). I scheduled for a date and time that suited the individual participants to conduct an online interview.

Under normal circumstances face-to-face interviews would have been my preferred choice. Face to face interviews can give the researcher not only rich data, but the non-verbal communication can also be observed (Burns & Grove, 2007). However, during the COVID-19 pandemic this was not possible. Students were placed in clinical services and, therefore, were quarantined and not allowed to be visited at the student residence where they all stayed. Online interviews were therefore conducted. Each interview was between 15-25 minutes and each participant was given 2 Gigabytes of data as a token of appreciation and to ensure that they would be able to join the online interview.

The interviews were conducted in English as this is the official language of teaching and communication at the NEI and, therefore, it could reasonably be expected that the participants would be able to participate meaningfully in English. The interviews were done online via Microsoft Teams and audio recorded both via Teams and on another separate electronic device to ensure there would be a backup should one device fail.

Each interview was transferred from my device to my laptop and was kept securely in a separate folder. Each interview was given a unique number to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The interviews were uploaded on a USB device and given to an

independent person who transcribed the interviews. The audio recordings were transcribed to a Microsoft Word document and password protected to maintain confidentiality. Thereafter, the transcriptions were also stored in a secure folder until it was analysed. All documentation and recordings pertaining to the study were stored on a password-protected computer to ensure the integrity of the study.

3.6 Data analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis approach were used to analyse the data that were generated in this study. Thematic analysis is recognised as a useful method in qualitative research in several fields (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The method is used to analytically identify and organise data into themes to offer some insight into a specific phenomenon and this process allowed me to make sense of different meanings and/or overall experiences. Furthermore, thematic analysis allows the researcher to make use of various ways of looking at the data while focusing on one aspect of a phenomenon, making it a very flexible process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) identified six phases in the process of thematic analysis. The first step in the process was to familiarise myself with the data; secondly, to generate different codes; thirdly, to search for themes that emerged from the data; fourthly, to review potential themes; thereafter, to define and name the themes; and, lastly, to produce a report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each step will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Thematic analysis is an approach to analysing qualitative data and there were some pitfalls of which I needed to be aware. The first pitfall is failing to analyse the data at all or conducting a poor or weak analysis thereof. A second pitfall is using the data collection questions as themes. Other pitfalls include not matching the theory and analytic claims with each other as well as failing to clarify the theoretical assumptions and their undertakings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study every attempt was made to avoid these pitfalls, including utilising an external coder to verify themes and subthemes to ensure that the data interpretation was correct. Figure 3.1 illustrates the process.



Figure 3.1: Phases of thematic analysis (Adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2006)

3.6.1 Six phases of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke

3.6.1.1 Phase 1: Familiarising myself with the data

An independent person transcribed the interviews before the first phase started. I started by listening to each recording and checking it against the transcript to ensure that the data were transcribed correctly. I familiarised myself by reading and re-reading the transcriptions to fully immerse myself in the data, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Before re-reading through the data, I started to search for specific meanings and patterns that occurred in the data. Reading and re-reading of the data can be very time consuming, however, immersion in the data is very important to ensure that the researcher becomes familiar with the complexity of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the first phase I also started to mark and highlight certain words and phrases that could become potential codes.

3.6.1.2 Phase 2: Generating initial codes

Initial codes were generated during the process of familiarisation with the data and initial ideas that seemed interesting or that stood out were highlighted. Similar ideas were grouped together to form codes. According to Saldana (2013), a code can be a single word, a phrase or a full sentence and represents a summary of the idea in the

data. Coding is an iterative process and an act that needs to be repeated (Saldana, 2013). It requires several rounds of coding and re-coding to come to the final set of codes.

Initial codes were generated from the data, which were later condensed into more descriptive, encompassing codes. After following several rounds of coding, a final set of codes was created to complete the data set.

The final codes were grouped together according to the relevance and three groups of codes were generated that spoke to relevant issues. Shorter descriptive codes were generated from this (Addendum B).

3.6.1.3 Phase 3: Searching for themes

During this phase, I searched for themes by combining codes into possible themes and more quotes from the transcripts to support the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This could only be done when all coding was completed, and I had generated a list of the different codes. An overarching theme was formed according to relevance of the grouped codes. Refining allowed me to identify if the themes had subthemes as subthemes can provide structure to large or complex themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the end of this phase, I had a collection of codes, themes and subthemes.

3.6.1.4 Phase 4: Reviewing themes

The next step was to evaluate the themes to ensure that they spoke to the code as well as the complete set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes may be re-evaluated, grouped together and broken down into new themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I reviewed and refined the themes to ensure the complete set of data has been analysed. Braun and Clarke (2006) advise researchers to re-read the entire set of data to ensure that the themes speak to the data and to code any additional data that could have been missed during the initial coding process. No additional data were identified after I had completed this process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although coding is an ongoing process, I had to end this phase with a set of themes and an understanding of how the themes linked together and what they described in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.6.1.5 Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

In this phase, each theme was named and refined (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By the end of the phase, I was able to define clearly what the themes were as well as name the themes with a summarising but effective name that would allow the reader to understand what the theme is about immediately (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Key themes were identified from the final analysis process and each theme had a subtheme related to the data. After defining and naming themes, an external coder further verified themes and subthemes to enhance the trustworthiness of the data.

3.6.1.6 Phase 6: Producing a report

During this phase, the final analysis was documented and is presented in Chapter 4.

3.7 Quality assurance

To ensure that the research was trustworthy, the study complied with the criteria of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Frambach et al., 2013).

Credibility: To ensure trustworthiness of the study, there is a need to adhere to ensuring the credibility of my data to judge the accuracy and correctness of the research findings (Polit & Beck, 2012). Credibility, which is comparable with internal validity, is the degree to which the study's results are accurate and convincing to other researchers (Polit & Beck, 2012). I ensured that the resources that I used to frame the study were published in academically credible resources. Furthermore, credibility of a study cannot be insured without dependability (Polit & Beck, 2012).

Dependability is comparable with reliability and is the degree to which the findings are consistent with the contexts in which they were produced. Dependability will be ensured by iterative data collection and analysis (Polit & Beck, 2012). To ensure dependability, I needed to be flexible, open to the process and analyse data until no new codes emerged (Frambach et al., 2013).

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be utilised in different scenarios (Frambach et al., 2013). To ensure transferability, all aspects including context, sampling, and literature were described in depth so that other, interested researchers could adopt aspects of my methodology in their own work.

Confirmability, comparable to objectivity, relates to the extent to which the findings can be endorsed by other researchers (Polit & Beck, 2012). “Thick” descriptions (Polit & Beck, 2012), entailing comprehensive information of the research, were provided to the readers to ensure that the findings can be interpreted across different contexts. I ensured confirmability by searching for data that contradict the findings and I, furthermore, reflected on the process throughout the study (Frambach et al., 2013).

3.8 Ethical procedures

Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at Stellenbosch University (Addendum C). An email was sent to the Head of the Nursing Department at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) as well as to the Head of Campus of the Boland Overberg Campus. Both granted approval for the study via email (Addendum E). Ethical approval was also requested from the Ethical and Research Committee from CPUT, which was also granted (Addendum D).

