

Evaluative conduct in teacher–student supervision: When students assess their own performance

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Abstract

The practice of evaluating one's own performance or that of another is ubiquitous across workplace and institutional settings and is foundational to the educational endeavour. In contrast to the traditional dynamic of teachers assessing students' performance, this paper focuses on how students evaluate their own performance in feedback meetings. We use conversation analysis to investigate two settings in which students evaluate, reflect on and assess their own work. The analysis focuses on how evaluative practices are initiated and/or elicited, mostly by teachers, and how they align with or disrupt conversation analytic norms around assessment. The analysis revealed that doing evaluation – whether self-praise or self-deprecation – presents interactional challenges for those eliciting, doing and responding to it, despite the foundational nature of assessment in educational settings. We discuss the implications for preference organisation in specialised institutional settings and seek to understand what counts as assessment and evaluation in real pedagogic events.

Keywords: feedback, evaluation, assessments, conversation analysis, education, supervision

Introduction

Evaluating performance at work or at school as part of the process of giving feedback is a ubiquitous feature of institutional life. Yet we know very little about what 'evaluation' looks like in real conversational encounters. We know that it occurs routinely in conversations between organisational or workplace members, in which a more experienced/senior/expert party interacts with a more junior/less experienced/novice party, with the goal of enhancing the performance or conduct of the latter. The junior party may also be required to reflect on or evaluate his or her own performance. However, despite the wealth of literature – both academic and popular – on what constitutes effective feedback and evaluation practice (e.g. say something positive first, before making critical comments; for an overview, see Brookhart, 2017; Drugli & Onsjøen, 2009), what actually happens in such conversations remains hidden in an analytic 'black box'.

This paper aims to specify some of the practices that comprise evaluative conduct. More specifically, it focuses on what happens when students are required to evaluate and reflect on their own performance. Extract (1) provides a brief example taken from a teacher–student supervision session. The teacher is asking a first-grade student in upper secondary school about a presentation he has just given to other students.

(1) Supervision (simplified)

- 01 T: What do you think yourself uh how it went?
02 (pause)
03 S: I think that it went pretty okay, or very good actually.
04 (pause)
05 T: Yeah?

06 S: Better than I hoped I think.
07 (pause)
08 T: Yeah?
09 S: Think I came across with uh my concrete opinions.

This article focuses on how teachers, such as the teacher above, elicit the kinds of evaluative comments that students make as well as on the self-assessments themselves. For instance, the student does not simply produce one positive assessment, but makes three *separate* assessments, each with turn design features that we unpack in the analysis.

We start by situating our paper alongside the body of research that examines evaluation, assessment and performance in institutional and educational contexts as well as conversation analytic research on evaluation and the interactional constraints placed on evaluating and evaluated parties. There is robust evidence within the conversation analytic notion of ‘preference organisation’ that there is a *preference for agreement* when others make positive assessments or evaluations and a *preference for disagreement* when others praise or compliment us. These constraints, coupled with the burden of producing the dispreferred action of making negative evaluations, are rarely considered by the educational expectation that any party may simply ‘do evaluation’ or ‘give feedback’. We know little about the academic and professional guidance regarding such practices, whether the guidance is apposite or how it may be borne out empirically.

Evaluating educational performance

Within the domain of ‘assessment for learning’ theory in educational science, evaluation is often researched and theorised as ‘feedback’ (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Sadler, 1989). Pedagogic theories, policy documents and ‘best practice’ guidelines articulate the manner in which teachers should provide feedback to their students (e.g. Andrade & Cizek, 2010; Sawyer et al., 2016). Over the last two decades, feedback has been increasingly conceived as a collaborative and interactive process in which students are active partners in actively constructing their own knowledge (Engelsen, 2014). By regulating and monitoring their own feedback, researchers claim that students learn more and have greater academic success at school (Andrade, 2010, pp. 90, 92). Facilitating students’ self-assessments has thus become a key element in constructivist models of formative assessment and self-regulated learning on different educational levels, from supervision in school to debriefing methods in healthcare education (e.g. Black & Wiliam, 2009; Baird et al., 30f; Cheng et al., 2016; Cizek, 2010; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Sadler, 1989). This theoretical landscape is the backdrop of contemporary teaching practice and has influenced normative models (Peräkylä & Vehviläinen, 2003) for conducting supervision and feedback.

Echoing these frameworks, best practice handbooks for teachers, coaches, advisors and other professional counsellors explicitly encourage professionals to pose questions that solicit students’ or clients’ assessments and reflections of their own learning practices and outcomes (e.g. Bjørndal, 2016; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Textbooks for teacher education include guidelines that explicitly instruct professionals to pose questions that elicit students’ own evaluations. For example, teachers are encouraged to ‘stimulate assessments and reflection by posing questions that address the ‘pathfinders’ assessment and reflection on their own learning process’ (Bjørndal, 2016, p. 219) and to pose open questions in the opening phase of the supervision/feedback encounter (Lauvås & Handal, 2014, pp. 261, 263). Likewise, debriefing models for simulation and role play emphasise the production of self-evaluation (Sawyer et al., 2016, p. 211). However, rarely in the wealth of literature summarised above do we find examples of evaluations conducted in real time. As such, we do not know whether the various theories and models are empirically translated. We therefore turn to work within

conversation analysis (CA) to understand how evaluation and feedback, as conversational practices of *assessment*, actually work.

Assessments, evaluation and conversation analysis

As mentioned above, CA is one of the domains of research in which the practices of evaluating others and oneself is studied through an examination of *assessments* (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987; Pomerantz, 1975, 1978, 1984). Broadly put, within this tradition, assessments are conversational turns ‘which provide an evaluation’, either positive or negative (Liddicoat, 2007, p. 118), and may involve an evaluation of persons and/or events that are being described in the talk (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987, p. 6). Assessments may be built via structural units in talk, such as adjectives, but the pragmatic function of evaluation may also be carried by other types of social actions. Assessments may be designedly subjective (‘I think that...’) or objective (‘That is excellent!’; see Edwards & Potter, 2017); they may display the agent’s experience of the event and their affective stance towards the target of evaluation (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987; Stivers, 2008).

