Transition: Role duality issues for HCAs undertaking a pre-registration nursing programme.

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Introduction: Professional Doctorate (DProf) Research

- Whereas the PhD develops a professional researcher, the DProf is intended to develop researching professionals (Bourner et al, 2001).

- Conceptually, a DProf is driven by a practice issue or problem, linked to related theory and returned to practice to drive service improvement.

- The DProf candidate needs to demonstrate not only new knowledge, but also improvements to practice or, where this is not the case, to justify the rationale for this.
Background

- National and local nursing shortages
- Need for employers to “Grow Their Own”
- Need for widening-participation
- Cavendish Report (2013) - recommends pre-nursing healthcare experience
- Shape of Caring Review and Regional Review of Pre-registration Nurse Training (Branson, 2014)

- All potentially leading to an increased need for Work-based Learning (WBL) programmes
Research Focus

- Work-based learning pre-registration nursing programme
- Employed as HCAs 3 days per week
- Working as students (supernumerary) 2 days per week
- Student experiences in employed area and alternative areas
- Mentors work as RN/HCA and Mentor/Student - often long-term colleagues
Literature Review

- Little relating to Work-based learning, pre-registration nursing programmes
- Very little, if anything, relating to practice issues - academic focus
- Suggests students struggle to protect role identity and in transitioning from HCA to student
Methodology

- Grounded Practice (part of a Tri-grounded Methodology)
- Findings grounded in practice (rather than theory)
- Intention to drive new practice (as opposed to new theory)
- Theory may derive from the new practice or as a by-product of the research
Data Collection

- One Cohort of students (2nd year)
- Population of 14 students across 6 NHS organisations
- 5 Students (2 x adult, 3 x mental health)
- 2 Mentors (1 x adult, 1 x mental health)
- Multiple common themes linked to Role Duality
Being “Out of their Depth”:

- Difficulty maintaining role boundaries
- Often had to “negotiate” their student role or make compromises
- Mentors did not perceive role boundaries for themselves, but identified need to set clear expectations for students

Sam (Student): “trying to get your head round a completely different role. I think that was possibly, to start off with, the main thing that I’d found difficult has been getting used to being a student nurse and an HCA in the same team.”
Recognise the “Comfort Zone” of their home placement but relish the challenge of alternative placements - allows them to be students

Prior expectations of HCAs affected experiences in familiar home placement

Danny (Student): “External(((ly)) you are treated as a student. That’s how they know you. Um, so they might know you little bits from your work role, but you’re a student there and so they don’t assume that you know things. Whereas in your sort of home, core placement bit, I think there’s the expectation that you already know?”

Jordan (Student): “I was thinking “Really?? Do we need to be going down this route??” ((incredulous)) ….. I don’t think it struck me straight away, it was something that struck me a little way in. I was thinking “Jesus, this is actually quite difficult to manage”, you know, just trying to keep them completely separate.”
“Battling” to be a Student

- Little known about the programme
- Competing for placements with traditional students
- Lack of consistent formal reinforcement from programme provider or employers
- Being “forgotten”

Danny (Student): “...there’s a lot of explaining... Loads of it! ((laughs)) Like “Well, what do you mean you’re a student two days of the week?” and then “What are you today?” “Well how does this work?” And no matter where you go, there’s a lot of that that happens. So it takes a good few weeks before anyone sort of understands.”
Danny (Student): “and you’re almost battling a lot. That’s the best way to describe it. Because you could be there and you’re not on an HCA day, but someone will say “Well, I need you to go and do this” and yes, because you’re the only person that can do this, and it’s how you balance the two up.” .... “you feel a bit like a parrot at times when you just keep repeating “I’m a student!” “I’m a student!” I’m a student!” (laughs)) And then they’ll say “Well what can you do as a student ?””
Better when employed area not used as a student placement - creates 3 areas:

- Employed HCA area
- Home placement
- Alternative placements

Supported by Artefacts:

- Uniforms (formal and informal)
- ID Badges
- Greater pride in appearance

Kim (Mentor): “If you are wearing a HCA uniform then you are seen as an assistant to the HCA work. If you are in a student uniform you are here to learn and you are here to be taught and you are here to have an experience. You are not here as a fundamental assistant to the work.”

Jordan (Student): “you put it on, and it .... You feel different. Um, and I used it for a short period of time to sort of refocus me. To say “Hold on”, you know, it just pulled me back. The boundaries had just gone. And that did help.”
Lack of clear transition leaves students “on the fringes”

Mixed feelings about where they belong (student or HCA)

Influenced by perceptions of their employed area colleagues

Perceived as “HCAs training to be nurses” or “an HCA who’s doing extra”

Jordan (Student): “There’s a part of me that feels I’m exiting that group ((HCAs)). I’m sort of there on the fringes. Not fully a part of .... and it’s not because anyone’s made me feel that way. It’s my own, sort of, not fully a part of .... and it almost feels, and I’m not sure that next year will be even more so, it feels like the beginning of the transition. Sort of into something else ((whispers)).”
Researcher: “If you had to label yourself, would you label yourself as an HCA or a student?”

Danny (Student): “At this moment? HCA.”

Researcher: “HCA?”

Danny (Student): “Mmm. I would. Because I just think that ((sighs)) .... Because you’re working three days a week every week that role is always there and your team expect it.”

Researcher: “That’s always your key role? Your core role?”

Danny (Student): “And your team expect that. There’s always that expectation there. That you have to fit in that role. So you have to see that client group, you have to make sure your work’s done, you have to .... So for me, I find that I have very ((sighs)) little extra time to just, sort of, take a step back in the student role.”
Understanding the Realities of Practice

- Students do not complain about being used as HCAs - recognise competing priorities for mentors
- Trade-off against being treated as a student on HCA days
- Able to negotiate learning opportunities against undertaking HCA duties
- Mentor recognises student offers to help out the team - mentor tries to ensure student can recognise learning from this
- Mentor perceives that students get less stressed when meetings (such as planned formative assessments) get postponed
- Mentor also perceives students are more “self-sufficient”, more solution focussed and less reliant on their mentor
- Student recognises it is up to them to make sure they fit into new areas by (for example) engaging with staff, learning and fitting in with routines
Kris (Student): “Every placement I have a mentor. I don’t specifically aim for them, because that’s just one person... you’ve got a team of ten different views, ideas, experiences, knowledge. You know, I never want to limit myself to just my mentor and one line of thinking.”

Kim (Mentor): “Everything is very self-directed, everything is very motivated from themselves, so they have a different learning motivation... So I think the course is potentially teaching, encouraging, a different way of dealing with nursing challenges.”
Next Steps

- Feedback findings and determine priority for intervention
- Plan next phase and gain approval
- Grounded Action phase
Any Questions?
References

- Duffield, C., Diers, D., O’Brien - Pallas, Linda., Aisbett, C., Roche, M., King, M., Aisbett, K. 2011 Nursing staffing, nursing workload, the work environment and patient outcomes. *Applied Nursing Research*. Nov. 24, 4, p.244 (12)
- Willis Commission on Nursing Education 2012 *Quality with Compassion. The Future of Nursing Education. Report of the Willis Commission on Nursing Education*. London: Royal College of Nursing.