The interviews were conducted after ethical approval was granted from both institutions. Each participant received an invitation to participate in the study, providing details about the nature of the study, the purpose, and the process of the interview. The participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (Addendum A) electronically and to email it back to me. Participants were informed that participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw any time they wished to do so. Participants were told that the audio recordings would be made available to them if they wished to have it. I also explained to the participants that the audio recordings will just be used for the purpose of the study and will remain confidential.

3.9 Limitations

A limitation of this small-scale study is that, ultimately, all of the students who were willing to participate in the study were recruited into it. There was no opportunity to apply purposive sampling as mentioned above. Nevertheless, the idea of the research assignment was not to generalise findings, but to simply explore ideas about students' perceptions of and engagement with feedback. This can be seen as a step to inform future work in this field. The study focuses on a single population at one specific institution and only on one aspect that influences teaching and learning. The current

state of change at the institution also influenced the study. We are in the middle of a worldwide pandemic, which caused tremendous physical and emotional strain on the population that was used for the study. This might have influenced their attitude towards the interviews.

As the research took place at only one institution it can, therefore, only account for the opinion of the participants at one institution. However, I do believe that the findings from the study have the potential to add value to future teaching and learning at the institution.

Furthermore, my inexperience as interviewer as well as my close professional relationship with the participants could have played a role in the responses I received from the participants. For example, the interviews were shorter than expected, possibly due to us knowing what the other meant about certain aspects or situations. It is always difficult to be an insider-researcher and remain true to my participants' voices. I do believe that it will become easier as my experience in research continues to develop.

3.10 Summary

The focus of this chapter was on the methods used to carry out this study as well as what was needed from an ethical point of view to embark on the research journey. This chapter also describes the role of the researcher and, more specifically, the role of the insider-researcher. The importance of reflexivity was highlighted, and a description provided on how quality was managed to conduct the study. The chapter gave an overview of the qualitative interpretive research approach that was followed as well as the methods of data collection and analysis. Lastly, ethical considerations for the study were emphasised and the limitations of the study were stipulated.

Chapter 4: Findings of the study

4.1 Introduction

The focus of this research was to explore the perceptions of nursing students about feedback provided by lecturers in an undergraduate module of the B-Tech degree in Nursing, and to understand what influenced their engagement with that feedback. This study focused on formative and summative written assessments implemented in the NPP module. Overall, the data suggest that the student nurses understood feedback in essence as a form of communication that provided a platform for guidance to improve performance, but their experience of feedback was varied. The themes that were identified (figure 4.1) during analysis were as follows: the first theme discusses the concept of feedback and students' understanding of it; the second theme explains the nature of feedback provided in the NPP module and the last theme focuses on the enablers and constraints for students to engage with feedback. Several recommendations were put forth to enhance the quality of feedback that is provided and to encourage engagement with that feedback.

The findings will be discussed under the different themes that were identified through the process of thematic analysis as discussed in chapter 3. The focus of the analysis process links to the objectives of the study, which include:

- Exploring students' perceptions of the role of feedback and the value thereof
- Understanding the factors that influence students' uptake of feedback

As indicated above, three main themes were identified during the process of analysis. Each theme had subthemes that described similar concepts within the data. The first theme referred to the concept of feedback and included subthemes referring to feedback as a form of communication as well as the provision of a platform for guidance to improve performance. The second theme related to the nature of the feedback including the subthemes of the extent of feedback and the approach to feedback. The last theme referred to enablers and constraints for student engagement with feedback.

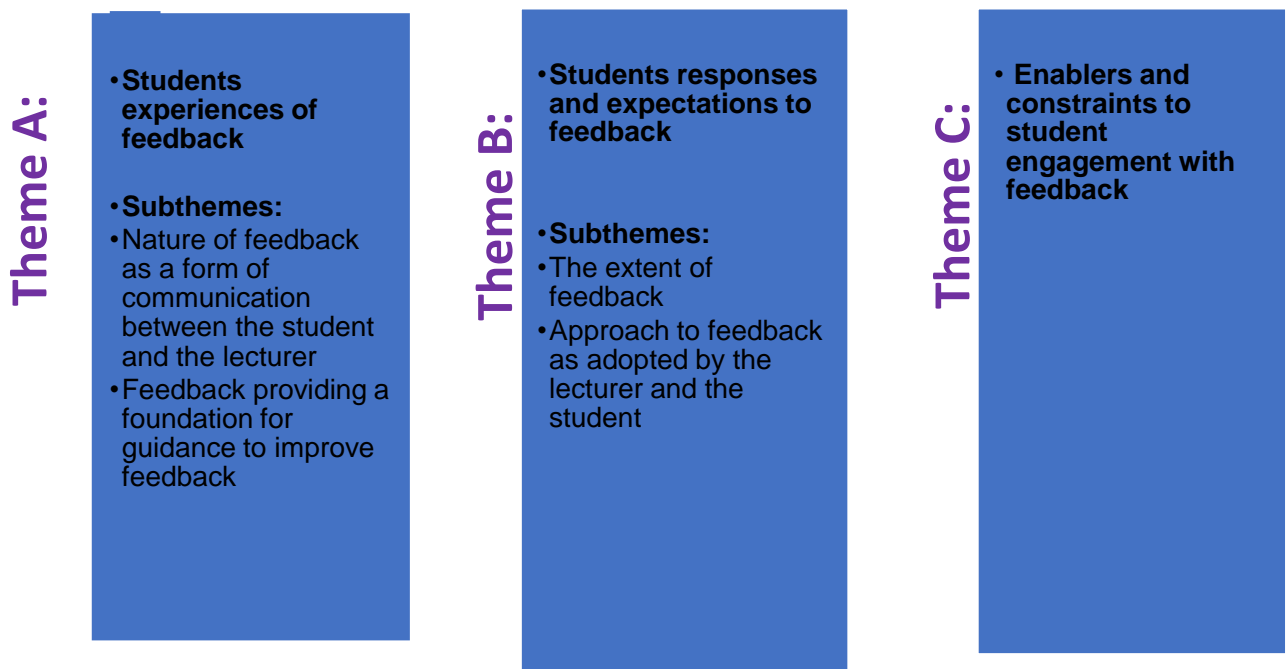


Figure 4.1: Key themes and subthemes

4.2 Findings

To ensure accurate interpretation of the data, it is important to acknowledge who the participants were, as this will provide insight into the different voices that are presented. However, it is important to note that the data cannot account for all the voices of the third-year nursing students that successfully passed the NPP module in the Western Cape.

4.2.1 The participants

Ten participants from the Boland Overberg Campus took part in the study. The age of the students ranged between 20 and 32 years. All ten participants successfully completed their third year of studies, including the NPP module. The academic performance of the participants ranged between 50-75% for their final mark of the NPP module. This gave a good representation of different academic performances in the module. As mentioned in chapter 3, all the participants were fluent in English, which is the preferred language of teaching at the Western Cape College of Nursing (WCCN)

and, therefore, it is assumed that they were able to express themselves clearly. Both male and female participants were interviewed.