No turn in any conversation exists in isolation; it is connected to another in a sequence, and these sequences are organised systematically via what conversation analysts call the *adjacency pair*. When one speaker takes a turn, he or she does a first action, such that the recipient is expected to respond with a turn that delivers a second action paired with the first. Examples of adjacency pairs are ‘assessment/agreement’ and ‘offer/acceptance’. The production of the first part of an adjacency pair creates the context for the second part by making it conditionally relevant. That is, anything produced next is, for the participants themselves, inspectable and accountable as an instance of that second pair part. Thus, on issuing an invitation, any response to it will be hearable as relevant to it as an instance of acceptance, rejection, stalling manoeuvre, an account for non-acceptance, etc.

Preference organisation (e.g. Pomerantz, 1984) has generally been regarded as a feature of these second pair parts. Second parts (acceptances, refusals, etc.) are normatively provided for, in that, there is an interactionally- rather than a psychologically-defined ‘preference’ for one kind of response over another. For example, assessments are normatively agreed with rather than disagreed with. Disagreement is marked as ‘dispreferred’ via the use of various discourse markers such as delay in producing the rejection and the production of an ‘account’ for it. Thus, normatively, participants account for disagreements, but not agreements. However, if agreements are accounted for in some way, they become marked as interactionally meaningful, unusual or special in some way.

One exception to this rule takes us directly to the target territory of this paper – evaluating oneself or making self-assessments. Forty years ago, Pomerantz (1978) demonstrated that there is a preference for *disagreement* when a speaker makes a negative self-assessment (‘You didn’t do badly; you did really well!’) or is the recipient of a compliment (e.g. of one’s outfit: ‘What? This old thing...?’). Thus, a system of interactional constraints operates such that speakers minimise self-praise and disagree when people make self-deprecating remarks (p. 81). This is because, as Speer (2011, p. 161) has shown, the speaker who performs the compliment deals with both ‘the *object* of the action (that is, the thing being complimented) and its *subject*, that is the complimenter’ (see also Edwards, 2005). Speakers who compliment themselves run the risk of being seen as overly invested in descriptions of themselves and, hence, as braggers. This observation is supported by findings in Johansson, Lindwall and Rystedt’s (2017) analysis of post-simulation debriefings in which a student’s self-praise was treated as non-serious and laughable (pp. 98–101). By contrast, reported third-party compliments are a relatively safe or socially acceptable way of saying positive things about oneself (Speer, 2011, p. 182).

Within the broader focus on assessment as an action in interaction, a handful of CA studies have examined how self-evaluation in feedback activities occurs in real-time encounters (cf. Lindsröm & Mondada, 2009). For example, Öhman (2017) investigated the social organisation of feedback in ongoing hairdressing education and demonstrated its collaborative production between teachers and students. Hofvendahl (2003) examined how teachers initiated parent–teacher–student conferences by using open-ended general questions such as ‘what do you think about life in school?’ In theory, wh-questions create opportunities for students to address things in their own terms. However, the students typically responded with minimal responses such as ‘sådär’ (okay); that is, ‘no problem’ responses that went unelaborated (see also Pillet-Shore, 2003). In an analysis of post-observation conferences in teacher education, Waring (2014) examined how students reflected on their own learning. She found that students tended to treat open-ended questions as a form of test and opted against responding so as to reduce the risk of providing self-assessments that did not match the teacher’s view. Other studies have revealed that even when the delivery of negative feedback is an expected institutional goal, the preference for agreement may override it (Asmuß, 2008; Hofvendahl, 2003; Skovholt, 2018).

In addition to preference organisation, other interactional constraints and affordances make evaluative practices more complex than one might expect, particularly in institutional settings. Producing assessments is also related to institutional identities and social-epistemic positions. In other words, ‘[t]he rights to assess, as well as the epistemic authority of the assessors, are often related to professional expertise and to institutional membership categories’ (Lindström & Mondada, 2009, p. 394; Sacks, 1972). On one hand, teachers are entitled, by virtue of their category membership, to evaluate student performance. On the other hand, however, depending on the target of the evaluation (e.g. how much effort a student has put in), who is more entitled to evaluate is not straightforward. Furthermore, research across a range of settings has shown that being critical or giving negative feedback and advice are dispreferred actions. Thus, the person doing the evaluating has to manage the delivery of such actions in a way that will not be met with resistance if the institutional goal of the encounter is to be met (e.g. Asmuß, 2008; Skovholt, 2018; Vehviläinen, 2009; Waring, 2014).

In the current study, we examine evaluative practices in a routinized part of supervision and feedback activities. Our objective is to explicate the tension between the emphasis on assessment in pedagogic guidance (cf. Black & Wiliam, 2009) and the way assessments are actually organised. We ask how students come to reflect on, assess and evaluate their own performance; the sequential location in which such practices are interactionally provided for; their design of and mutual orientations towards preference organisational constraints. We also consider how pedagogic guidance resonates (or not) with empirical practice. In so doing, the paper contributes to what we know about assessment and evaluation in conversation and to pedagogical research about a core aspect of educational life.

Data and methodology

Video-recorded encounters were collected across 1) teacher–student supervision and 2) debriefing episodes in simulation-based healthcare education. The first dataset was collected from a Norwegian upper secondary school and comprised nine feedback encounters with the same teacher and different students. Each encounter was about fifteen to twenty minutes. The video recordings captured feedback following an oral presentation session using predefined assessment criteria. The students were expected to later improve their presentations based on the feedback. All informants signed a letter of consent, and the project was registered with the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD).

