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Teaching and Learning Professional Reasoning during Paediatric Practice Education

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The process of professional reasoning in occupational therapy is intricate and requires more than simple application of theory (Fleming & Mattingly, 1994). Professional reasoning is evident throughout all stages of client care (Schell, 2009). It is thought to be important in promoting professional competency (Duke, 2004). The teaching and learning of professional reasoning is challenging for educators and students respectively and the study of its educational practices is in its infancy (Schell, Unsworth, & Schell, 2008). Educational experiences during practice education are regarded by many educators as crucial to the development of professional reasoning in students (Paterson & Adamson, 2001). From accounts of practice education placements, students have varied in their achievement of competence in paediatrics compared to other areas of practice and they reported lowered confidence with their professional skills which may signal difficulties learning elements of this area of practice (Mickan, 1995). How best to foster professional reasoning particularly in this area of practice is a pertinent issue for educators and students.

Objectives

This paper reports on a qualitative research project that aimed to understand the teaching and learning of professional reasoning during paediatric practice education placements. It addressed the questions: What strategies do practice educators use to facilitate teaching and learning? What strategies do students use to learn professional reasoning?

Methods

Sixty practice educators and students were recruited over two years. Data collection included a focus group of experienced practice educators together with participant observation and interviews of practice educators and students across three blocks of practice education placements.

Results

Rich descriptions of aspects of reasoning in paediatric practice and how these aspects develop in students across practice education placements were generated. Educational experiences that fostered this development were explored. Each is discussed.

Conclusion and Contribution to Teaching and Learning of Occupational Therapy

Implications for teaching and learning of occupational therapy during both practice based and class based education were considered. This paper provides an overview of the research findings to date.

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