4.2.2 Discussion of findings

To give voice to these participants, the data that were analysed will now be discussed under the key themes that were identified, namely the concept of feedback and students' understanding of it, the nature of feedback provided in the NPP module, and lastly, the enablers and constraints to student engagement in feedback. Illustrative quotations have been included to support the findings. Quotations have been included verbatim.

4.2.2.1 THEME A: STUDENTS EXPERIENCES OF FEEDBACK

The focus of Theme A is on students experiences of feedback. Subthemes describe the nature of feedback as a form of communication between the student and the lecturer (Subtheme A1) and feedback providing a foundation for guidance to improve feedback (Subtheme A2).

Overall, the feedback provided during the NPP module was appreciated and valued by most of the students despite some disappointments and limitations that they experienced.

Subtheme A1: The nature of feedback as a form of communication between the student and the lecturer

Direct questioning during the interviews about students' perceptions regarding the purpose of feedback produced a limited response. Further prompting revealed that students experienced feedback as a form of communication on different levels. Three participants had different opinions about the concept of feedback; one participant gave a more general understanding about the concept of feedback:

My understanding about feedback is, when someone is asking you about what you experience, for example, then you give your experience and what you think and what you believe, and, yes, then you just express yourself in the way that you experience the things. (Interview 1)

Another student linked their understanding of feedback to somebody giving an evaluation:

Feedback is, when you communicate with somebody; you provide them with information, certain information and they communicate back to you about what you have said to them or given to them and they will almost give you the evaluation of the information that you have given to them. (Interview 9)

[Feedback is] communication, which is done when you have done something, and you're getting a response on how you were doing. (Interview 4)

Most students viewed feedback as consisting of two components: written comments and a mark. However, feedback is often given mainly in the form of a "pass or fail" judgement or numerical representation, which provides students with little qualitative information on the performance of their progress. They saw the comments as stating whether they achieved the outcomes of the assignment and the mark as determining how well they met or failed to meet the outcome.

When I received my results for my assessments and exams, I was very happy and felt good because it shows that there was good communication between me and the lecturer or the class and lecturer; so according to my result, I did good! (Interview 8)

It was evident that students appreciated feedback as a form of communication between the student and the lecturer. Communication is an important aspect to enhance to facilitate an open dialogue between two people and even more between a student and a lecturer. However, the role of marks in this communication process can create positive self-esteem, hence enhancing communication between the student and the lecturer.

Subtheme A2: Feedback provides a foundation for guidance to improve performance

Students perceived feedback as a good foundation to guide and assist them to improve their performance. Feedback was seen as essential to ensure that students are aware of mistakes that were made during an assessment. It should offer insight into possible interventions or guidance on how to rectify and improve performance.

One interviewee remarked that feedback is “actually a great guidance so that learners can understand certain things they are actually confused with” (Interview 2), while another stated that feedback “[c]reate[s] a platform for progress in a specific subject” (Interview 3).

This understanding of feedback is further underlined by the way in which, across the ten interviews, it became evident that students wanted feedback that created a foundation for them that will serve as a guide to improve future performance. The following two quotes are exemplars of what the students expected of feedback:

When you write an assignment or some work and then we expect the lecturer to correct you in some way, that they guide you to the correct way or manner. (Interview 6)

It was always nice to get feedback from the lecturers because then you actually are certain of where you have lost your marks or even if they don't give your assignment back to you and you can see where you've lost, they always would be able to tell you that you have to focus more on that, or focus more on that and then in the next assignment you can always rephrase on that and you can better your next assignment and gain marks in that way. So, it was always nice to get feedback so that you can know where to do better in the next assignment. It is better than to get something than nothing. (Interview 1)

It was interesting that one participant felt that, when feedback was received, it was perceived as being reprimanded for doing something wrong:

I have to say they give me a task to do and then I do it and then they'll give me feedback or just say what I did wrong. (Interview 5)

Sister, when they give feedback because you always think that you did something wrong, what is wrong now but when they send an email or WhatsApp, you, then you need to correct some stuff or gave feedback on certain aspects then I like that but not to face-to-face feedback. (Interview 2)

From the data it was evident that students valued the foundation for learning that was created during the provision of feedback. Most of the students experienced that feedback could assist them to possibly improve future performance.

4.2.2.2 **THEME B: STUDENT RESPONSES AND EXPECTATIONS TO FEEDBACK**

The focus of this theme was on students' responses and expectations to feedback, including the extent of feedback that was provided (Subtheme B1) and, secondly, the approach adopted by the lecturer and the student to the provision of feedback (Subtheme B2).

Subtheme B1: The extent of feedback

Although feedback was mostly experienced as positive, in several interviews it was described as inadequate. The following quotes are examples of this perception highlighting, for example, the absence of detail in the feedback:

...example the formatives [formative assessments] – we didn't really get a lot of feedback specifically related, just for example, we had a question that we send in the formatives and then the feedback was just like Yes or a No. (Interview 5)

I'm not sure if we, we get enough feedback, but we do get some feedback. (Interview 6)

During the interviews, participants mentioned that, in some instances, feedback was shared via a WhatsApp group that was created specifically for the NPP module. A class list with all the class marks were also shared on this group. Only students' numbers are being shared to ensure privacy. Additional to that, generic feedback was

given in class on written assessments while individual written feedback was given to each student in the form of an electronic mail, with track changes on the assignment. In the interviews, it became evident that some students desired more face-to-face interaction with the lecturer whereas others were satisfied with feedback that was given in a group setting. Most students agreed that they valued the feedback that was received, irrespective of the way it was shared. The following two quotes are given as examples of their positive experiences of the given feedback:

I like the feedback because it's always electronically, it's always WhatsApp or an email copy of the assignment where she corrects the stuff and it's not like face-to-face, which is good because sometimes you get anxious when you see a lecturer. (Interview 2)

For the fact there was no formal or any written down feedback, I didn't really mind because my results was okay so it wasn't something that I would have made an issue about, but I would still like if sister maybe would have given us and say that 'you guys did well' or 'you guys did poor in this area' or 'what I still think more of you guys but the result was I was good with that'. I was fine with that. (Interview 8)

For some students, the nature of the feedback provided can be experienced as appreciative and affirming. The given feedback is directed at specific areas of their work, whether good or bad rather than just providing a student with a specific mark.

Subtheme B2: The approach to feedback as adopted by the lecturer and the student

Students generally had high expectations regarding the feedback that they would receive. From the data, it was clear that targeted feedback supporting different levels of student understanding would greatly benefit the process of effective feedback. The integration of theory with practice would enhance the total learning experience of the student:

In a practical sense, yes, I think practically (laughing) I understood it better with the feedback because our lecturer took time to give us more realistic scenarios of the things that we discussed ... it helps me in outside of the NPP class as well. (Interview 3).

One student also noted that the provision of examples by the lecturer and the recalling of these examples led to improved feedback:

She literally made an example also in the class that you see, okay that is also coming back again into the feedback, and she also mentioned that there in the class. (Interview 5).