The second dataset comprised ten 30-minute debriefing conversations for medical and nursing students following simulation-based training scenarios. The training was part of one-day practices on interprofessional¹ collaboration, arranged at a Swedish university hospital. The students worked in groups of approximately ten medical and nursing students, of which one medical student and two to three nursing students took part in each scenario; the remainder were observers. All students took part in the debriefing conversations: follow-up discussions were aimed at support learning and reflection. The debriefings were organised around an educational model dividing the conversation into phases, each aimed at generating certain kinds of contributions from the learners (e.g. objective descriptions and reflective analyses). These included scripted/predefined questions, including ‘what worked well?’ Instructors and students signed a letter of consent, and the project was approved by the Swedish Regional Ethical Review Board.

All data were transcribed according to Jefferson’s (2004) system for conversation analytic research. The transcription conventions are listed in the Appendix. We collected all instances in which participants evaluated their own practice as well as the wider sequence in which they were occasioned. We analysed the design of turns in which evaluative conduct occurred: the action under construction; the initiating action that created a sequential environment for evaluation and the preference organisational features that were endemic throughout. Although our target phenomena were located mainly in the opening phases of the feedback sessions, some occurred elsewhere in the overall encounter.

Analysis

The students’ self-evaluations in our data are part of a sequence initiated and occasioned by the teacher’s (teacher–student data) or the facilitator’s (debriefing data) initiating question. The analysis is divided into three sections. In the first section, we examine how the teachers attempted to elicit positive evaluations from the students (‘What worked well?’). The second focuses on how the teachers elicited evaluations through open-ended ‘neutral’ questions (‘How do you think it went yourself?’). In the final section, we focus on how the students came to make negative assessments of themselves, either through the teachers’ questions tilted towards negative evaluations (‘Is there something you should have done differently?’) or through these teachers’ own negative evaluations and subsequent accounts from the students. While many of the turns we examine do the action of assessing, we use the terms ‘evaluation’ and ‘evaluative practices/conduct’ to reflect the wider range of turn designs that occasion and deliver such actions.

1. Eliciting positive self-evaluations

We start by examining what happens when students are explicitly asked to provide a positive evaluation of their own performance. Extract 2 comes from the debriefing conversations in which the students were asked to reflect by responding to a question from the standardised debriefing form: ‘What worked well?’ We will see how the students explicitly orient towards the constraints regarding answering these questions – constraints that, we argue, concern preference against self-praise. The sequence was initiated by the facilitator, who directed a request to the whole group.

(2) DEBRIEF_1

01 FAC: Okej (.) låt oss prata om va ni tycker fungera bra,
Okay let’s talk about what you [plur] think works well,

¹ Interprofessional collaboration means collaboration between two or more professions.

02 (3.2)
 03 NU3: .PHHH
 04 ME1: [ɛAlltid lika jobbigtɛ]
 [ɛAlways as difficultɛ]
 05 NU3: [He-he-heh] .hhh
 06 (1.0)
 07 NU3: E:m:
 Uhm:
 08 (1.0)
 09 FAC: De va mycke,
 It was a lot,

The sequence starts with the facilitator performing an agenda-setting action (Peräkylä, 1995) in imperative mode ('let's talk about what you think works well'), addressing the whole group ('us') and making multiple responses relevant. The request design makes a 'subject-side' positive assessment relevant, that is, one which conveys the recipients' subjective appreciations of the objects being assessed (Edwards & Potter, 2017). After a longer gap of 3.2 seconds in line 02, S3 self-selects and provides an object-side assessment, not of any individual performance, but of the requested action itself ('always as difficult'). Her assessment is followed by laughter by another student. The student's evaluation is elliptical, but may be heard as '[That is] always as difficult', where the elliptical 'that' refers to the requested action – to positively evaluate the students' performance. The response may imply that evaluating oneself is difficult or that identifying something in the performance that worked well is difficult, or both. It may even imply an expectation that nothing in the simulation performance really worked well. As such, the student's response may be heard as a resistance towards answering the question, as an implicit negative self-assessment or, at the least, a negative expectation regarding her own performance. The facilitator's response in line 8 ('it was a lot [that worked well]') rejects the presupposition in the student's response ('always as difficult') and re-establishes the premises in the question, namely, that there are positive elements in the students' simulation performance.

The students orient to the *eliciting action as dispreferred*. First, note the long gap in line 02; the smiley voice and the laughter by two of the students; filled gaps (line 06); assessing the requested action as 'difficult' (line 03) and the selection of an object-sided response which does not focus on the student as the subject. Second, the teacher orients to the *student's negative assessment as dispreferred*. CA research posits that the preferred response to a negative self-assessment is disagreement, that is, when one speaker produces a negative self-evaluation, disagreement is the relevant next action (Pomerantz, 1989). Here, the facilitator adheres to this norm and rejects the student's position that responding is difficult. This interactional work shows the constraints related to self- and other assessment in interaction. In this extract, both the preference organisation and the student's explicit verbalising evaluation of difficulty display a clear orientation to the constraints regarding performing a positive self-evaluation.

In the next two extracts, the facilitator selects a specific student (per extract), rather than random students from the whole group, in order to assess their performance.

