The development of academics' feedback literacy: experiences of learning from critical feedback via scholarly peer review.

Karen Gravett[a], Ian M. Kinchin[a], Naomi E. Winstone[a], Kieran Balloo[a], Marion Heron[a],

Anesa Hosein[a], Simon Lygo-Baker[a], and Emma Medland[a]

[a]Department of Higher Education, University of Surrey

Keywords

Abstract

The emerging literature related to feedback literacy has hitherto focused primarily on students' engagement with feedback, and yet an analysis of academics' feedback literacy is also of interest to those seeking to understand effective strategies to engage with feedback. Data from concept map-mediated interviews and reflections, with a team of six colleagues, surface academics' responses to receiving critical feedback via scholarly peer review. Our findings reveal that feedback can be visceral and affecting, but that academics employ a number of strategies to engage with this process. This process can lead to actions that are both instrumental, enabling academics to more effectively 'play the game' of publication, as well as to learning that is more positively and holistically developmental. This study thus aims to open up a dialogue with colleagues internationally about the role of feedback literacy, for both academics and students. By openly sharing our own experiences we seek to normalise the difficulties academics routinely experience whilst engaging with critical feedback, to share the learning and strategies which can result from peer review feedback, and to explore how academics may occupy a comparable role to students who also receive evaluation of their work.

1

Introduction

Developing the skills for engaging proactively with feedback has been shown to be critical to students' academic success (Hattie and Timperley 2007) and a growing international literature is attending to the development of student feedback literacy (e.g. Sutton 2012; Winstone, Nash, Parker, and Rowntree 2017; Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, and Parker, 2017; Carless and Boud 2018; Gravett and Winstone 2018). However, to date, other than the recent work of Xu and Carless (2017), little attention has been paid to the development of teachers' or academics' feedback literacy. As a result, we believe that as scholars of learning and teaching, how we develop our own feedback literacy, and use our experiences to support the development of others, is worthy of further scrutiny.

Academics' feedback literacy and scholarly peer review

For the purposes of this paper we define feedback literacy as the 'understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies' (Carless and Boud 2018, 1315). In particular, we wish to engage with Carless and Boud's recent framework (2018) for understanding students' feedback literacy, composed of four inter-related features: appreciating feedback; making judgments; managing affect; and taking action. We contend that this framework is also generative in offering insight into features of academics' feedback literacy. Arguably, academics will already possess a high degree of feedback literacy skills: they will be experienced in publishing their work, and will be familiar with appreciating feedback and making judgements. However, we suggest that the process of engaging with peer reviewer feedback can still prove problematic for even the most experienced academics. Moreover, we contend that candidly sharing academics' feedback

2

strategies can be generative for other colleagues' development, through offering valuable insight into others' practice.

Within this study, we chose to focus on the critical feedback received by academics when writing for publication. This was partly because of the importance of feedback to academics' careers, and because of the difficulties academics often report in actioning reviewers' comments. Paltridge and Starfield explain that 'the peer review process provides a mechanism by which you can receive expert feedback on your work and then improve it' (2016, 64) and that feedback is 'crucial to the production and publication of high-quality articles' (ibid., 64). However, in reality, this practice can be fraught with difficulties. Reviewers' feedback matters: writing for publication is a key part of an academic's career, and authors have been described as experiencing unprecedented pressure to publish in an 'era of hyper-performativity' (Mercer 2013, 125-6). And yet, the peer review process has been described as 'amongst the most difficult, frustrating and confusing elements of the academic profession' (Dobele 2015, 864). The anonymous nature of peer review has been critiqued (Smith 2006; Jackson et al. 2018) and described as 'ethically problematic' (Atjonen 2018, 361), and the debilitating impact of peer review feedback has been highlighted (Hyland 2011; Horn 2016; Day and Porter 2017; Bozalek, Zembylas and Shefer, 2019). Indeed, Hyland (2011, 7) writes that following negative reviews 'many novice writers are so disheartened by criticism that they give up', and Mercer (2013) and Hartley and Dobele (2009) explore the particular impact of publication rejection upon female and early career researchers. The impact is not exclusive to those at the outset of a career according to Bozalek, Zembylas and Shefer (2019, 351), who highlight that peer reviewers' comments can 'unnerve' even experienced authors. This echoes the literature addressing students' responses to feedback, for example, where the emotional, and potentially

debilitating, impact of assessment feedback has been examined (Värlander 2008; Shields 2015; Pitt and Norton 2017).

Considering the substantial investment in time of colleagues to peer review one another's work (with often limited or no financial remuneration) this situation can be viewed as difficult for both author and peer reviewer, and may promote 'pedagogic frailty' when tensions cause a debilitating level of stress for academics and for institutions (Kinchin and Winstone 2017). Thus with publication being so important to many academics' career progression and scholarly identities, how academics use and develop feedback literacy skills to manage and learn from these difficult experiences becomes a crucial area to examine. As we have seen, the literature has paid considerable attention to the disabling consequences of this aspect of academic life. However, to date, it has not fully explored how this particular source of feedback may be utilised positively by authors, or how it may contribute to the development of academics' own feedback literacy.

Intellectual candour

This study involves exploring and sharing the personal reflections of six academics. In doing so, we seek to examine personal encounters with rejection and critical feedback, in order to understand whether such experiences may be a catalyst for learning and development, and to consider how academics have been able to thrive despite these difficult publication experiences. By openly including the reflections of academics upon feedback experiences we engage in what has been described as 'intellectual streaking' (Bearman and Molloy 2017) or 'intellectual candour' (Molloy and Bearman 2018). Bearman and Molloy (2017, 1284) argue

4

that intellectual streaking is: 'the nimble exposure of a teacher's thought processes, dilemmas, or failures – as a way of modeling both reflection-in-action and resilience'. They write that:

> We believe that there is value in the exposure of teachers' inner mechanisms to a wider, public audience. When we show our vulnerabilities, we illustrate that working within constraints and uncertainties are part of expert practice (1284).

By sharing our vulnerabilities, via concept maps and personal individual reflections, we too seek to illustrate that responding to challenging situations is a part of our practice, and to model intellectual candour. As a result, this study contributes to international higher education, as by exploring the inner mechanisms of academics' experiences we seek to normalise the difficulties that authors routinely experience as well as examining and sharing our feedback literacy and learning strategies. Ultimately, we seek to open up a dialogue with other colleagues, and within our own practice, about the role of feedback literacy for both academics and students, and to explore how academics may occupy a comparable role to students who also receive evaluation of their work.