Some participants, however, felt more comfortable with feedback from their peers. Students seemed to have a more open relationship amongst each other as they are all working towards the same goal:

[I]t looks like you on the right path, but it doesn't necessarily mean that the way that the other student interpreted it, that you interpreted the same. So, we would kind of bounce ideas off each other and then I think that's how we made it our own but I'm telling my perspective and another student telling their perspective and we take a bit of everyone and assume about a specific... (Interview 5)

The student also guides another student. First, the class was arranged in groups, like groups sitting, so it was really, you give feedback. (Interview 4)

So, then [the lecturer] explains the whole question to the class and then she said she also wanted to listen to other opinions of the students because sometimes the level explaining from the student also guide another student. (Interview 7)

Detailed individual written feedback adds towards the feedback that was given in the NPP module that can be helpful; elaborate more of their information to help the upcoming students with their module. (Interview 2)

However, as noted above, some students preferred face-to-face feedback to provide more detail and clarity on certain aspects.

[W]hen we can go back to class the sister gave an overall explaining of the feedback and why she actually; also, there was a more face-to-face that was better. (Interview 1)

Me, personally, I like verbal contact feedback like because I'm more of a visual and verbal learner. (Interview 4)

Generally, participants highlighted a preference for verbal feedback. This enabled them to "visualise" the feedback that was given, and questions could be asked immediately if they did not understand the feedback that was given.

I understand feedback better when I can visualise it and when I hear it. (Interview 2)

Verbal feedback, because then I can also ask about the feedback, what is meant when feedback is given if I don't understand, because with a written feedback, its only once. It's only, it's only like maybe a text you're receiving so because you don't get a chance to engage with the feedback you're getting. (Interview 8)

So, I think I like the written feedback also ... I like verbal contact feedback like because I'm more of a visual and verbal learner. (Interview 4)

One student (Interview 9), however, expressed concern that targeted individual feedback that was provided verbally can be demotivating, particularly when the comments focus on the negative.

It is evident that students had mixed feelings about written versus verbal feedback. Something that stood out clearly was, irrespective of which type of feedback was given, students generally valued feedback. For some student's face-to-face interaction with the lecturer during feedback sessions was important but for other students written feedback had more value. However, there was a sense that written feedback might not always be understood, therefore leaving the student uncertain as to what was expected of them.

4.2.2.3 **THEME C: ENABLERS AND CONSTRAINTS TO STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH FEEDBACK**

Many enablers and constraints in terms of engaging with the feedback that was received were identified during data collection and analysis.

Firstly, the way in which the feedback was communicated proved to be either enabling or constraining. For example, students felt that individual feedback, as opposed to generic feedback, is more valuable to encourage future teaching and learning.

Usually, was overall like mistakes that were made or certain points that students didn't understand it in general, but there was never a specific like one-on-one feedback or if it was more generalised. So, if you as a student struggle with a specific part of the work, you never really knew if the feedback was directed at you and if you didn't understand properly, then you will just take the information in but not necessarily. You make it your own. (Interview 3)

The second constraint for students' engagement with feedback was timing of feedback and frequency of feedback provided during the NPP module. Participants felt strongly that feedback on formative assessments was given too close to the final summative assignments and must be given shortly after the assessments to allow enough time for engagement with the provided feedback. Two participants agreed strongly with this:

I would, however, have liked more time to engage in feedback. Feedback was given too close to assessments. (Interview 5)

Feedback was given once, and this did not give you an opportunity to engage in it. The next assignment will just be given. (Interview 6)

Another constraint identified by an interviewee was difficulty in understanding the feedback provided. One participant mentioned:

I didn't engage because I couldn't understand some of the feedback. In some of the questions they will give you one answer or then they will say you must go back and look into a page, your start page, 73 for example and then when I get there to the page it has all that kind of topics. Then I would feel like I'm out of context or I don't even understand the work that has been ask of me to do. Limited time was given to engage in content. (Interview 9)

Detailed, written feedback was generally perceived as being more helpful to encourage and enhance learning. However, several students felt that detailed feedback was not provided during the presentation of the NPP module:

We would just get our marks a few weeks later, but no communication further unless we ask. (Interview 4)

Contradictory to that, two participants believed the provided feedback was detailed and sufficient.

Because then you are certain of where you have lost your marks or even if they don't give your assignment back to you and you can see where you've lost. (Interview 7).

Feedback was very detailed. The sister was very nice; she mentored us; she gave us very detailed feedback. So, I do what she just, I did what she'd told me to do and then I just incorporated her feedback into my work. (Interview 5)

Feedback was seen to be enhanced when providing the students with examples and by recalling certain aspects that were deemed important.

So, my personal experience, I understand feedback better when I can visualise it and when I hear it. So, if a person explains the feedback to me and give examples and if they can, for example, show it to me then I can understand it 100% really. So, I think that type of feedback is, is the one that will help students specifically in nursing because nursing is a more practical. (Interview 2).

As mentioned earlier, when preferences about verbal and written feedback were discussed, several students acknowledged that verbal feedback supplemented with written feedback and comments to the whole class can be seen as useful and, therefore, enabling in terms of their learning. One student made an interesting comment about feedback in general and the dependence of your grade scored in terms of your attitude towards feedback:

I honestly just looked at my mark on my assessment and lucky – I am usually quite happy with my marks; so, I just kind of accepted it. But I think if I had received my marks that I wasn't satisfied with I wouldn't have been happy with the feedback because I would have wanted to know where I went wrong in my assignment or in my test assessment. (Interview 9)

From the start of the interview process, it became clear that the absence of effective communication between the lecturer and the student was a key constraint in the

process of providing useful feedback. As described in chapter 2, effective communication involves communication that involves both the students and the educator to ensure a two-way dialogic process. It thus seems as if a definite constraint was that feedback that was communicated did not meet the needs of the students.

The NPP module seemed to be of value to students in a practical sense but not necessarily in terms of its theoretical content. The content of the EPP module often focus on nursing policies, regulations and guidelines, while the practical component of the programme provides the opportunity for “hands on learning”. This was supported by the following:

In a practical sense yes, I think practically (laughing) I understood it better with the feedback because our lecturer took time to give us more realistic scenarios of the things that we discussed. So, that type of feedback helped me especially when working in the services because, if something happened that was related to the subject or related to what we discussed, then I could easily make a connection on, that would help of me because, practically, I could see what we were learning so yes, I think the feedback did, it helps me in outside of the NPP class as well. (Interview 3)

4.3 Conclusion of findings

In sum, the participants were very interested in the topic of study. Most were comfortable and freely shared their opinions about the feedback provided in the NPP module during their third year of studies. During the interviews, it was evident that students were happy about the opportunity to share their opinions, feelings and experiences regarding the feedback that was given during the NPP module.

Participants showed a fair amount of understanding about the concept of feedback and during the interviews. They recognised that feedback is an essential part of teaching and learning and cannot be left out in any way. However, it was clear that several constraints prevent students from actively engaging with the feedback received.

Chapter 5: Discussion, synthesis, and conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of undergraduate nursing students and the way in which they engage with feedback provided in the NPP module presented at the Western Cape College of Nursing (WCCN). The intention was to understand the nursing students' perceptions of, and engagement with, feedback and thereafter consider what implications the findings would hold for assessment and feedback practices going forward.

