



“Learning outside the box”

Student led elective learning on a speech and language therapy programme

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The transition experience

- 2 year Postgraduate Diploma programme run collaboratively by University of Greenwich and Canterbury Christ Church University
- Elective learning period 3-4 weeks called Transition
- Takes place between 1st and 2nd years of the programme
- Similar to medical electives: nursing programmes at UofG
- Unique to this programme



What students are required to do

- Plan a minimum of 60 hours activity with clear learning objectives
- Related to speech and language therapy or education or healthcare practice
- Should not duplicate placement experiences
- A mix of study, or practical activity, or both
- Undertaken locally, or elsewhere in the UK, or internationally
- Present evidence of activity through verbal report to group of peers
- Provide a reflective account of what student gained from experience
- Self-funding

What transition offers

- Transition allows students an opportunity to pursue an area of practice that they are particularly interested in
- Students responsible for making contacts, establishing objectives and organising themselves to achieve those objectives
- Gives a focus for reflective writing
- Not assessed or graded

Examples of activities students did

- Visited SLT services abroad
- Worked with literacy projects
- Worked on creative arts projects
- Looked at yoga, Alexander technique and beat boxing
- Learned about baby signing
- Learned about baby massage
- Supported palliative care team
- Experienced process of learning a new language and looking at communication from the perspective of a learner
- Explored animal assisted therapy

Links to ethos of programme

- Emphasis on life long learning, taking responsibility for own learning
- Reflective writing
- Programme fosters self-directed learning
- Programme encourages holistic view of SLT
- Professional identity discussed from outset

Evaluation of transition

- Questionnaire given to students from 3 consecutive year groups to evaluate the experience (n= 37 return rate = 47%)
- Opportunity to reflect on impact of transition on their professional identity
- Provided qualitative evaluation
- Results presented in this presentation

Questions for retrospective reflection

- What did you learn on transition that you could not have learned at university or on placement?
- How will the opportunities you had on transition help me in employment?
- What is the effect of being able to choose an area to develop?
- How is the process of learning different when it is not being assessed?
- Did participation in elective study enhance or reduce confidence?
- Did the fact that you had to organise the activities yourself make you more motivated or less motivated?

What emerged from the data overall

- Students moving from peripheral role to more central role in community of practice that they have chosen to join
- Supports their definition of their professional identity by observing how others behave in relation to them, how they construe their professional roles when away from university

Developing professional identity

- Proto-professionalism (Holton and Slotnick 2015) : acquire practical wisdom (“phronesis”) about ethical practice, reflection, responsibility and collaborative working with respect for others’ roles
- Transition allows development of proto-professionalism
- Reflection with less emphasis on meeting competencies
- Professional identity evolves through a number of different influences; transition important staging post on process of professional identity formation
- Professional identity formation dynamic, evolving and co-constructed process (Scanlon 2011)

Links to social cognitive theory – Bandura (1994, 2001)

- Links to Bandura's model of self-efficacy
“the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (1994)
- Students can reflect on their strengths and needs in relation to employability, able to set own goals
- Associated with social cognitive theory which emphasises observational learning

Practice-based information learning (Beckett et al 2002)

- Organic/holistic learning
- Contextual learning
- Activity- and experience-based
- Activated by individual learners rather than by teachers/trainers

Boyer's four domains of scholarship (1990)

- Discovery: process of research
- Integration: putting knowledge into perspective, beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries
- Application: idea that knowledge can be put to service of others
- Teaching: transformation and extension of what has been learned, and the passing on to others

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006)

- Inductive – the themes linked to the data, not driven by the researcher's interest
- No pre-existing coding framework
- Themes were identified at a semantic level i.e. from the explicit or surface level of the data

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2). pp. 77-101. ISSN 1478-0887 Available from: <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11735>

Themes that were identified in reflections

Increased confidence, independent learning	Freedom from pressure of assessments	Personal responsibility for devising own learning goals	Broad view of SLT	Personally invested in learning	Employability
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Three key areas stood out

Freedom from process of assessment:

“Less pressure to pass/fail; you just focus on taking away as much as possible that you may be able to use in future”

“Being assessed when learning can impact negatively on your skills development in that it can create rigidity in practising or applying untested techniques, not wanting to take the risk to try something new when being observed”

“Sense of freedom, improving flexibility , meaning that learning can come from reflection and mistakes made rather than an outcome of assessment which could be detrimental to professional confidence”

Devising own learning goals:

“Allowed me to identify gaps in my own knowledge and experience and work towards exploring new areas”

“I set myself quite stringent tasks in spite of not being assessed”

“Control over my own knowledge gathering”

“You take from it what you want rather than looking specifically for answers to questions”

Broad view of SLT:

“Opportunity to help with activities on the edge of our remit but that can influence how we work”

“Going abroad helped me appreciate the social structure around healthcare in the UK”

“Opportunity to appreciate how other professionals work”

What does transition offer?

- Unique opportunity offered at this university
- A way of thinking about SLT from a fresh perspective
- Take the learning that has happened over the first year, and have time to synthesise it and relate it to different situations, of one's own choice
- A time to engage in accidental learning, no assignment attached, allow oneself the freedom to let learning come to you
- Personal and professional development
- Gain further experience outside formal constraints of the university context – arts, languages, travel, perspective of the service user, charity work
- Beneficial to spend time away from the university at the end of the first year to allow deeper reflection on the knowledge and skills learned, and to contextualise this in real life experiences, undertaken in a spirit of curiosity and inquisitiveness often not prioritised in the university context

Reich, Rooney and Boud (2015)

“Professional practice and the learning entwined is thus highly contextualised, responding to the ‘messiness’, unpredictability and complexity of everyday working” (p.133)

In contrast to the idea that learning is a “thing”, a product, separated from its context

Learning so often happens “outside the box”

Student contribution



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