Teaching Doctors:

The Relationship Between Physicians'

Clinical and Educational Practice.

Submitted by Jonathan Lake, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education by Research in EdD, January 2013.

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ABSTRACT.

This thesis explores the relationship between physicians' clinical and educational roles in the context of UK General Practice (GP) education by investigating the experiences of seven GP trainers through an ethnographic approach employing Activity Theory (AT). The Introduction considers the philosophy and structures of GP education and outlines the author's professional biography to provide context. The Literature Review focusses on the development of medical education as a discrete field and identity formation in medical educators, concluding that: specialist medical educators are a relatively new group; and there is a paucity of knowledge regarding the impact on physicians of occupying dual clinical and educational roles. The thesis then focusses on three Research Questions (RQs), namely:

1. What is the impact of GP trainers' clinical practice upon their educational work?
2. How does GP trainers' educational practice influence their clinical work?
3. What are the social contexts for GP trainers' clinical and educational practice?

These questions are addressed within a pragmatic theoretical framework to build up an ethnographic description of the participants' experiences. Data collection is through semi-structured interviews and observation of video-recorded teaching. Ethical issues associated with the study are discussed in detail, in particular the challenges of "insider" research. Four approaches are used for data analysis: global impressions; word cloud analysis; thematic analysis; and analysis shaped by AT.

In answer to RQs 1 and 2, the study finds that GP trainers experience their dual roles as intimately linked, intuitively transferring their skills between their clinical and educational practice. The study also finds that GP trainers reconstruct their professional identities through teaching. With regard to RQ 3, engaging in teaching can lead to internal conflict for GP trainers and tensions with their colleagues, trainees and regulators. These findings are discussed in relation to medical education research methodology and the impact the study on the researcher is explored. The thesis closes by considering the conflicted position the participants occupy, concluding that teaching offers physicians the opportunity to reconstruct their professional identities so they can approach tensions in their practice with a sense of agency and optimism.

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