This study was directed by the objectives as set out below:

- Explore students' perceptions of the role of feedback and the value thereof
- Understand the factors that influence students' uptake of feedback

This chapter consists of the discussion and interpretation of the study findings in response to the research questions. Lastly, recommendations for future research opportunities will be made.

5.2 Students' perceptions of and engagement with feedback

5.2.1 Perceptions of feedback

This section addresses the first part of the research question, namely, student's perceptions of the concept of feedback. For this study, feedback was defined as a process where information is given to the student on their work and how they utilise this information to improve future results (Boud & Molloy, 2013a).

The findings of this study, overall, reflected that most students valued feedback. However, consistent with literature that focuses on feedback, it highlighted that feedback is complex (Archer, 2010). Feedback has many facets, and each aspect must be considered when providing feedback that is meant to support and enhance student learning. It furthermore identified that students' perceptions and experiences of feedback that they received, as well as how they responded to the feedback, depended on several variables. Various participants in this study agreed that feedback is a process where information is given about the current task or suggestions for future

performance. However, they also considered feedback as being a justification of the grade. For some students the sole purpose of feedback was to provide them with corrections for factual errors and misconceptions. Whilst clearly relating feedback to learning conceptually, their focus seemed to be purely on the marks they have received.

5.2.1.1 Students' perceptions of feedback as a form of two-way communication

Most students clearly understood the concept of feedback and acknowledged its place in enhancing teaching and learning. It was clear that feedback as a form of two-way communication between the student and the lecturer was an important aspect.

The findings of the study indicated that the students experienced a lack of communication between themselves and the lecturer. According to them, they received feedback on some areas of an assessment task, but it would not always be provided in a manner that facilitated a two-way communication process. It is evident from the literature by Price et al. (2010) that the core of feedback should be provided in such a manner that communication barriers between the lecturer and the student are prevented.

Where open communication between the students and the lecturer is hampered, it can lead to poor uptake of feedback, leading to little or no improvement in future assessments and performance. This is also evident from the findings reported by Burke and Pieterick (2010), as well as Boud and Molloy (2013a), that poor feedback processes lead to poor performance in future assessments. This was an important aspect to discover as it will impact the way in which feedback is provided in future. The literature is clear on the fact that feedback must be provided on all aspects of teaching and learning; a constant open communication system is needed to ensure effective uptake and engagement in feedback (Burke & Pieterick, 2010; Carless & Boud, 2018; Boud & Molloy, 2013a). This is also consistent with the view of Nicol (2010) who states that, whilst good feedback is important, the meaning of feedback is enhanced through interaction and dialogue.

5.2.1.2 Students' perceptions of feedback as an opportunity for learning

Feedback serves as an important foundation for guidance to improve knowledge and skills. Several students indicated that a variety of feedback methods is needed to ensure effective engagement and uptake of feedback. Only a few respondents verbalised that they prefer one single method of feedback. Some students experienced the feedback provided as adequate. However, many students felt that more detailed, continuous feedback is necessary to ensure effective teaching and learning.

In essence, there are several factors that can lead to students not improving their performance in future assessments. These factors include not receiving the feedback that suits the needs of students and not receiving feedback directly from the lecturer. Students also need to accept the feedback, make sense from it, and apply it to enhance further learning. This is supported by the factors for effective feedback practices as identified by Handley and Williams (2011).

5.2.1.3 Feedback as a goal-directed discussion

From the study, it became clear that students valued feedback that focused on their performance and not on them as individuals. Handley and Williams (2011) identified principles of effective feedback practices that must guide students to reach desired goals or to move forward in a goal-directed manner. The focus of the feedback should be on the performance by the student and not on the personality of the student as such. It is about closing the gap between current performance and the desired performance. Another aspect that was aligned with Handley and Williams' (2011) principles is that the assessor should protect the self-esteem of the learner. Arts et al. (2016) support the notion that students should be equipped with information that assists them to reach their goals by building on existing goals to make progress towards future goals.

Some students in the study acknowledged "feeling good" when they received positive feedback. However, the majority of students experienced it as demotivating when the obtained grade was lower than expected. This finding is consistent with Hattie and Timperley's (2007) suggestion that feedback directed at the self tend to contain sufficient information about the task and is rarely converted into more engagement

and commitment to the learning goals, enhanced self-efficacy, or understanding about the task.

5.2.1.4 Feedback as an educational alliance

A strong alliance between the educator and the student is needed to improve the uptake of feedback. Both the learner and the teacher must work together to reach their desired goals that will collectively create opportunities to use feedback in practice. Good communication between the student and the lecturer to reach goals is emphasised and the significance of this in the feedback process. Students must be made aware of the different resources available to them and how to utilise these resources to reach their desired goals.

The bi-directional educational alliance framework in Fig 5.1 emphasises the formation of a cordial relationship between the educator and the student (Telio et al., 2015). This feedback approach allows a collaborative understanding of performance objectives and a jointly settled action plan (Figure 5.1).

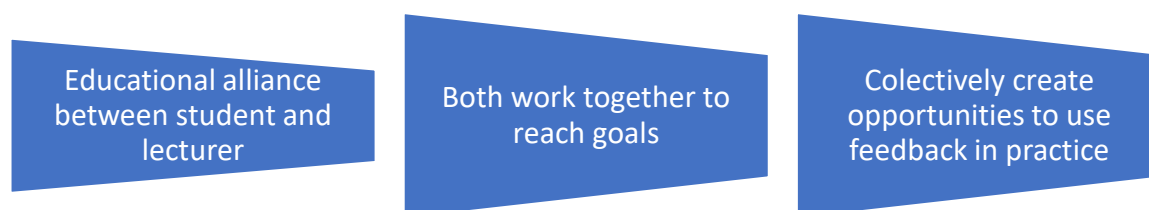


Figure 5.1: Educational alliance feedback process (Telio et al., 2015)

Literature highlights the importance of understanding the concept and dimensions of feedback. Feedback should be a medium through which learner's make sense of the information provided to them and must be used to enhance their own learning experience (Burke & Pieterick, 2010). During data analysis, it was found that students do indeed understand the concept of feedback, but they did not engage actively in the process of feedback, which was the essence of the second part of the research question.

5.2.2 Students' experiences of feedback

5.2.2.1 Variance in their experiences of feedback

From the study it is clear that variances in students' experiences, whether positive or negative, are often informed by their individual preferences for feedback. Various modes of feedback (verbal, written, individual, group and peer feedback) are appreciated by students; however, some were perceived as being more beneficial than others.

Although literature indicates that verbal feedback is often preferred by students (O'Donovan, Rust & Price, 2016; McCune, 2014; Ferguson, 2011), there was disagreement between the participants as to which form of feedback (verbal or written) provided the best platform to facilitate future learning and improved performance. This is supported by literature indicating that lecturers must explore different kinds of feedback to ensure that it is facilitative rather than directive (Archer, 2010). Some students indicated they preferred written feedback as they could go back and revisit the feedback, while other students shared their fear for verbal feedback as they were scared that it could lead to a poor self-esteem when negative feedback was received. This is also reinforced in the principles of good feedback practice reported by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006).