(3) DEBRIEF_2

01 FAC: Va gjorde du som va bra Bella.
 What did you do that was good Bella.
 02 NU1: .ptk .hh nämen ja tyckte ändå: ja å Rebecca hade
 .ptk .hh nah but I thought nevertheless I an' Rebecca had
 03 ganska bra kommunikation å::(0.1)eller(.)bra kommunikation
 pretty good communication an' (0.1) or (.) good communication
 04 hade vi.hh och:: (1.4) men vi kompletterade varandra (0.1) bra.
 we had .hh and (1.4) but we complemented each other (0.1) well

05 (0.4)
 06 FAC: M:.
 07 NU1: Uppmärksammade olika saker å:
 Noticed different things an'
 08 (2.8)
 09 NU1: tog e- egna initiativ
 took o- own initiatives
 10 FAC: Ja,
 Yeah,
 11 NU1: Fast- (0.1) u- (0.2) spoke up
 Though- (0.1) u- (0.2) spoke up

The facilitator addresses Bella with a question that explicitly invites her to provide a positive assessment of her own actions in the simulation exercise. The question is object-sided ('what did you do that was good' versus 'what do *you think* you did that was good'), and it presupposes that Bella did something good. Bella responds immediately, using a subject-side turn design ('I thought nevertheless'), a response that makes alternative views possible; through a stretch of talk (lines 02–11), she delivers multiple positive assessments (good communication, complemented each other well, noticed different things, took own initiatives). Notably, her response is initiated by the particle 'nämen' ('nah but') in line 02 – a response initiator that signals that her response is diverging from the presupposition in the question (Svennevig, 2001, p. 148). The adverb 'ändå' also signals a breach of expectations, implying that she had low expectations of her own performance. The facilitator responds with minimal responses in lines 6 and 10.

Bella's response, like that of the student in Extract (2), is delivered with a dispreferred turn shape: note the pauses (lines 03–08), restarts (line 03), self-repairs and within-turn pauses (line 11). In addition, her initial positive assessment is mitigated with 'pretty good' and subsequently upgraded to 'good' (lines 02–03). Furthermore, rather than presenting what she did *herself* that worked well, she assesses actions that were performed *jointly* by herself and another student ('we'). Thus, the invitation to assess her *own* performance is resisted.

In response, the facilitator does not supply the preferred action of agreeing with (and upgrading) positive assessments, but produces continuers, which treat the student's turn as incomplete or insufficient. This may be because the student's response in plural format ('we') is not grammatically congruent with his question: 'What did *you* do that was good Bella'. But it may also show that the rules of preference organisation for evaluative practices are more complex in specialised settings in which assessment is the goal of the activity underway. Including others may also reduce the negative affordances of self-praise.

Extract (4) also contains an attempt to elicit positive self-assessments.

(4) DEBRIEF_3

01 FAC: E:: berätta va a:tt e: (0.2) fungera bra (.) va gjorde
 Uh tell what that uh (0.2) works well (.) what did
 02 du som va bra Suzy.
 you do that was good Suzy.
 03 (1.4)
 04 NU1: E::m
 Uhm
 05 (1.9)
 06 NU1: Ja vet inte de blev lite att de du va arbetsledare (0.2) e
 I don't know it was like that you were teamleader (0.2) uh
 07 å ja tyckte vi försökte där i början å liksom: (0.2)
 an' I thought we tried there in the beginning an' like: (0.2)
 08 först få en blick å sen så: efter ā b c (1) e: (0.6) a vi
 first get a view an' then so: after ā b c (1) u:h (0.6) we
 09 försökte strukturera upp ty(h)k(h)t(h)e [j(h)a-he-he]

Like in previous extracts, Suzy's response includes a range of features that mark it as dispreferred: it is delayed; there is a gap of 1.4 seconds (line 03); a filled pause (line 4) and a second gap of 1.9 seconds (line 05). Her response also includes a turn-initial epistemic hedge 'I don't know' (line 05), epistemic modifiers such as 'maybe' (line 12) and 'we tried' (line 8), within-turn pauses and laughter (line 09). Moreover, like Bella in the previous extract, Suzy couches her assessment with the plural 'we', framing her positive assessment as attributable to the group (line 17-18).

So far, our analysis shows that doing positive self-assessment is problematic, which corroborates existing conversation analytic research (Speer, 2012). This is so despite the fact that evaluation is the goal of the educational endeavour. Furthermore, the facilitator's second

pair parts breaks the preference for agreement, instead producing minimal responses and continuers, signalling that students' attempts to evaluate themselves were failing or insufficient. Furthermore, by asking the students what they did *that was good*, presupposing positive features of their performance, the facilitator displays his epistemic authority to make correct assessments. In the next section, we examine what happens when students are invited to evaluate their performance in individual teacher–student supervision.

2. Eliciting self-evaluations through open-ended 'neutral' questions

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the students did not spontaneously engage in evaluative or reflective activities. Instead, such practices were heavily imbricated in the institutional setting and its interactional requirements and were occasioned in response to the teacher's elicitations.

Extract 5 takes place immediately after a student has completed an oral presentation.

(5) SUPERVISION_1

- 01 T: Jeg skjønner.
I see
- 02 (0.2)
- 03 T: Mm.
- 04 (0.9)
- 05 T: .h ↑ja.
Yeah
- 06 (0.8)
- 07 T: E: hva tenker du selv e:: hvordan det ↑gikk?
What do you think yourself how it went
- 08 (0.9)
- 09 S: h jeg tenker at det: gikk ganske greit.
I think that it went pretty okay
- 10 (0.2)
- 11 Eller veldig bra synes jeg
Or very good I think
- 12 (0.4)
- 13 T: [Ja?]
Yeah
- 14 S: [Bed]re enn jeg: håpet på faktisk.
Better than I hoped actually
- 15 (0.3)
- 16 T: Ja?=
Yeah
- 17 S: =Synes jeg fikk fram e:: (.) mine konkrete meninger.
Think I came across with my concrete opinions

The teacher elicits self-assessment with a wh-question and invites a general subject-side assessment ('what do you think² yourself'), that is, one that formulates the student's subjective view (Edwards & Potter, 2017). This is immediately followed by a second wh-question directing the attention to 'how it went', where the indexical 'it' refers to the student's oral presentation.