Methods

Context and participants

This study included the researchers (first and second authors), and participants, who work together as colleagues within an academic development department in a UK university. All participants were co-authors on the paper. As such, our study follows Reason (1994) in pursuing a participative form of human inquiry where research is conducted '*with* people rather than *on* people' (1994, 1). Participants were research-active academics as well as having responsibilities for teaching undergraduate and postgraduate students, and supporting educational research across the university. Two participants were male, and four female.

5

Length of experience working in academia ranged from 12 to 29 years. Academic developers occupy different locations in institutions, and as a relatively new role attempts have been made to define an identity and articulate shared values (Land 2004; Lygo-Baker 2006). Although it remains contested, it is increasingly evident that the role is not distinct from other disciplinary academics and that publication is an essential aspect of researcher-led academic development (Kinchin et al. 2018). As Green and Little (2016), recently surveying the role internationally noted, the majority now undertake research and many publish in various disciplines. Colleagues in this study regularly publish in the areas of psychology, linguistics and biology, as well as academic development. As a consequence, academic developers often write for different audiences, working across disciplines, engaging with different narratives, as well as for other academic developers, sometimes referred to as a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). Academic developers subsequently share the same experience as other academic colleagues regarding feedback on their work, whilst in addition also seeking to gain credibility for their own discipline. As scholars and developers of learning and teaching, how we as academics read, interpret and respond to the feedback we receive (Sutton 2012), and develop our literacy in this regard is likely to shape how we use our experiences to develop colleagues as well as ourselves.

Data collection

This study involved concept map-mediated interviewing of six participants by the first author. Concept map-mediated interviewing was chosen as a method as the aim of the map-mediated interview (Kandiko and Kinchin 2013) is to surface beliefs and values, and to enable dialogue. Concept map-mediated interviewing is open-ended and in this instance the interviewer began by asking the interviewee a single question: '*During your experience as an academic, how*

have you managed experiences of critical reviewer feedback, and how have these experiences affected you and your work?' The interviewer then wrote down key concepts onto post-it notes, employing subsequent probing questions as appropriate. Once the participant had provided 12 – 15 concept labels, the interviewer then asked about the relationships between concepts and invited the interviewee to position the post-it notes on a piece of paper. After the interviews were finished, the interviewer electronically drew the map and sent this to the participant to review. The concept maps were then validated via a member check (Impellizzeri, Savinsky, King, and Leitch-Alford 2017) with participants to ensure that they were a suitable reflection of the experience. Informed by the discussions depicted in the concept maps, participants then wrote a follow up reflection on the interview, and both the concept maps and reflections provided the data for analysis.

Ethical issues

Institutional ethical approval was granted, and all participants provided informed consent for their participation. It was made clear that participants could withdraw at any time, particularly if the subject matter became too emotive. All participants were also co-authors on this paper and have therefore been involved in writing and reviewing the final output.

Reflexivity

It is important to acknowledge the positionality of the researchers, and participants, as co-authors in this study. As noted earlier, all are members of the same department, and thus the familiarity of context and practices afforded an emic perspective on our experiences. Although the participants did not carry out the initial analysis of the data (see below), they were part of the writing and reviewing of the paper resulting from the research, and would have brought

this emic perspective to this process. As a team we had already built up a working relationship with each other, were working in the same research site, and had appropriate experience and collegiality to overcome power differentials. These have been highlighted as considerable privileges in participant research (Canagarajah 1999) and we were strongly aware of this. However, we also believe that an insider perspective such as ours can avoid the 'othering' of colleagues (Clegg 2009), that is, making a person feel different or as an outsider because of their identity. To account for the fact that we were 'interactants' (Holliday 2005, 305), that is the actors in the area being researched, and thus bringing our own bias and possible prejudices to all stages of the research, we have attempted to show the 'workings' (Holliday 2007) through a description of the data collection and the data analysis, and the presentation of the concept maps with the commentary below.

Data analysis

NVivo 11 was used to store and organise the concept maps and reflections. The research corpus, the maps and reflections, were then coded inductively in NVivo 11 by the first author using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). This analytical approach was adopted due to its flexibility in inductive approaches to data. The questions which guided the initial analysis were: what are the variety of ways in which participants describe their responses to critical feedback, what strategies do they adopt to manage and respond to feedback, what themes are identifiable in some but not all of the participants' interviews, what tensions (if any) are visible within the maps and reflections? The first author employed iterative and inductive processes to identify semantic themes across all maps and reflections. The corpus was initially open-coded with respect to the concept of feedback. These open codes were then organised systematically from which substantial codes were generated. Recurrent themes were identified across these

substantial codes, grouped together and reviewed together. Semantic themes were identified based on their visibility, significance and prevalence within the individual maps and reflections, and included for example: emotive responses to feedback; strategic responses; adaptive capacity; tensions within the peer review process. Themes were then related to Carless and Boud's (2018) feedback literacy framework. Although the initial coding described above was carried out by the first author, all participants were subsequently given the opportunity to critique these themes and to determine whether their maps/reflections fitted these themes. Participants' reflections, and findings from the concept map-mediated interviews and reflections are now presented and discussed below.

Reflections

Marion

The first rejection I received was a very destabilising experience, but in hindsight I realise that my paper was not well-written. Now, rejections from journals only make me more determined to publish elsewhere. I take any feedback from the editor or reviewer and rework my paper for a different journal.

Reviewer feedback has informed a very strategic approach I now take to writing for publication. I feel that there is a lot of 'game playing' and as a result of both editor and reviewer comments, I now understand these tacit game rules better. I have learnt how to deal with the reviewer feedback. I organise the reviewer feedback into a table which helps me to identify the main changes to be made, and allows me space to then address each comment separately. The act of organising the table breaks down what can often seem a barrage of negativity into a manageable set of feedback comments. These and other strategies have

allowed me to have a very structured approach to both preparing the publication for

submission and also to managing feedback. In general, I find reviewer feedback really helpful

in helping me to develop my ideas. I can honestly say that I rarely disagree with the reviewer.

I find that the comments can be very perceptive and scaffold my thinking on the topic. As my

confidence as an author grows, I am better able to manage the feedback and use it to focus my

writing.

[Insert Figure 1 about here.]

