

**Doing, Being and Becoming: Creative qualitative research as a placement experience for final year occupational therapy students**

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**Introduction:** Identifying relevant and suitable practice placement opportunities is an ongoing challenge for all pre-registration Occupational Therapy programmes in the UK. These placement opportunities also need to reflect the increasingly diverse roles and setting in which OTs engage. Contemporary and role emerging placements are becoming a regular, and necessary, feature of any OT course. Research activity is becoming part of many OTs' roles. The research process matches the OT process and utilises many of the core skills of OT, so why has research not been seen as a relevant and suitable setting for practice placements?

**Objectives:** This paper will discuss how involvement as research assistants in qualitative research projects can help students to develop their skills and identities as occupational therapists.

**Description:** **Qualitative** research projects, being undertaken by the University, were identified as a suitable placement opportunity for pairs of occupational therapy students. The projects required the students to work with research participants to tell their stories in a range of creative formats that were meaningful to each participant. The key research themes of choice, empowerment and the use of occupation ensured that the links to occupational therapy and placement learning outcomes were achieved. The students were supported both by a research supervisor and a university-based placement educator.

**Discussion:** The placement was a growth experience for all involved. Students initially struggled with the relationship of research to practice, but as they worked closely with the research participants, their professional identities evolved. Doing everyday activities, collecting qualitative data and being therapists in a research setting facilitated a process of transformational change. From students who knew the theory, they became occupational therapists who lived and articulated all of their underpinning professional values, including that of research as a practice tool.

**Conclusion:** The paper will explore the placement experience from the perspective of students, the placement educator and research supervisor

**Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy:** This paper will outline how qualitative research can be used as a valuable tool in helping students to develop both their skills and their identity as occupational therapists.