Note that in contrast to the binary questions in the previous extracts, here, the teacher's question requests neither a positive nor a negative evaluation, but invites an evaluation in

² The first question component is designed by using the Norwegian verb 'tenker', which refers to the mental process 'to think' rather than to the process of giving an opinion on something. This distinction is important to note since both the Norwegian verbs 'tenker' in Extract (1) and 'synes' in Extract (2), which refer to the process of giving an opinion on something, have been translated into English as 'think'.

neutral terms. Initially, the student responds by providing a weak and mitigated positive assessment,³ including both subject- and object-side components (line 9: ‘I think that it went pretty okay’), a response format that downgrades the authority of the assessment and detaches the student from the evaluated performance. After a short gap, the student continues by producing a stronger positive assessment (line 11: ‘or very good I think’), which, due to the prefacing conjunction ‘or’, comes across as an *alternative* to the prior assessment (Lerner & Kitzinger, 2015) rather than an upgrade of it. Taken together with its sequential position following a downgraded first assessment, the second upgraded one is designed to handle the constraints against self-praise.

As noted earlier, a positive assessment in the first position of an adjacency pair prefers a response in the form of an agreement or upgrade (Pomerantz, 1984). However, the teacher’s ‘ja/yeah’ in line 13, with a final rising intonation, is a continuer that invites the student to continue his turn rather than agreeing or confirming with the student’s evaluation. In overlap, the student provides an account (line 14: ‘better than I hoped actually’). By marking that his successful performance was contrary to what he expected – which is done both through the literal contrasting of his actual performance against his expectations ‘better than I hoped’ and the concluding disclaimer ‘actually’ (Speer, 2012, p. 57) – the student shows an explicit orientation to the constraints against self-praise (p. 57). As the teacher again responds with a “‘ja”/yeah’ with rising intonation, the student proceeds, accounting for the preceding positive assessment by giving an example of a successful element of his presentation (line 17: ‘think I came across with my concrete opinions’). The subject-side design, in combination with the shift to the verb ‘synes’ (‘think’, view), formulates the assessment as a matter of personal opinion and thereby opens up for alternative views.

Extract (6) is also taken from the opening phase of an encounter.

(6) SUPERVISION_2

- 01 T: Oke:i.
Okay
- 02 (0.4)
- 03 S: .ptkhh e: ↑ja.
Yeah
- 04 (.)
- 05 T: Hvordan synes du selv e: det gikk?
How do you think it went yourself?
- 06 (0.8)
- 07 S: Det ↑gikk helt ↓grei::t h,
It went quite okay
- 08 (1.0)
- 09 T: Ja?=
Yes
- 10 S: =Ja jeg har vært syk så jeg har liksom-
Yes, I have been sick so I have some-
- 11 (1.0) fikk ikke forberedt meg
didn’t get prepared
- 12 så mye som jeg kanskje hadde håpa på da.
as much as I maybe had hoped then.

The teacher asks a wh-question ‘How do you think it went yourself’ (line 5). The question includes both subject- (‘How do you think’, ‘yourself’) and object-side (‘it went’) components and, thus, makes relevant an assessment pointing to both an attribute of the object and the

³ In Norwegian, the adjective expression ‘greit’ is neutral. Preceded by the adverb ‘ganske’ (‘pretty’), it means: it went okay/all right, but nothing more than that.

subjective state of the student. After an 0.8-second gap, the student presents a downgraded positive assessment that is designed with a mitigator ('quite'), sound stretch and rising intonation at the end, which are all features that show the student's orientation to the constraints against self-praise ('It went quite okay'). Furthermore, despite the teacher's invitation requesting the student's subjective view, the response has an object-side design, which serves to objectify the assessment and make it less hearable, as if stemming from the student's own judgement (Speer, 2012).

Both the action and the format of the student's turn solicit an uptake by the teacher in the form of an agreement, but what follows is instead a longer gap of 1 second and a 'yes', with rising intonation, which signals that further elaboration has been requested. The student responds immediately and accounts for the prior assessment by providing an explanation of why she did not perform better (line 10: 'I've been sick so I have some- (1) didn't get time to prepare as much as I maybe had hoped then'), which indicates that she understands the teacher's uptake as questioning her self-assessment. Thus, the account is produced with a self-repair, a longer within-turn pause and an epistemic modifier 'maybe', which are all features that mark the turn as dispreferred – further showing the student's orientation towards the constraints against self-praise.

Extract (7) is also from the opening phase of the feedback encounter:

(7) SUPERVISION_3

- 01 L: ↑Skal vi ↓se:: m ↑ja.
Let me see yes
02 (1.9)
03 T: ↑Ja, (0.5) e: hva tenker du selv?
Yeah what do you think yourself
04 (0.2)
05 T: Hvordan synes du selv det gikk? ((lener seg fremover))
How do you think it went yourself ((bends forward))
06 (1.1)
07 S: e: det gikk helt greit? (.) tror [jeg]?
It went quite okay I believe
08 T: [Ja?]
[Yes]
09 (0.6)
10 T: Dette er jo det første foredraget du har holdt e for
11 klassen ↑da
This is the first presentation you have given the class
right
12 (0.3)
13 S: Ja h de::t- (0.3) h man bli h r litt nervøs (.) av det (.)
14 siden
Yes it one becomes a little nervous from it since
((ser ned))
((looks down))
15 (1.2)

Like in Extract 6, the teacher elicits self-assessment by first asking 'what do you think yourself', followed by 'how do you think *it went* yourself', thus inserting an object-side element ('it went') into a question designed to elicit what the student herself thinks. This insertion may reveal the teacher's tacit knowledge that producing self-assessments is delicate and permits a focus on 'it' rather than the student personally. The student's response, produced after a delay, indeed uses the object-side format first ('*it went* quite okay').