Figure 1. Marion's concept map-mediated interview

Naomi

I can think of very few instances where the peer review process has not resulted in a vastly

improved article. Yet even when armed with this knowledge, my initial responses to receiving

critical feedback and rejection during peer review are remarkably consistent. I feel like the

comments are a personal judgment of me and I often feel like an imposter inhabiting an

academic role.

My most developmental experiences of dealing with reviewer feedback have been where I have

been able to 'share the burden' with a co-author. This includes the initial emotional burden,

the cognitive burden of decoding comments and translating them into action points, and the

motivational burden of what sometimes feels like starting from scratch. Managing emotion,

understanding feedback, and being motivated to take action are represented as dimensions of

'proactive recipience' of feedback as described by Winstone, Nash, Parker, et al. (2017). I have

been less likely to experience imposter syndrome when critical feedback is 'shared' between

myself and a co-author, and having a partner with whom to discuss potential actions is invaluable in feeling that resubmission, either to the same journal or elsewhere, is achievable.

In academic circles, we typically only see the final polished articles produced by our colleagues; rarely do we have insight into the journey that they have taken to get to the point of publication. This insight has influenced my work as an academic developer, by encouraging me to share my own vulnerabilities and 'failures' in the classroom. I believe that sharing our own failures and how we have overcome them is more transformative for the academics with whom we work than examples of 'best practice'. In today's higher education landscape, it can be challenging for academics to feel that they can succeed as holistic academics where they have to juggle multiple demands. Feedback has the potential to fuel their development, motivation, and identity, yet it can be hard to experience criticism of our scholarly outputs, particularly when the stakes are so high. No matter how feedback makes me feel, I feel it is important in my role as an academic developer to model proactive recipience of feedback, in order to enable the academics with whom I work to uncover and harness the power of feedback.

[Insert Figure 2 about here.]

Figure 2. Naomi's concept map-mediated interview

Simon

I do not worry about the peer review process and rejection because the anonymity of the system means that I cannot engage in a dialogue to understand the reasons for decisions and therefore to me it seems that once I have written whatever I have then this is as far as I could take it.

11

Others then make a judgement based on whatever reasons/criteria they have and that is outside my sphere of influence/engagement and therefore not something I can understand. If I am unable to understand the reasons behind a decision fully then I am not willing to allow that to impact on me. The value ascribed to it by someone I cannot engage with seems to me useful potentially but ultimately flawed in that I cannot engage in the dialogue to understand why. Therefore I am not going to allow it to impact on me as that would seem that the only person who is affected by that is me. This may in part also be that I have very limited interest in a system which to me seems to be somewhat more of a game. If other people feel something I have written is 'good' or 'bad' they are quite entitled to that view and I to mine.

With regard to feedback I have received, it is part of a game with rules that seem to make it such that it is not a useful game and therefore I don't want to play it. I don't think the impact of reviewers' feedback has had any impact on my role as an academic developer. I think this is impacted on far more by my engagements with people in the learning environment. If I believed that there was a 'community' to which I wanted to belong or felt a need for reassurance from then perhaps that would be different but a very long time ago I felt that this did not exist or not in a format that I was happy with and so I see it differently and am not sure who is even making a judgement.

[Insert Figure 3 about here.]

Figure 3. Simon's concept map-mediated interview

Kieran

The more I engage with the peer review process, the more I see parallels between it and how students are assessed during university. The peer review process reminds me that the affective dimension of receiving comments on one's work is one of the most salient features of the feedback process. Research outputs can become very personal; they represent our own interests, choices and interpretations. Therefore, evaluations of my work do feel like an assessment of me.

Students' pre-conceived conceptions of the quality of their work is thought to affect their emotional response to feedback (Pitt and Norton, 2017) and I believe this is no different for academics during the peer review process. I have submitted manuscripts to journals that I have spent substantial amounts of time on, so an excoriating critique of something I feel is 'good enough' has felt like a personal attack. In some of my early submissions, negative feedback and rejections resulted in the feeling of imposter syndrome. I have since developed strategies for dealing with negative reviewer decisions and feedback. For example, I do not read reviewer feedback immediately, as I now know I will be unable to form any useful actions whilst dealing with the emotional aspects of the decision.

In all of my experiences of peer review, the work that has been published is significantly better than the work I originally submitted. The final published work is undeniably a co-constructed effort drawing on peer reviewers' expertise. Likewise, student and teacher co-construction can be a desirable aim within higher education (Balloo, Evans, Hughes, Zhu, and Winstone 2018) and students acting on feedback from teachers shows how this process is a joint undertaking (Price, Handley and Millar 2011). Ultimately, through mirroring the assessment process that

students go through, I feel that the peer review process is an effective way to place myself back in 'students' shoes' and re-experience how feedback is useful for developing my work.

[Insert Figure 4 about here.]

Figure 4. Kieran's concept map-mediated interview

Emma
In the spirit of 'intellectual streaking', or 'candour' (Bearman and Molloy 2017), rejection hurts. It can be a painful experience that can undermine professional identity and fuel imposter syndrome. It also often remains intensely private and personal, and in keeping it as such, can be an isolating experience. Once the rejection has been processed through the affective filter, the emotional reaction can serve to support or hinder personal development, as can the quality of the feedback comments accompanying the rejection.

The key, for me, is to try to harness the emotional reaction to look beyond the words used in the feedback, and see what can be taken from insight into how another person has engaged with your work. Once this occurs, the benefits can be numerous: it can result in the development of the specific piece of writing in question; it can also provide insight into the feedback process, and it can act as an experience upon which to reflect in terms of the development of my own feedback practices that I can apply to my own teaching.

Ultimately, most rejection can provide an opportunity for self-reflection, personal and professional development. It is vital to remember that it is a person who will be receiving your comments and, therefore, to frame your feedback comments constructively and

14

developmentally. We are all colleagues working towards the same aim of developing and challenging the existing knowledge-base, not competitors whose peers' achievements detract from our own. In essence, we must apply our developing knowledge of feedback literacy to our own practices in peer review, it is not only relevant to the student-staff relationship, but to every academic interaction.

[Insert Figure 5 about here.]

Figure 5. Emma's concept map-mediated interview

Anesa

In general, I do not like receiving negative feedback but I recognise it is a learning opportunity which helps me in developing my self-regulation (Zimmerman 2008) and self-growth (Deci and Ryan 2002). Therefore, when I have negative feedback, I set it aside and wait till I am ready to deal with it. This may take anything from a few days to months. During this time I will reflect on the paper and think about three aspects for improvement, the content, my writing skills, and my research skills. I will then undertake personal learning to improve my competence in this area. Therefore, when I return to the feedback, I often find it useful for improving the paper even though I may not always fully agree with every point.