Some students recognised the value of hearing general feedback comments, in a group setting, even when it was not directed at their own work. This is supported by Nicol (2010), indicating that group feedback has many benefits. However, some students in this study experienced peer feedback as being a constraint to their learning experience and discouraging opportunities for dialogue and engagement. When feedback was provided in a group setting, some participants experienced a feeling of exclusion, as they were not actively involved or encouraged to be part of the learning process. When students do not understand feedback, they rely and lean on fellow students to clarify certain concepts related to the feedback instead of relying on the designated lecturer who provided the feedback. This may lead to a lack of confidence in students, which in turn leads to greater feelings of isolation from the learning process. This is consistent with Nicol (2009) who confirms that students who lack confidence may show resistance to peer feedback. Differing student opinions regarding the value of group feedback was also noted by Ellery (2008:425), who

describes such feedback as a “double-edged” sword, hence acknowledging that for some students it is easy to ignore the feedback given to them as a group as it is not seen as relevant to their own work.

This places emphasis on the relationship that self-confidence and self-efficacy has with how feedback is accepted by students. This highlights three important aspects of feedback, namely, who provides the feedback, how it is provided and in which setting it is provided. Aspects of a trusted source, a secure environment, and constructive feedback are therefore highlighted as key variables influencing the feedback process.

Recognising students’ various preferences regarding the mode of feedback, it has been identified that there is no one method that can be used to meet the needs of all the students. Adopting a balanced approach by utilising a variety of feedback methods that provide personalised feedback and stimulate an active dialogue would therefore appear to be appropriate.

5.2.2.2 Level of understanding of the feedback

In some instances, the feedback was perceived as difficult to understand, but students reported they were more focused on the grade obtained. If students were happy with their grades, further engagement with the feedback was minimal, even when their espoused use of feedback was to help improve future teaching and learning. It is suggested that when students are happy with a result, they might conclude that no further action is required and so there is little need for careful consideration of the feedback comments (Draper, 2009). Some students indicated that, if they were not happy with the grade, they would read the feedback comments and just accept it or they would read it with the view to challenge the grade assigned to the assessment. This reaction could be indicative of an assumption that the low grade indicated an error in the judgement of the lecturer, rather than a problem with the assignment (Draper, 2009) or even a more general distrust of the lecturer (Price et al., 2010).

5.2.3 Students’ engagement with and response to feedback

Students’ engagement in the feedback provided to them was influenced by the extent to which the feedback experience was perceived to be either enabling or constraining.

Students felt that individual feedback, as opposed to generic feedback, is more valuable to encourage future teaching and learning. Ghazal et al. (2014) agreed that comprehensive and holistic individual feedback was found to be more valuable. Another clear feeling that emerged from the data analysis was that feedback was not perceived as being targeted. Feedback should be provided in such a manner that students can exactly see to what the feedback is referring. If feedback is not provided in such a manner, it creates a feeling of generalised feedback, rather than targeted feedback to the specific work of the student. Students found contextual feedback the most valuable as they were able to apply it to their work and life environments (Knowles, Holton & Swansen, 2005),

Another element leading to poor engagement with feedback, is the concept of feedback literacy. Studies support that feedback literacy can enhance the uptake and engagement in feedback (Carless & Boud, 2018). A clear problem identified from the study was that students did not read and interpret the written feedback. They merely scanned over it with no further engagement that could enhance future performance. The students should be encouraged to engage in critical reflection of their performance (self-analysis). This is supported by Watling and Ginsberg (2014), who says that reflecting on the experiences and perspectives of the students who have received feedback, will allow us to start unravelling the complexity of different influences affecting feedback for our students.

Several participants reflected that, while they acknowledged the importance of feedback, they did not request more detailed personal individualised feedback, as they were just grateful for the feedback that was provided. The students appeared to struggle between taking responsibility for their own learning and being provided with sufficient direction in terms of how to improve their work. This is in contrast with the assumption that adult learners should be self-regulated (Blondy, 2007; Knowles et al., 2005). Students should be encouraged to have more agency, be more self-regulated and to find gaps for themselves by engaging with and reflecting on feedback provided to them.

A fourth factor that influenced student engagement with feedback was the opportunity to ask questions about the feedback that was provided, including bouncing ideas off one another. Students acknowledged that they would look at their comments and

discuss it with their peers after thinking about it. Several students indicated that sufficient opportunities were given to clarify feedback and comments that were provided. However, some students chose not to fully make use of these opportunities. This is a debatable issue: whose responsibility is it to initiate dialogue? Lecturers may assume that students should be able to regulate their own learning and seek additional information for themselves, whilst students may feel it is the responsibility of the lecturer to initiate a dialogue (Knowles et al., 2005).

The last factor is the extent to which feedback was perceived as timely. Claims made by Butler, Karpicke & Roediger (2007) and Sadler (2010) regard the benefits of delayed feedback. Butler et al. (2007) did a comparison between immediate feedback and answer-until-correct feedback (delayed). This was, however, done in the context of multiple-choice questions, revealing that delayed feedback led to superior final test performance. The findings of this study support the literature emphasising the value of timeous feedback (Ghazal et al., 2014; Yang & Carless, 2013; Price et al., 2010; Nicol, 2009). Feedback should be given straight after the activity to ensure that students revisit comments as soon as possible. One participant indicated that a crucial constraint in the feedback process was timing and the frequency with which feedback was provided. Feedback is given only a while after the completion of a summative assessment, hence making it difficult to engage with the feedback before the next assessment. Students perceived this to potentially compromise their learning experience as delayed feedback was experienced as less meaningful.

This highlights the value of more frequent formative feedback that shifts its focus to work in progress, allowing the students to reflect in action. This enables the students to utilise the feedback to inspire their thinking and improve their performance by incorporating the feedback into their subsequent assignments.

5.3 Limitations of the study

A limitation of this small-scale study is that, ultimately, all the students who were willing to participate in the study were recruited into it. Nevertheless, the idea of the research assignment was not to generalise findings, but to simply explore ideas about students' perceptions of and engagement with feedback. We are in the middle of a worldwide pandemic, which caused tremendous physical and emotional strain on the population

that was used for the study. This might have influenced their attitude towards the interviews. The Covid-19 pandemic also resulted in limited access to participants and produced limited participation.

As the research took place at only one institution it can, therefore, only account for the opinion of the participants at that institution. However, I do believe that the findings from the study have the potential to add value to future teaching and learning at the institution. Another limitation of the study was timing, as the information was collected in the student's fourth year of training, while the instances of feedback referred to during the study already took place during their third year of study.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

The recommendations are based on the findings from the ten semi-structured interviews conducted with the nursing students and, although these are not the only possible solutions to encourage lecturers to embrace effective feedback practices more willingly, it could allow staff to approach it with more insight and start a process of change at the institution.

This study showed that feedback has an important role in teaching and learning and effective feedback can have a great impact on the student. It is important for the lecturer to ensure that the factors arising from the study are addressed during the feedback process and that lecturers evaluate their practices continuously to ensure that the quality of feedback are upheld.