Moreover, like in Extract (6), the student's weak and mitigated positive self-assessment has a final rising intonation and makes relevant an affirmative response by the teacher, but instead receives a 'yes' with a rising intonation that can be heard as an invitation for the student to elaborate further on the assessment (line 08). In this extract, however, the teacher's re-elicitation does not occasion a new turn from the student, but is followed by silence (line 9). On line 10, the teacher continues to provide an assertion that frames the student's presentation in a certain context, namely, that of being new in the class and having given an oral presentation for the first time. The turn is designed with a final rising (eliciting) intonation and can be heard as inviting a confirmation and expansion on this particular feature.

In sum, when the teachers invited the students to assess their performance with an open-ended wh-question (e.g. 'How do you think it went yourself'), the students delivered short neutral responses or downgraded positive assessments ('helt greit'/'quite okay') that largely remained unexplicated. Such responses may be associated with 'okay'-responses that are 'neither overly critical nor overly laudable' and function as a 'default response' that also functions as sequence-closing devices (Pillet-Shore, 2003, pp. 288, 313). While the teachers pursued elaborations, their 'yes?' responses in fact elicited accounts ('I have been ill, so', 'I started on it yesterday' (not shown in this article), 'One becomes a little nervous') rather than further assessments. Our analysis further reveals the interactional difficulties involved in assessing performance. We continue our analysis in the final section.

3) *Eliciting negative self-evaluations*

The students were also asked to evaluate aspects of their performance that did not work well. The previous section focused on the teachers' initial attempts at eliciting assessment sequences with open-ended wh-questions. As the encounters unfolded, the teachers supplied critical feedback regarding what improvements the student needed to make to her/his presentation. We found that it was in these sequential environments that the students provided their own negative assessments. Extract (8) exemplifies this.

(8) **SUPERVISION_4**

- 01 T: E::m nå skal vi gå gjennom disse punktene ikke sant?
E::m now we're going through these points right?
((peker på vurderingskriteriene / pointing to the assessment criteria))
- 02 S: Mm,
- 03 T: Som vi har jo gått gjennom dem noen ganger på timen
As we have gone through them a few times in class
04 (0.9) Og e: (0.6) fordi helt i starten? så e: kom ikke du med noe
And because right in the start so e: you didn't present any
05 proble:mstilling? du hadde ikke noe sånn
research question? You didn't have no such
- 06 S: Ja ((eleven kikker opp i luften))
Yes ((student looks up in the air))
- 07 T: Du formulerte ikke en tydelig problemstilli- eller,
You didn't formulate any clear research quest- or,
- 08 S: Nei,
No,
- 09 T: Hva tenker du om de:t,
What do you think about that,
- 10 S: Ja nei det er [jo-]
Yes no it is (PRT)-
- 11 T: [Var] det bevisst eller var de::t,
Was it with consciousness or was i::t,
- 12 S: Ja det er jo liksom en- det er jo en analyse? av symbolikk og

- 13 Yes it is like a- it is an analysis of symbolism and
så videre i
so on
- 14 T: Ja det er det
Yes it is
- 15 S: [i den men]
In it but
- 16 T: [=og]innholdet i foredraget ditt synes jeg va::r veldi::g
And the content in the presentation I think wa::s very::
- 17 logisk og ikke sant? ((Nikker til eleven))
logical too right? ((Nods to the student))
- 18 S: Mm

The teacher begins by establishing a collaborative frame ('now we're going through these points right') while pointing at a document listing assessment criteria. After minimal uptake from the student (line 2: 'mm'), the teacher provides a pre-account to foreshadow an upcoming negative assessment by emphasising the routine status of the assessment criteria (line 03: 'as we have gone through them a few times in class'). The upcoming negative assessment,⁴ which concerns a missing element in the student's presentation ('because ... you didn't present any research question?'), is preceded by common components of dispreferred actions: pauses and hesitation (lines 3, 4).

As the student only responds with a minimal token of agreement (line 6: 'yes') while gazing up in the air, the teacher begins to repeat the negative assessment. Before completion, however, the utterance is aborted and restarted with an 'or', with slightly rising intonation that invites a response from the student (line 7: 'you didn't formulate any clear research question,'). Again, the student responds only with a minimal token of agreement (line 8: 'no', see Koshik, 2002a, on reversed polar questions), which occasions a more direct invitation for the student to comment on the negative assessment: 'what do you think about that' (line 9).

As noted by Pomerantz (1984, p. 58), responding with disagreement when agreement is preferred frequently incorporates turn-initial delay devices or, in this case, a turn-initial agreement (line 10: 'yes') that prefaces disagreement (line 10: 'no it is' (prt)-). Prior to the end, however, the student's response is interrupted by the teacher, who starts to produce another question concerning whether the absence of a research question was intentional (line 11: 'was it with consciousness or was i::t,'). The sound stretch at the end, coupled with the continuing intonation, makes the question hearable as 'designedly incomplete' (Koshik, 2002), targeting the omitted part (i.e. that it was *not* intentional) as the dispreferred response option. The student responds with an account, but rather than explaining why s/he did not formulate a research question, s/he starts to describe the theme of the essay (line 13: 'Yes it is like a- it is an analysis of symbolism and so on'). The teacher provides an affirmative uptake (line 14: 'yes it is'), and then, in overlap with the student's attempt to continue her account (line 15: 'in it but'), she provides a positive assessment of the content of the student's presentation, inviting an agreement (line 16-17): 'and the content in the presentation I think was very logical too right?').

Extract (9) is from another feedback encounter.

(9) SUPERVISION_5

⁴ Grammatically, the teacher's turn beginning on line 03 is designed as a description rather than an explicit assessment via adjectives. As emphasised by Edwards and Potter (2017), however, there is 'no definite, a priori distinction between descriptions and assessments' (p. 7), and neither is the presence of lexical items such as *good* or *bad* a requirement for an utterance being an assessment. To determine whether an utterance is an assessment or description, it must be considered in the context of its production and the interactional work it does there. In this case, we think that the teacher's utterance does the job of an evaluation.