I have never received cruel feedback but I have received difficult feedback. For example, in one of my papers, one editor had explained to me that my research had no implications for the wider community. The feedback thus has always been offered with kindness and with the intention of getting the best 'science' published and with developing me as a writer. Difficult feedback although not nice has made me think (sometimes creatively) to solve the issue being

15

raised from different perspectives. Although initially difficult to read, this type of feedback has created more deep and meaningful learning for me (Marton and Säljö 1976), because it puts me in a position of defending or developing a new approach to discover and draw on arguments from disciplines or areas that I may be unfamiliar with. Difficult feedback has strengthened my papers and I look forward to receiving it from persons who have engaged with my paper in such depth that they can find the issues that can make the paper more significant or rigorous. I have therefore come to see the feedback on papers very much like a debate, where we put forward and defend our positions, until we negotiate to a position of agreement.

In my role as an academic developer, I want to remind myself to be always kind in putting forward feedback but also I do not want to give superficial feedback that does not make a piece of work stronger.

[Insert Figure 6 about here.]

Figure 6. Anesa's concept map-mediated interview

Findings and discussion

In the following section, we put to work Carless and Boud's feedback literacy framework (2018). We have used the elements of the framework to structure the section, and to discuss our findings from the reflections and concept maps.

Appreciating feedback and making judgments

In agreement with Carless and Boud's framework (2018, 1319), many of the academics report that they appreciate the positive impact of feedback upon themselves and their work, and that they are able to participate productively in feedback processes, developing capacities to make judgments. Comments are described as strengthening the final output (Anesa, Figure 6), 'leading to a vastly improved article' (Naomi, reflection) and making the work more 'significant or rigorous' (Anesa, reflection). Comments can also 'scaffold' thinking (Marion, reflection), encouraging authors to draw upon arguments from unfamiliar disciplines, and can lead to a wider 'holistic' improvement (Naomi, reflection). Feedback can foster determination (Marion, reflection) develop self-regulation and self-growth (Anesa, reflection), and also encourage creativity, requiring problems to be examined from new perspectives (Anesa, reflection).

The participants note the impact upon their practice as academics. Experiencing rejection leads colleagues to aim to show 'kindness' to others (Anesa, reflection and Figure 6) and to make our own feedback 'transparent' (Anesa, Figure 6). Academics strive to invest time, and to use our experiences to model good practice, for example: 'I feel it is important in my role as an academic developer to model proactive recipience of feedback, in order to enable the academics with whom I work to uncover and harness the power of feedback' (Naomi, reflection).

Colleagues also note the impact of feedback as a 'formative process', enabling their 'development as an integrated academic', and their development of skills such as 'evaluative

judgement' and the 'mindset of a reviewer' (Naomi, Figure 2). These comments resonate with Carless and Boud's framework (2018, 1319) where feedback literate students are shown to 'refine self-evaluative capacities over time in order to make more robust judgments'. While clearly, some of the strategies that colleagues adopt in order to respond to this feedback can be seen as instrumental: a part of 'playing the game' of publication, what is more interesting is that the maps and reflections also depict deeper and more significant changes occurring. Colleagues report, for example, their development in terms of creativity, self-regulation, self-growth, problem solving, resilience, evaluative judgement and kindness.

However, it is significant that these generative outcomes were not reported by all authors. For one colleague, some of the problematic aspects of the peer review process already considered led to a feeling of disconnection with reviewers' feedback. For example, comments are articulated as 'outside my sphere of influence/engagement and therefore not something I can understand' (Simon, reflection). In particular, the anonymous, monologic, nature of peer-review is impeding: 'I cannot engage in a dialogue' (Simon, reflection). As a result, problematic peer-reviewing practices means that feedback makes little impact, it cannot be 'appreciated', and in this sense Carless and Boud's framework sits uncomfortably with feedback processes that may be inherently flawed. Interestingly, these comments are in contrast to the views of another colleague who articulates the peer-review process as a communicative period: 'very much like a debate, where we put forward and defend our positions, until we negotiate to a position of agreement' (Anesa, reflection). The depiction of a developmental, communicative, process resonates with Hyland who advises writers to 'see their submission not as a single text but as part of a *genre set*, the productive and receptive genres which together contribute to a paper's eventual acceptance' (Hyland 2011, 7). Hyland also argues that writing for a peer audience is a process where colleagues 'are socialised into an academic community:

it is the recognised route to insider status' (2011, 4). Our findings suggest that whilst the majority share this view, for some authors, questionable practices that exist within the peer review process may mean that academics feel unable to use peer review feedback to improve their work.

Managing affect: the emotive nature of feedback

Both the maps and reflections portray the powerful and affective impact of peer review feedback. 'Rejection hurts' (Emma, reflection), and feedback can be 'destabilising' (Marion, reflection) and 'discomforting' (Kieran, Figure 4). Feedback feels like an 'attack' (Kieran, reflection), and research outputs are often 'very personal; they represent our own interests, choices and interpretations' (Kieran, reflection). This chimes with the immobilising depiction of peer review feedback in the literature (e.g. Day and Porter 2017). Carless and Boud (2018) contend that 'feedback often provokes negative affective reactions and threats to identity' (2018, 1317), and that students must manage affect through developing 'habits of striving for continuous improvement' (ibid., 1319). For academics too, excoriating feedback must be managed and 'habits of striving for continuous improvement' developed, and feedback comments are shown to provoke threats to identity, and in particular to fuel feelings of 'imposter syndrome' (Naomi, Emma, Kieran reflections; Naomi, Figure 2; Kieran, Figure 4). However, notably, not all of the academics were in agreement with this depiction of the emotional impact of feedback discourse. In contrast, one colleague (Simon, Figure 3) describes feeling 'comfortable' about peer review feedback comments, explaining that often these may have little affective impact, perhaps because of their lack of perceived value.