Continuous feedback from students about the feedback process is recommended to ensure the practices are adapted regularly to uphold the quality of feedback. Furthermore, the lecturer should implement the guidelines identified above and apply them in practice and also evaluate their effectiveness.

This study allowed students to voice their perceptions regarding the feedback process in one module presented at WCCN and, although some areas for improvement were identified, ongoing work in feedback, including in the context of nursing education, is needed. Such work could include a focus on lecturers' perspectives by conducting a comprehensive assessment on educator's perceptions of effective feedback practices

for enhancing teaching and learning. Regular evaluation on feedback practices to ensure feedback based on the principles of effective feedback is also needed.

Furthermore, sharing the findings of this study with fellow colleagues at the institution and with other nursing education institutions could lead to research into developing more training opportunities for lecturers to improve their feedback skills.

5.5 Contribution of the study and closing thoughts

This qualitative research study, situated in the interpretive paradigm, set out to understand the perceptions of nursing students and the way in which they engaged in feedback provided in the NPP module during undergraduate nursing studies at WCCN. Using a qualitative approach, I sought to explore the participants' specific perceptions and give voice to their unique individual perspectives.

It was important for me to remain objective throughout the process and refrain from adding my own personal ideas or views to the discussions. This encouraged continuous reflection on what was said and ensuring that I distinguished between the views of the participants and my own.

Data generated from the ten interviews with the students ultimately pointed to three guidelines that can improve feedback processes and ensure that the quality of the feedback is maintained, namely 1: Create channels for appropriate communication; 2: Apply clear and structured feedback processes; 3: Regularly evaluate feedback processes.

As stated in the literature by Burke and Pieterick (2010) and Carless and Boud (2018), I agree that feedback plays an important role in teaching and learning, and that students' perceptions determine the effectiveness of the feedback process. These guidelines could possibly assist lecturers in maintaining effective feedback processes, as well as be more aware and focused on the need of providing suitable structured feedback. By applying these guidelines, it could possibly improve feedback practices at the institution. However, further research after implementation is needed to see if this is so.

This study offers a unique perspective on feedback in nursing education from the viewpoint of the students at WCCN. Lecturers may wish to draw on the insights gained from this study when providing feedback and the guiding principles developed will allow them to ensure that the quality of feedback is maintained and incorporated into their teaching and learning practice.

Personally, this research assignment questioned my own personal feedback practices. It gave me a deeper insight into the perceptions of students regarding the concept of feedback. This will ensure greater sensitivity when providing feedback to students after assessments. It was also very helpful to develop better feedback practices.

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Addenda

Addendum A: Invitation to participate in research study and consent form

| | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT: | |
| Nursing student's perceptions of and engagement with feedback provided in an undergraduate Nursing programme. | |
| DETAILS OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI): | |
| Title, first name, surname: Ms. L. Nel-Cooke | Email: lizettenel99@gmail.com |
| Full postal address: 52 Sutherland Street, Worcester, 6850 | PI Contact number: 0825948858 |

We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. It is very important that you are completely satisfied that you clearly understand what this research entail. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary**, and you are free to decline to participate. In other words, you may choose to take part, or you may choose not to take part. Nothing bad will come of it if you say no: it will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part initially.

The Health Research Ethics Committees at Stellenbosch University approved the study. It was also approved by the Health and Wellness Sciences Research Committee of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. The study will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Declaration of Helsinki, the South African Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice (2006), the Medical Research Council (MRC) Ethical Guidelines for Research (2002), and the Department of Health Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Processes and Studies (2015).

What is this research study all about?

The study will explore the way in which fourth-year nursing students engage with feedback within the Nursing Professional Practice module at the Western Cape College of Nursing. Research suggest that feedback practices at higher education institutions are often not of an adequate standard, which leads to inadequate improvement in future assessments (Osmond & Merry, 2011). Despite these multiple opportunities for feedback to students, there is concern among the educators that students show poor growth and a lack of progression in the NPP module. This has raised questions about the nature of the feedback that is currently being provided and the extent to which students are engaging with it. This is a trend seen across all modules in the program, but the NPP module was selected, because of the direct involvement of the researcher. This study aims to understand how students engage with the feedback that they are currently receiving with a view to ultimately establishing an environment where

the feedback is responsive to student needs and encourages a student response that will enhance their learning. The information obtained from this study on how students learn can be potentially of relevance for others teaching on various modules within the programme.

Why do we invite you to participate?

All fourth year Nursing students will be invited via email to participate in the study. Every attempt will be made to ensure that these sample will be inclusive according to a matrix of factors, based on what was earlier identified and being of relevance in the uptake of feedback. The interview will be done on a date and time that suits the participant. Each participant will receive 1 gig of data to conduct the online interview. The principle investigator will conduct the interview herself, however I would also like to give each participant the opportunity to indicate if they would like to be interviewed by a field worker. All interviews will be audio recorded.

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

It is envisaged that the inferences that can be made from the findings can improve feedback practices in the undergraduate nursing program, improve my own feedback practices and will lead to personal and professional development. Recommendations made out of the study can be used to enhance learning experiences for students entering the diploma program and students that are currently in the program.

Who will have access to your records?

For the purpose of this study, access to the academic records of each participant is needed. Confidentiality of participants will be ensured by the allocation of a unique number to each individual interview and no specific locations will appear on the interview or transcript. Data will be secured by password protected to ensure further confidentiality. Although the Principal Investigator will be reporting on the data, anonymity will be assured. By accepting this invitation please also give me permission to access your marks.

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

You can phone **Ms L. Nel-Cooke** at **0825948858** if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.

You can phone the Health Research Ethics Committee at 021 938 9677/9819 if there still is something that your principal investigator has not explained to you, or if you have a complaint.

- Should any student have any concern/ problem during thus study please contact student support: kjooste1@gmail.com
- My supervisors: Professor Susan van Schalkwyk: scvs@sun.ac.za and Dr N. Herman: nherman@sun.ac.za

You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for you to keep safe.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the attached declaration of consent and send it back electronically to the Principal Investigator: lizettene199@gmail.com



Principle Investigator

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I agree to take part in a research study entitled (insert title of study here).

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form, or it was read to me, and it is written in a language in which I am fluent and with which I am comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and I am satisfied that all my questions have been answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary**, and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and nothing bad will come of it – I will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the study doctor or researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the study plan that we have agreed on.

Signed at (place) on (date) 2020.

.....

Signature of participant

.....

Signature of witness

Declaration by investigator

I (name) declare that:

- I explained the information in this document in a simple and clear manner to
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took enough time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she completely understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above.
- I did/did not use an interpreter. (If an interpreter is used then the interpreter must sign the declaration below.)

Signed at (place) on (date) 2020.

.....

Signature of investigator

.....