- 08 T =Den tiden du brukte på de ulike elementene i foredraget da?
=The time you spent on the different elements in your presentation then?
- 09 (.)
- 10 E: =Ja
Yes
- 11 (0.3)
- 12 T: For du hadde jo med veldig mye som-
Because you (PRT) included a lot that-
13 .hh
14 .ptkh
15 (.)
16 Er fint å ha med i en litterær analyse,
Is nice to include in a literary analysis
17 (.)
- 18 S: Mm,
- 19 T: E:::m (0.3) men jeg tenkte at du kanskje brukt- kunne brukt noe
E:::m (0.3) but I thought you maybe could spend- could spend some
20 mindre tid på handlingsreferat,
less time on the summary
21 S: Ja
Yes
(0.3)
- 22 T: Og e mer tid på:: e- (0.4).ptk (0.4) ↓tema:, bu:dskap:,
And e more time on:: e- (0.4) .ptk (0.4) ↓theme:, me:ssa:ge,
23 litterære virkemidler,
literary resources,
24 S: Ja,
Yes,
(.)
- 25 T: ↑Hva tenker du selv om det?
↑What do you think yourself about that?
26 (0.8)
- 27 S: Ja h det k h an jeg være enig i,
Yes h that h I can agree with,
28 (.)
- 29 S: Det: (0.8) altså- (0.3) jeg prøvde å få fram (0.7) på en måte
That: (0.8) well- (0.3) I tried to evoke (0.7) in a way
30 budskapet i handlingen
the message in the narrative
31 (.)
- 32 Og litt sånn tema at det handlet om rasisme og sånt
And a little like theme that it was about racism and such
- 33 T: =JA NEMLIG
=YES EXACTLY

While the teacher in Extract (8) anchors her negative feedback in the assessment criteria, she initiates the sequence in Extract (9) by providing a positive assessment, followed by an adversarial ‘but’+ a negative assessment, followed by a request for the student’s reflection on the negative assessment.

The extract begins with the teacher setting the agenda to talk about the time spent on different elements in the student’s presentation, moving on to produce a next turn where the initiating connective ‘because’ projects an account of the prior utterance (lines 13–16: ‘because you included a lot that- .ptkh is nice to include in a literary analysis’) (cf. Couper-Kuhlen, 2011; Parry, 2013). What initially follows on from ‘because’ is not an account, however, but a positive evaluation of the student’s presentation (‘you included a lot that is nice to include in a presentation’). Despite the action (positive evaluation) and format

(slightly rising final intonation) of the utterance, which both invite an affirmative response, the student only responds with a continuer ‘mm’, suggesting that he or she expects more talk to follow.

The teacher’s next utterance is introduced with the conjunction ‘but’, which projects a contrast onto the prior positive evaluation, and what follows is indeed a negative evaluation produced in a subject-sided format (line 19-20: ‘but I thought you maybe could spend some less time on the summary’). Like in the previous extract, the negative evaluation is produced with features that mark it as dispreferred: a turn-initial hesitation mark followed by a pause, a self-repair and mitigators (‘maybe’, ‘some’) that downgrade the assessment. The student responds with a token of agreement (‘yes’), and the teacher continues to produce an and-prefaced expansion that suggests an alternative approach (line 22-23: ‘And e more time on:: e- (0.4) .ptk (0.4) theme: message literary resources’). Again, the student responds with a token of agreement, which occasions a more direct invitation for the student to comment on the negative evaluation (line 25: ‘what do you think yourself about that’).

The student’s response on line 27 can be described as an ‘accept with account’ (Waring, 2007), as she begins by claiming unequivocal acceptance and agreement with the teacher’s assessment (line 27: ‘yes h that h I can agree with’), but then continues to account for the criticised performance (line 27–32: ‘That: (0.8) well- (0.3) I tried to evoke (0.7) in a way the message in the narrative and a little like theme that it was about racism and such’). The teacher’s subsequent response is delivered quickly and latches with the student’s last word. The affirmative exclamation ‘Yes Exactly’ signals a change of state, agreement and surprise, and it may be heard as an appraisal utterance hedging the previous negative feedback, as if it works to delete the critique or mark it as having been given on false premises. The teacher’s response marks strong agreement and is delivered in a preferred format – quickly and with no hesitations, restarts or other dispreferred features. It works to mitigate the negative feedback in a similar way as the positive assessment does in line 16 in Extract (8).

The final extract comes from the debrief conversations. We are now in the phase of the debrief, where the students are asked to respond to the question following on ‘what worked well?’ from the standardised debriefing form: ‘what would you like to do differently?’ Extract (10) is initiated by the facilitator, who directs a version of this question to a nursing student who took part in the preceding simulation scenario.

(10) DEBRIEF_4

- 01 FAC: E de nånting du skulle ha gjort annorlunda.
Is there something you should have done differently.
- 02 FAC: ((gazes at NU4))
- 03 NU4: M:?
- 03 FAC: A[ha]
Yeah
- 04 NU4: [Ja sku]lle: rapporterat(h) .hh (.) mycke bättre till dej
[I shou]ld have report(h)ed .hh (.) much better to you
- 05 enligt SBAR när du kom in (0.3) för de: (0.6)
according to SBAR when you came in (0.3) because that (0.6)
- 06 gjorde ja inte (0.5) de va väldigt dåligt (0.2) för ja- du hade
I didn’t do (0.5) that was very bad (0.2) because I- you had
- 07 ingen koll alls egentligen=
no track at all really=
- 08 NU3: =M:=
- 09 NU4: =mer än att han va (.) medvetslös
=more than that he was (.) unconscious
- 10 (1.1)
- 11 FAC: Å varför gjorde du inte de tror du då,
An’ why didn’t you do that you think then,

The facilitator asks the nursing student (Nu4) whether there was something she could have done differently: The student provides an affirmative response and then, in overlap with the facilitator's 'yeah' (line 03), continues to provide a description of how she should have performed and how she actually performed (line 04). This is followed by a strong negative assessment of her actual performance (line 06: 'that was very bad') and an account of why it was bad (lines 07, 09: 'because I- you had no track at all really more than that he was unconscious'). Compared with the extracts in which the facilitator elicited positive evaluations, the student's negative assessment is delivered in a preferred format, with no initial hesitation marks, restarts, laughter or gaps. As we have already touched upon, previous research on assessments has shown that negative self-assessments by first speakers render relevant disagreements by second speakers (Pomerantz, 1984). This does not happen here. The facilitator responds to the negative evaluation with a follow-up question (line 12) that invites the student to account for her (bad) performance.