19

Taking action: a repertoire of strategies

Our findings show that academics employ a number of strategies to engage with the feedback they receive, in order 'to take action in response to feedback information', as articulated by Carless and Boud (2018, 1319). Again, the trope of publication as a 'game' is visible here. As one colleague explains: 'I feel that there is a lot of "game playing"' and 'as a result of both editor and reviewer comments, I now understand these tacit game rules better' (Marion, see reflection and Figure 1). This concept echoes Hyland who advises that: 'learning to write like an insider is part of the game…learning to accept criticism, understand comments…these are key strategies of publishing success' (2011, 2) and Casanave's (2005) metaphor of writing games, in which players have to learn the rules of the game and who the key players are. Similarly, colleagues describe a 'strategic approach' (Marion, reflection). This might include using a 'feedback table' in which comments are clearly separated, listed and attended to, using comments to rework the paper for a different journal (Marion, reflection), or, in order to manage the affective impact of process, setting aside the feedback (Emma, Figure 5; Anesa, reflection and Figure 6). Likewise, one colleague described developing an 'action plan for response' (Naomi, Figure 2).

Another strategy that surfaced within the data is that of 'sharing the burden' through co-authoring. For one author: 'having a partner with whom to discuss potential actions is invaluable in feeling that resubmission…is achievable' (Naomi, reflection). Another key strategy examined was consulting the editor if necessary (Marion, Figure 1), perhaps if feedback was considered inappropriate – a strategy that perhaps only an experienced author would be aware of. These strategic approaches again clearly resonate with the dimensions of student feedback literacy suggested by Carless and Boud (2018, 1319): as here we see

colleagues drawing 'inferences from a range of feedback experiences for the purpose of continuous improvement', and developing 'a repertoire of strategies for acting on feedback' (1319).

Our data thus expose divergent views. These divergent views highlight the importance of viewing peer review feedback processes within the wider context of the global economy of universities, where for many the contemporary HE landscape signifies a requirement to adapt oneself and one's writing in order to 'play the game'. It is important to consider then whether such strategic game-playing might pose a threat to academic creativity. For some colleagues, there are clearly problematic aspects of both peer-review and the wider environments that academic writers work within, and how far we should seek to disturb and disrupt these systems is worthy of further discussion. Nonetheless, for other colleagues, peer reviewer feedback can be appreciated and used developmentally, and a number of strategies can be usefully employed in order to use feedback to take action.

Conclusions

This article makes explicit the strategies academics adopt to engage with critical feedback. In doing so we have put to work Carless and Boud's framework for understanding students' feedback literacy (2018) as a lens to understand academics' feedback literacy strategies, as well as to draw links between academics' and students' engagement with feedback. We do not wish to minimise the problematic aspects of the peer-reviewing process. Indeed, we have examined how a lack of dialogue and transparency may mean that feedback comments simply cannot be appreciated, and believe how we might seek to disturb and disrupt methods of anonymous peer-

reviewing is worthy of further discussion. Nonetheless, through sharing our experiences, we portray how critical feedback can be utilised developmentally, and we hope that this will also help other academics to develop both their feedback literacy skills and research publication experience. Furthermore, as educators we aim to open up a dialogue about how an examination of our own experiences of developing and utilising feedback literacy skills, can impact upon our practice with students. As we engage with feedback in similar ways to our students, potentially useful parallels can be drawn which may help us in our work as educators to develop skills such as empathy, kindness, and transparency when delivering feedback to our students. Thus, in writing this paper, we seek to open up a conversation both about the interconnections between academics and students' interactions with feedback, and about the value of academic openness, or 'candour', in order to help and inspire others.

References

Atjonen, P. 2018. "Ethics in Peer Review of Academic Journal Articles as Perceived by Authors in the Educational Sciences." *Journal of Academic Ethics 16* (4): 359-376. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-018-9308-3

Balloo, K., C. Evans, A. Hughes, X. Zhu, and N. Winstone. 2018. "Transparency Isn't Spoon-feeding: How a Transformative Approach to the Use of Explicit Assessment Criteria Can Support Student Self-regulation". *Frontiers in Education* 3 (69). https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2018.00069

Bearman, M. and E. Molloy. 2017. "Intellectual Streaking: The Value of Teachers Exposing Minds (and Hearts)". *Medical Teacher* 39 (12): 1284-1285. https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2017.1308475

Bozalek, V., M. Zembylas, and T. Shefer. 2019. "Response-Able (Peer) Reviewing Matters in Higher Education: A Manifesto" In *Posthumanism and Higher Education,* edited by C. Taylor, A., Bayley. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology". *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77-101.https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Canagarajah, A. S. 1999. *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Casanave, C. P. 2005. *Writing Games: Multicultural Case Studies of Academic Literacy Practices in Higher Education*. London: Routledge.

Clegg, S. 2009. "Forms of Knowing and Academic Development Practice. *Studies in Higher Education* 34 (4): 403-416.

Carless, D. and Boud, D. 2018. "The Development of Student Feedback Literacy: Enabling Uptake of Feedback". *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education 43* (8): 1315-1325. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2018.1463354

Day, N. and T. Porter. 2018. "Lacerations of the Soul: Rejection-sensitive Business School Faculty and Perceived Publication Performance". *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies* 25 (1): 101-115. https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051817709008

Deci, E.L. and R. M. Ryan. 2002. "The Paradox of Achievement: The Harder You Push, the Worse it Gets". In *Improving Academic Achievement,* edited by J. Aronson, 61-87. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Dobele, A. R. 2015. "Assessing the Quality of Feedback in the Peer-review Process". *Higher Education Research and Development* 34 (5): 853-868. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2015.1011086.

Gravett, K. and N. Winstone. 2018. "'Feedback Interpreters': The Role of Learning Development Professionals in Facilitating University Students' Engagement With Feedback". *Teaching in Higher Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1498076

Green, D. A. and D. Little. 2016. "Family Portrait: A Profile of Educational Developers Around the World." *International Journal for Academic Development* 21(2): 135-150. doi: 10.1080/1360144X.2015.1046875

Hartley, N., and A. Dobele. 2009. "Feathers in the Nest: Establishing a Supportive Environment for Women Researchers". *The Australian Educational Researcher* 36 (1), 43–58. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03216891

Hattie, J. and H. Timperley. 2007. "The Power of Feedback" *Review of Educational Research* 77 (1): 81-112. http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487

Holliday, A. 2005. "How is it Possible to Write?". *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education* 4 (4): 304-309.

Holliday, A. 2007. Doing and Writing Qualitative Research. London: Sage Publications.

Horn, S. 2016. "The Social and Psychological Costs of Peer Review: Stress and Coping With Manuscript Rejection". *Journal of Management Inquiry* 25 (1): 11-26. https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492615586597

Hyland, K. 2011. "Welcome to the Machine: Thoughts on Writing for Scholarly Publication". *Journal of Second Language Teaching and Research* 1 (1): 58–68. https://doi.org/10.5420/jsltr.01.01.3319

Impellizzeri, J., Savinsky, D. M., King, J. A., & Leitch-Alford, L. (2017). Conceptual mapping task: An effective verification tool for qualitative counseling research.

Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation, *8*(1), 31–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/21501378.2017.1327745

Jackson, L., M. A. Peters, L. Benade, N. Devine, S. Arndt, D. Forster … J. Ozolins. 2018. "Is Peer Review in Academic Publishing Still Working?" *Open Review of Educational Research* 5 (1): 95-112. https://doi.org/10.1080/23265507.2018.1479139

Kandiko, C. B. and I. M. Kinchin. 2013. "Developing Discourses of Knowledge and Understanding: Longitudinal Studies of PhD Supervision". *London Review of Education* 11 (1): 46-58. https://doi.org/10.1080/14748460.2012.761819

Kinchin, I. M., M. Heron, A. Hosein, S. Lygo-Baker, E. Medland, D. Morley and N. Winstone. 2018. "Researcher-led Academic Development". *International Journal for Academic Development* 23 (4): 339-354. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2018.1520111

Kinchin, I. M. and N. E. Winstone. 2017. *Pedagogic frailty and resilience in the university*. Rotterdam: Sense.

Land, R. 2004. *Educational Development: Discourse, Identity and Practice.* Berkshire: McGraw-Hill.

Lave, J. and E. Wenger. 1991. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lygo-Baker, S. 2006. "Re-evaluating Values: The Impact of Academic Developers". *International Journal of Learning* 12 (4): 11–18.

Marton, F. and R. Säljö. 1976. "On Qualitative Differences in Learning I–Outcome and Process". *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 46 (1): 4-11. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8279.1976.tb02980.x

Mercer, J. 2013. "Responses to Rejection: The Experiences of Six Women Early Career Researchers in the Education Department of an English University". *Women's Studies International Forum* 38 (38): 125–134. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2013.03.008

Molloy, E. and M. Bearman. 2018. "Embracing the Tension Between Vulnerability and Credibility: 'Intellectual Candour' in Health Professions Education". *Medical Education* 53 (1): 32-41. https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.13649

Paltridge, B. and S. Starfield. 2016. *Getting Published in Academic Journals: Navigating the Publication Process.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Pitt, E. and L. Norton. 2017. "'Now That's the Feedback I Want!' Students' Reactions to Feedback on Graded Work and What They Do With It". *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 42 (4): 499–516. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2016.1142500

Price, M., K. Handley and J. Millar. 2011. "Feedback: Focusing Attention on Engagement". *Studies in Higher Education* 36 (8), 879–896. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2010.483513

Reason, P. 1994. *Participation in Human Inquiry.* London: Sage.

Shields, S. 2015. " 'My Work is Bleeding: Exploring Students' Emotional Responses to First-year Assignment Feedback". *Teaching in Higher Education* 20 (6), 614-624. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2015.1052786

Smith, R. 2006. "Peer Review: A Flawed Process at the Heart of Science and Journals". *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 99 (4): 178-182. https://doi.org/10.1258/jrsm.99.4.178

Sutton, P. 2012. "Conceptualizing Feedback Literacy: Knowing, Being, and Acting". *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*. 49: 31–40. doi:10.1080/14703297.2012.647781

Varlander, S. 2008. "The Role of Students' Emotions in Formal Feedback Situations". *Teaching in Higher Education*. 13 (2): 145-156. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510801923195

Winstone, N., R. Nash, J. Rowntree, and M. Parker. 2017. " 'It'd be Useful, But I Wouldn't Use it'. Barriers to University Students' Feedback Seeking and Recipience". *Studies in Higher Education*, 42 (11): 2026-2041. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1130032

Winstone, N., R. Nash., M. Parker, and J. Rowntree. 2017. "Supporting Learners' Agentic Engagement With Feedback: A Systematic Review and a Taxonomy of Recipience Processes". *Educational Psychologist* 52 (1): 17-37. doi:10.1080/00461520.2016.1207538

Xu, Y. and D. Carless. 2017 "Only True Friends Could be Cruelly Honest": Cognitive Scaffolding and Social-affective Support in Teacher Feedback Literacy. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 42 (7): 1082-1094. doi: 10.1080/02602938.2016.1226759

Zimmerman, B. J. 2008. "Investigating Self-regulation and Motivation: Historical Background, Methodological Developments, and Future Prospects". *American Educational Research Journal* 45 (1): 166-183. doi:10.3102/0002831207312909

