Speech and Language Therapists: Learning to be Placement Educators

Submitted by Karen Julia Stewart, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education in Education, October 2012.

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Abstract

Only two years after graduating themselves, speech and language therapists are asked to act as placement educators and supervise student speech and language therapists. The role of the placement educator is to supervise, teach, support and assess the student in the clinical environment and as such is a complex and demanding role. Some previous research has suggested that the training and support provided to developing placement educators does not adequately prepare them for the role. However, the development of speech and language therapists as placement educators is a relatively under-researched area in the UK.

This interpretive study explores how ten speech and language therapists feel they develop the necessary skills to be successful as placement educators, through the stories they tell about their experiences. This exploration of clinical education and professional development is set within a social constructivist perspective on learning.

The participants talked at length of their own early experiences as students and described these as the starting point for their own enactment of the placement educator role. They also emphasised the importance of continuing to learn and develop their skills as they gained experience in the placement educator role itself. The themes of talk, collaboration, reflective practice and experiential learning were central to the stories told by the participants and underpin how these speech and language therapists learnt to be placement educators. It is suggested that in describing how she felt she learnt to be a placement educator each participant created a unique and dynamic map of that learning.

This study contributes to the on-going discussion about the role of critical reflection in understanding and challenging established practice and reinforces the place of reflective practice as integral to both the clinical and placement educator aspects of the SLT's role. The findings highlight the importance of peer support and shared opportunities for critical reflection with colleagues in ensuring that placement educators do not feel isolated or disillusioned.

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Over the past five years we have been a family at study and it has been wonderful to see my daughters, Lizzy and Jessica, achieve great things and also to feel their belief in me. They are an inspiration to me.

And finally, but most importantly, thanks to my husband Nigel, who has walked beside me every step of the way.

This thesis is dedicated to my mum – she would have been so proud of me and I thank Becky for reminding me of that.

'Come to the edge, he said.
They said, 'We are afraid'.
'Come to the edge', he said.
They came
He pushed them....
And they flew!

(Guillaume Apollinaire 1880-1918)

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