Extracts 8–10 further reveal the constraints against doing evaluations, here, negative evaluations. We see that negative evaluations are framed as *descriptions* rather than as *assessments* and that positive evaluations precede negative ones.

DISCUSSION

Facilitating students' evaluation of their own performance or learning is a key element in educational theory and practice. The current study has specified how such activities happen in authentic evaluation episodes in encounters between teachers and their students, where students are invited, as part of the educational endeavour, to evaluate their own work or achievements.

Our analysis showed that the teachers' elicitations of the students' self-assessments were organised in *recognisable sequences*. The teachers' elicitations were typically of two kinds: 'open-ended' questions inviting general assessment without specifying a target or valence (e.g. 'How do you think it went yourself?'), or more specific questions tilted towards a positive or negative evaluation (e.g. 'What did you do that worked well'/'What could be done better/differently'). Regardless of what kind of assessment was required by the question, the responses revealed the dispreferred nature of evaluating one's own conduct, whether negative (self-deprecation) or positive (self-praise). The responses manifested many of the features previously identified by conversation analysts to indicate difficulty responding when the required action breaches the normative order for social action (e.g. delay, gaps, laughter, stretched sounds, particles, epistemic hedges, accounts, etc.). The questions requiring a positive evaluation ('What did you do that worked well') produced subject-sided, mitigated responses, which regularly included other students' joint performance rather than responses that focused solely on the assessor's own conduct. In cases where the questions were tilted towards a negative response ('What could you do differently?'), the students responded in a preferred format and provided overt negative assessments, suggesting that self-deprecation might be oriented towards a somewhat less delicate project than self-praise.

Furthermore, we found that both teachers and students were oriented towards the easier interactional task of producing assessments framed as objective 'it went' and about objects ('it') rather than subjects ('I' or 'you'). The answers were also short and unelaborated, at least initially. Perhaps this is a case whereby, in responding to teachers' questions, students understand that they had known the answers, and thus, they resist elaborating answers that might not pass the test of matching the teachers' assessments. As Waring (2014, p. 105)

observes, in order to ‘escape’ these tests and eliminate the risk of providing assessments that are incompatible with those of teachers, students may withhold or resist providing them. Waring (2014, p. 116) suggests that targeted questions receive better-fitted and more reflective responses than general questions, supporting Hofvendahl’s (2003) view that questions like ‘how do you think it went’ may even function like ‘How-are-you’-sequences which preface an encounter rather than initiate the main reason for it. This was something that we also observed in our data: Open-ended questions of this type typically generated short and unelaborated ‘okay-responses’. In fact, in these educational settings, doing any kind of self-assessment unfolded with features of dispreference, showing the interactional difficulties in doing what might seem a simple and routine task.

Assessments are also constrained by who is entitled to perform them. We found that teachers did not respond to students’ self-assessments with the preferred actions of agreement or disagreement (Pomerantz, 1984), but rather with continuers and re-elicitations, thus treating the students’ turns as incomplete, insufficient or in need of further elaboration. From this, we draw the conclusion that the preference organisation for ordinary conversation is overridden in institutional interactions; that is, positive self-evaluations do not necessarily prefer agreement, and self-deprecations do not prefer disagreement. However, producing assessments is also related to institutional identities as well as to the social-epistemic positions of the persons doing the assessments: ‘[t]he rights to assess, as well as the epistemic authority of the assessors, are often related to professional expertise and to institutional membership categories’ (Lindström & Mondada, 2009, p. 394). In our data, the persons doing the assessments were teachers and students. Research on classroom instruction has long established that the relationship between teachers and students is asymmetrical: teachers function as epistemic authorities and evaluate their students’ work in order to enable knowledge (re)production, and students are expected to learn from their teachers’ superior knowledge and understanding (Ekström, 2013; Macbeth, 2004).

While teachers are not – simply by virtue of their category membership and expertise in the subject areas being taught – objectively more entitled to evaluate students’ performance than students themselves, our analysis revealed that the teachers organised interactions so as to display their entitlement to decide when the students’ self-assessments were sufficient to close sequences and move on to the next issue. Thus, the students’ self-assessments were not treated the way in which self-assessments are treated in ordinary conversation – that is, as mere opinion – but rather as displays of ability to determine whether their performance met the assessment goal of the educational task. Moreover, as is typical in educational contexts, such displays of competence/knowledge are subject to teacher ratification or challenge in the next turn. Even though there might not be objectively correct ways to formulate self-assessments, the recorded encounters showed that there were at least some known-in-advance ‘criteria’ for a sufficient response. In addition to the social constraints regarding self-assessments, such epistemic constraints may also explain the students’ dispreferred response formats.

While it is established in pedagogic theory and practical instruction for teachers that eliciting reflective practice and evaluation should be done and, for instance, is best elicited with open-ended questions, our research both challenges this guidance and provides evidence for developing more effective guidance. Throughout the analysis, we observed that asking open-ended questions does not necessarily occasion self-reflection or self-assessment. Generating self-assessment is not a straightforward activity – it is not something that students’ simply do. The activity is largely concerned with social, epistemic and interactional constraints.

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