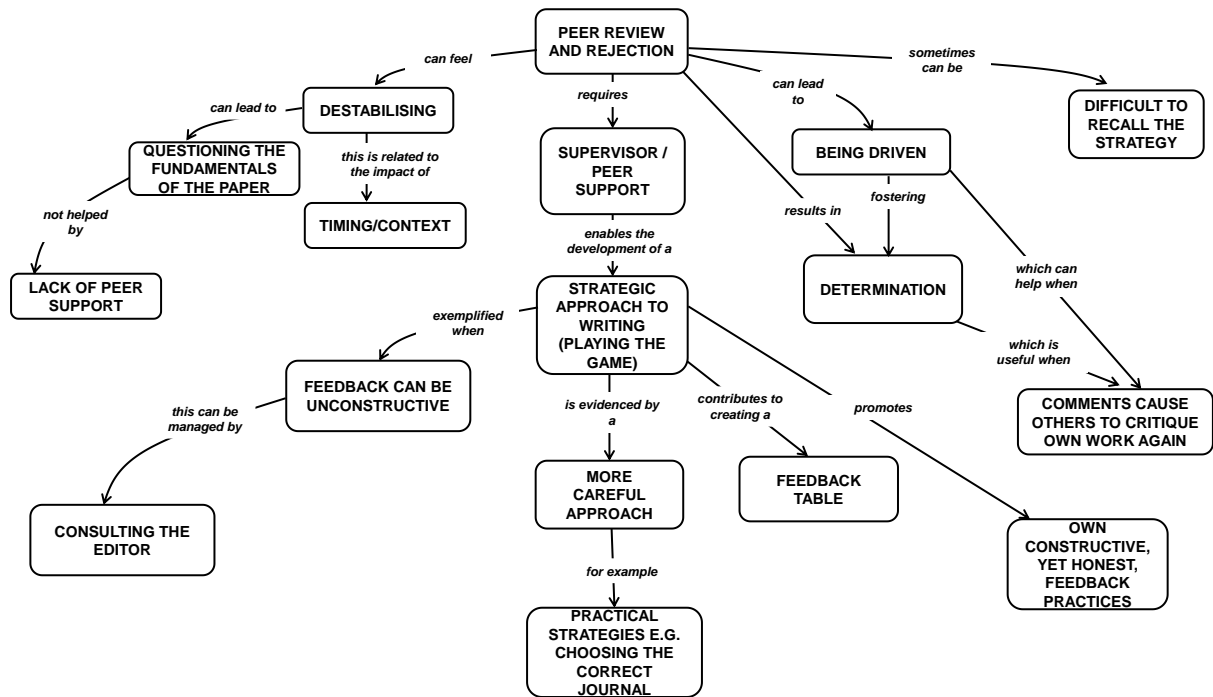*Figure 1. Marion's concept map interview.*
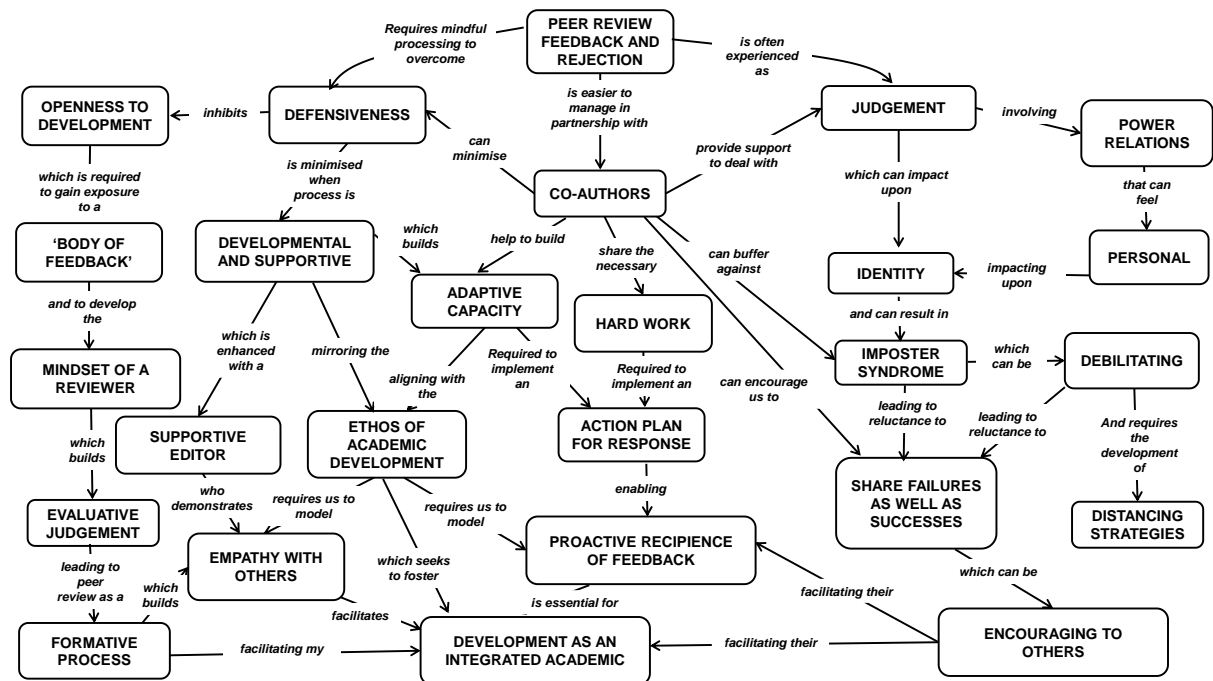
Figure 2. Naomi's concept map interview.

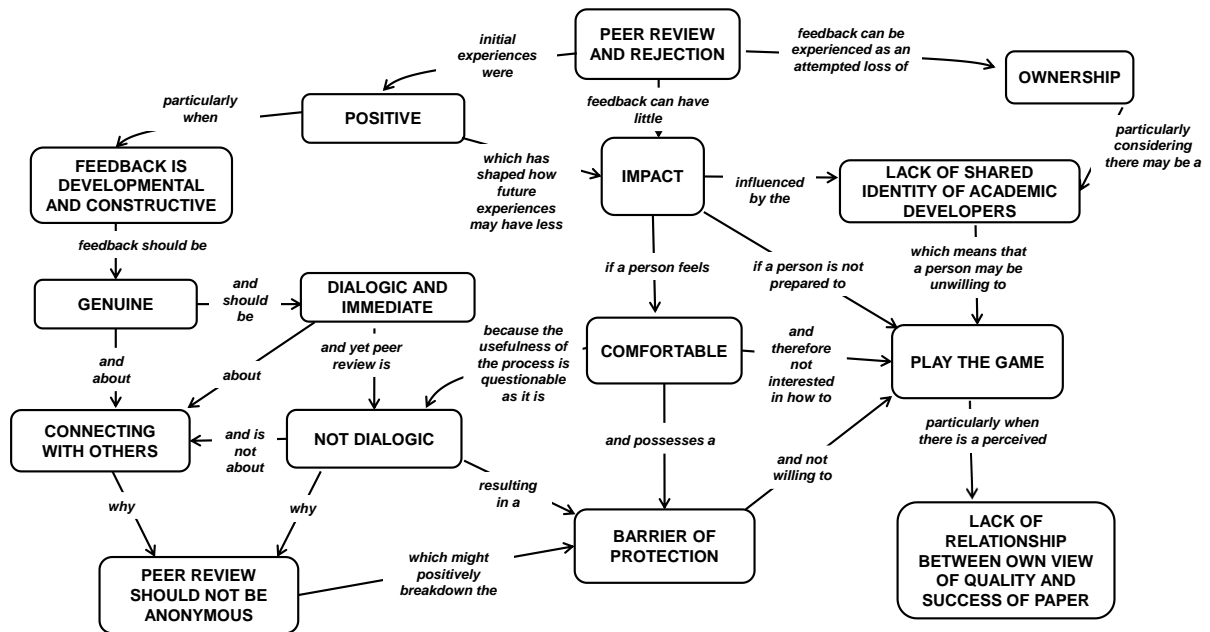*Figure 3. Concept map interview with Simon.*

Figure 4. Concept map interview with Kieran.