Signature of witness

Addendum B: Codes

| Central storyline | | |
|--|---|--|
| Student nurses understood feedback in its essence as a form of communication that provided a platform for guidance to improve performance. The feedback presented in the NNP module used various platforms for communicating on different assessment types. The scope of feedback ranged from minimal to satisfactory with particular references to discussions of feedback. Both these experiences had an impact on students' understanding and engagement. The attitude of both the lecturer and student had an influence on feedback. Several recommendations were put forth for the improvement of feedback. | | |
| Theme | Category | Code |
| The concept of feedback | A form of communication | |
| | Provides a platform for guidance to improve performance | |
| Feedback presented in NNP module | The route of communicating the feedback | Mobile Apps |
| | | Face-to-face provided greater clarity for some |
| | Formative versus summative feedback | |
| | The scope of the feedback | Lack of detailed/adequate feedback at times |
| | | When feedback is minimal or unclear, it culminates in accepting the situation that you cannot control, self-doubt and a lack of engagement |
| | Discussions regarding feedback | Generally helpful |
| | | Open, yet at times a cumbersome process |
| | | Theory and practice preparation |
| | | Examples and recall improve feedback |
| | | Provided opportunity for clarification |
| Improved the ability to prepare for further assessment | | |
| Being actively involved in feedback | | |
| The role of understanding and interpretation on engagement | | |
| Detailed feedback leads to learning, positive | | |

| | | |
|--|--------------------------|--|
| | | experiences and engagement |
| | | Encouragement is helpful |
| | | The role and value of peers and groupwork |
| | Attitude of the lecturer | Positive, open attitude reaps benefits |
| | | Availability |
| | | The role of trusted guide |
| | | Going the extra mile |
| | Attitude of the student | Positive attitude reaps positive results |
| | | Coping with lower-than-expected outcomes |
| | Recommendation | Targeted feedback and support at different levels of understanding |
| Detailed [individual] feedback | | |
| Adequate time | | |
| The value of setting goals | | |
| Multiple modes of feedback | | Verbal and written feedback |
| | | The value of scenarios |
| Encourage students to be active participants | | |

Addendum C: Ethical clearance University of Stellenbosch



Approval Notice

New Application

07/07/2020

Project ID :14381

HREC Reference No: S20/03/065

Project Title: Nursing students' engagement with feedback provided in an undergraduate nursing program

Dear Ms Lizette Nel-Cooke

The **Response to Modifications** received on 23/06/2020 was reviewed by members of **Health Research Ethics Committee** via **expedited** review procedures on 03/07/2020 and was approved.

Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

Protocol Approval Date: 3 July 2020

Protocol Expiry Date: 2 July 2021

Please remember to use your Project ID 14381 and Ethics Reference Number S20/03/065 on any documents or correspondence with the HREC concerning your research protocol.

Please note that the HREC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

After Ethical Review

Translation of the informed consent document(s) to the language(s) applicable to your study participants should now be submitted to the HREC.

Please note you can submit your progress report through the online ethics application process, available at: [Links Application Form Direct Link](#) and the application should be submitted to the HREC before the year has expired. Please see [Forms and Instructions](#) on our HREC website (www.sun.ac.za/healthresearchethics) for guidance on how to submit a progress report.

The HREC will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

Provincial and City of Cape Town Approval

Please note that for research at a primary or secondary healthcare facility, permission must still be obtained from the relevant authorities (Western Cape Department of Health and/or City Health) to conduct the research as stated in the protocol. Please consult the Western Cape Government website for access to the online Health Research Approval Process, see: <https://www.westerncape.gov.za/general-publication/health-research-approval-process>. Research that will be conducted at any tertiary academic institution requires approval from the relevant hospital manager. Ethics approval is required BEFORE approval can be obtained from these health authorities.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

For standard HREC forms and instructions, please visit: [Forms and Instructions](#) on our HREC website <https://applyethics.sun.ac.za/ProjectView/Index/14381>

If you have any questions or need further assistance, please contact the HREC office at 021 938 9677.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. Ashleen Fortuin
Health Research Ethics Committee 1 (HREC1)

National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC) Registration Number:

REC-130408-012 (HREC1)•REC-230208-010 (HREC2)

Federal Wide Assurance Number: 00001372

*Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) Institutional Review Board (IRB) Number:
IRB0005240 (HREC1)•IRB0005239 (HREC2)*

The Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) complies with the SA National Health Act No. 61 of 2003 as it pertains to health research. The HREC abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the [World Medical Association \(2013\), Declaration of Helsinki: Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects](#); the [South African Department of Health \(2006\), Guidelines for Good Practice in the Conduct of Clinical Trials with Human Participants in South Africa \(2nd edition\)](#); as well as the [Department of Health \(2015\), Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Processes and Structures \(2nd edition\)](#).

The Health Research Ethics Committee reviews research involving human subjects conducted or supported by the Department of Health and Human Services, or other federal departments or agencies that apply the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects to such research (United States Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46); and/or clinical investigations regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Addendum D: Ethical clearance Cape Peninsula University of Technology



HEALTH AND WELLNESS SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HW-REC)
Registration Number NHREC: REC- 230408-014

P.O. Box 1906 • Bellville 7535 South Africa
Symphony Road Bellville 7535
Tel: +27 21 959 6917
Email: simonsy@cput.ac.za

27 November 2020
REC Approval Reference No:
CPUT/HW-REC 2020/H26

Faculty of Health and Wellness Sciences

Dear Ms Lizette Nel-Cooke

Re: APPLICATION TO THE HW-REC FOR ETHICS CLEARANCE

Approval was granted by the Health and Wellness Sciences-REC to **Ms L Nel-Cooke** for ethical clearance. This approval is for research activities related to research for **Ms L Nel-Cooke** at Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

TITLE: Nursing students' engagement with feedback provided in an undergraduate nursing programme

Supervisor: Prof S Van Schalkwyk

Comment:

Approval will not extend beyond 28 November 2021. An extension should be applied for 6 weeks before this expiry date should data collection and use/analysis of data, information and/or samples for this study continue beyond this date.

The investigator(s) should understand the ethical conditions under which they are authorized to carry out this study and they should be compliant to these conditions. It is required that the investigator(s) complete an **annual progress report** that should be submitted to the HWS-REC in December of that particular year, for the HWS-REC to be kept informed of the progress and of any problems you may have encountered.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carolynn", written in a cursive style.

Ms Carolynn Lackay
Chairperson – Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Health and Wellness Sciences

Addendum E: Permission to conduct research at a CPUT campus

Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor:
Research, Technology Innovation & Partnerships
Bellville Campus
P O Box 1906
Bellville 7535
Tel: 021-9596242
Email: PHAHOD@cput.ac.za

30 November 2020

Ms Lizette Nel-Cooke
Lecturer
Western Cape College of Nursing
Western Cape Department of Health

Dear Ms Nel-Cooke

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT CPUT

The Institutional Ethics Committee received your application entitled: *"Nursing students' engagement with feedback provided in an undergraduate nursing programme"* together with the dossier of supporting documents.

Faculty Ethics Committee Approval Date: 27 November 2020

Faculty Ethics Committee Approval Reference No: CPUT/HW-REC 2020/H26

Permission is herewith granted for you to do research at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Wishing you the best in your study.

Sincerely,



Dr David Phaho

Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Technology, Innovation & Partnerships
Cape Peninsula University of Technology | #WeAreCPUT

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