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Use of interactive oral assessment to increase workplace readiness of occupational therapy students

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I. INTRODUCTION

Interactive oral assessment has been identified as a form of authentic assessment that enables students to develop their professional identity, communications skills, and helps promote employability (Sotiriadou et al., 2020). It simulates authentic scenarios where assessors can engage students in genuine and unscripted interactions that represents workplace experiences (Sotiriadou et al., 2020). Unlike written examinations, interactive oral questions are not rigidly standardised as students and assessors role-play using workplace scenarios, enabling students to respond to the conversational flow and achieve authenticity (Tan et al., 2021). Using Villarroel et al. (2018) four-step 'Model to Build Authentic Assessment', this paper will present the use of oral interactive with first year occupational therapy students. This is within the context of a module named "Occupational Performance Across Lifespan" and students learn about children's developmental milestones.

II. METHODS

The first step of the Model by Villarroel et al. (2018) is to consider the workplace context. It is important to identify key transferable skills that are needed at typical workplace scenarios. In the job of occupational therapists, they need to meet with caregivers and address their concerns. The key transferable skills include determining whether there is delay in a child's developmental milestones, communicating with

empathy and articulating practical suggestions for caregivers. Thinking critically and communicating persuasively and empathetically, especially in dynamic situations, are important graduate attributes for our students to prepare themselves for the clinical workforce.

The second step of the Model is to design authentic assessment, which involves (1) drafting a rich context; (2) creating a worthwhile task; and (3) requiring higher order skills. In our assessment, students were given a scenario and asked to discuss developmental milestones with parents, identify whether there were areas of concerns from what was reported and provide suggestions if appropriate.

To do this, we trained standardised "actors" / "parents" to share their concerns and correspond with the student individually. As the assessment took place during the pandemic, we used Zoom for corresponding, like therapists conducting teleconsultations. To promote employment opportunities, we included persons with disability as standardised parents. The students were unaware of the disability such as spinal cord injury, as it was conducted on an online platform. We followed the guide on inclusion of persons with disabilities as standardised patients (Lim et al., 2020). The academic staff took the role of the examiner and focused on listening in to the answers provided and writing down feedback for each student.

The third step involves developing the assessment criteria and standard in the form of rubrics and

familiarising students with them. To prepare the students, five weeks before the actual assessment, we explained what oral interactive assessments were and introduced the rubrics. They watched videos of one high performing student and one who struggled from previous cohort (with permission sought). They discussed what went well and where the gaps were, followed by pairing up to practice. This helped the students to understand the expected standard, visualise how the oral interactive will take place and learn to evaluate. Three weeks before the assessment, students were given some mock scenarios to practice, and suggestions from the previous cohort on how best to prepare for the assessment.

The fourth step relates to feedback. Feedback can enable students to judge future performances and make improvements within the context of individual assessment. After the assessment, each student was given individual written feedback. The cohort was given group feedback on what they did well and some of the common mistakes. Students who needed more detailed feedback were also given the opportunity to be coached by the Module Lead. At coaching-feedback sessions, the student will watch their video, pause, coached on what they notice, what was done well, and how they can do differently in future. Such feedback sessions are viewed as a coachable moment for educators to develop students in their competency (Lim, 2021).

III. RESULTS

We conducted oral interactive assessments with persons with disability as standardised parents for two cohorts of students ($n > 200$). From the anonymous module feedback, we learnt that students appreciated the assessment as it has real world relevance and enable them to gain professional skills. Some appreciated the opportunity to experience what it felt like interacting with caregivers at their future workplaces. We also noted some students expressed they were more anxious preparing for the oral interactive compared to other forms of assessments. Students shared that they prepared the assessment by remembering the developmental milestones and practise verbalising the concepts out loud with their peers.

IV. DISCUSSION

Students need time to be prepared for a new form of assessment as they may be more familiar with pen and paper examination or report. A few recommendations are suggested:

1) To reduce their anxiety, early preparation is important. Performance anxiety was a common stumbling block. Supporting students in learning strategies to manage performance anxiety can help.

2) For the assessment conversation to be natural, it is important to train the standardised actors on reactions for hit and missed responses from the students.

3) To maintain integrity of the assessment, different scenarios of similar level of difficulties were needed. Educators emphasised the value of learning from the assessment and individualised feedback, such that experience itself becomes intrinsically rewarding.

4) The educator plays the role of the examiner and concentrates to note down the quality of the answers and writes down feedback for each student.

5) Scaffolding students for continuous practice towards workplace competence is important. It is recommended to plan other authentic assessments in the later years of the curriculum such as OSCE.

V. CONCLUSION

Oral interactive assessment provides students with the opportunity to practice and be assessed on workplace competency. While students find themselves more anxious in preparing, they appreciate the real-world relevance and the opportunity to gain professional skills. It is worthwhile to spend effort in designing the assessment in detail, planning authentic scenarios, and preparing students for the experience. As an educator, it is rewarding to witness students developing the ability to demonstrate their competency in a professional manner.

Notes on Contributors

Associate Professor Lim Sok Mui (May) contributed to the conception, drafted and critically revised the manuscript.

Dr Lim Chun Yi contributed to the execution of the assessment, drafting and reviewing the manuscript.

All authors gave their final approval and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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