PEER REVIEW FEEDBACK AND REJECTION

can have an → UNCLEAR PURPOSE

causes an → EMOTIONAL REACTION

can sometimes be → ACHIEVABLE AND USEFUL

which is sometimes a → SENSE OF RELIEF

leading to a ← SENSE OF RELIEF

resulting in an → EXPERIENCE OF DISCOMFORT

which is sometimes an → EXPERIENCE OF DISCOMFORT

although still often leads to an → EXPERIENCE OF DISCOMFORT

which relies on → REVIEWER EXPERTISE

it could be a

resulting in

may require strategies such as → DELAYING READING OF FEEDBACK

resulting in

although looking back it can be

meaning that → CO-CONSTRUCTED WORK BECOMES HUGELY VALUABLE

and can also be used to promote academics' own

to avoid → FEEDBACK BEING IGNORED

and

FEEDBACK OPPORTUNITY ⟷ *or a* ⟷ JUSTIFICATION OF THE DECISION

meaning that it can be → EASY TO FORGET THE PROCESS WHEN PUBLISHED

demonstrating the effect of

although → REJECTION CAN INCLUDE A LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

resulting in → IMPOSTER SYNDROME

although it is

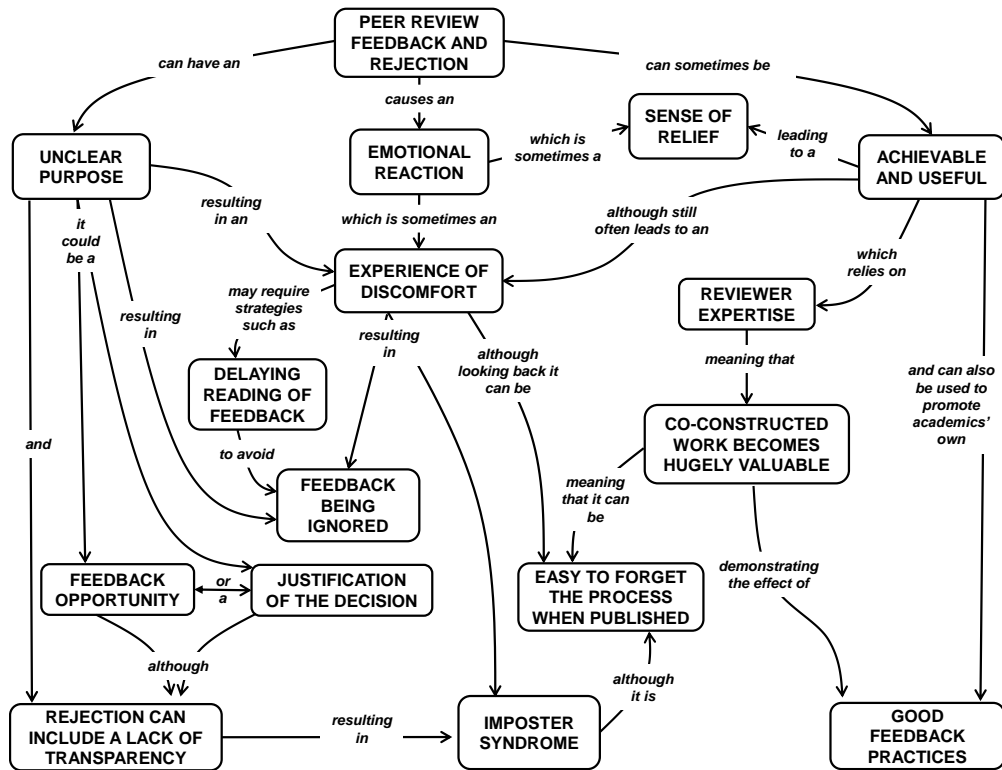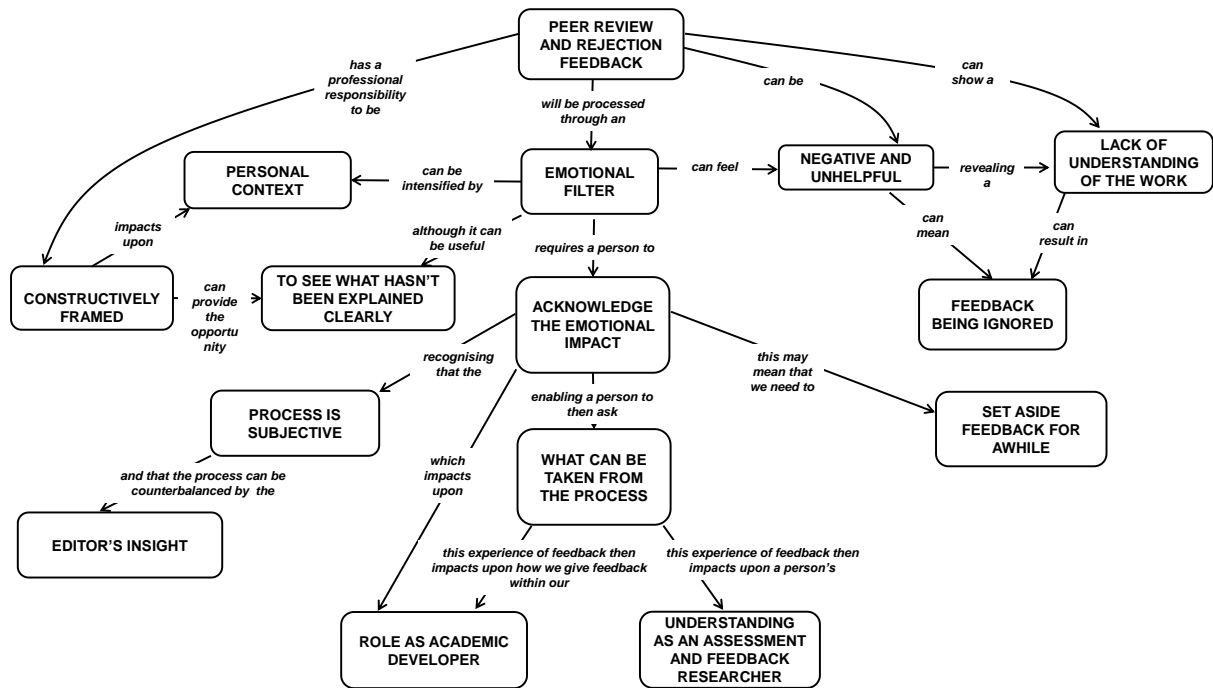GOOD FEEDBACK PRACTICES

29

Figure 5. Concept map interview with Emma.

Figure 6. Concept map interview with Anesa.