Learning to become a doctor: An occupational performance

Taylor, JA

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Learning To Become A Doctor: An Occupational Performance

Introduction

The process of learning to be a doctor, doing a PhD, can be seen in new ways, when viewed through the spectacles of the occupational scientist. Wilcock has described occupation as doing, being and becoming (Wilcock, 1998). In ‘doing–a-PhD’, an occupational form can be described, as can an occupational performance (Nelson, 1988). An occupation can also be examined for social and personal meaning if we examine the dimensions of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ (Hassellkus, 2002). I who am when engaging in an occupation such as a PhD, relates to who I am becoming through that engagement; occupation helps to shape identity.

The reader is invited to join me in co-constructing an understanding of the experience of an occupation. Each reader brings her or his own perspective to this understanding.

The aim of the study is to construct an understanding of the lived experience of an occupation: ‘doing a PhD’.

Method

Autoethnography is used here to record and explore the experience of an occupation, ‘doing a PhD’. Autoethnography is a methodology which makes the researcher’s own experience the focus of study (Ellis & Bochner, 2003).

Ellis and Bochner would regard the normal focus for such work as turning points in life. As someone interested in occupations, however, I am drawn to study everyday experiences, which can be equally transformative. Autoethnography requires the recording and study of the concrete, detailed minutiae of life – the traces and records that give clues to experience and meaning. This level of personal detail can be examined hermeneutically against broader cultural and societal contexts.

Sources of Data

The concrete traces of my engagement with this occupation include physical artefacts, real and virtual documentary evidence, and personal narrative accounts contained in memory or written records. They include:-

- Work diary
- PhD logbook
- Computer files
- Filing cabinet
- Bookshelf
- Study walls
- Correspondence
- Easel
- Lever arch files
- Desk
- email discussion groups etc

Miscellaneous: wall charts, scraps of paper, telephone messages

Epistemology

I write from a position which assumes that realities are multiple, and that meaning, and the self, are socially constructed. Reality is subject to the interpretation of the researched, the researcher and the reader. I also make an assumption that subjective accounts of experience have much to offer in developing understandings that are of value to researchers and therapists.

How is this research useful?

• it helps the researcher to understand the experience of others
• it may help others to understand their own experiences better. (Ellis & Bochner, 2003)

Generalisation from the findings of this study are not possible in the positivist sense of the word, but what I present here may have some resonance for the reader.

Findings

Some aspects of the exploration are illustrated on the adjacent diagram.

The following factors appear to be closely interwoven with the shaping of my identity through occupation:-

- My past history: who I have been
- My emotional and intellectual reactions and development
- The organization of time and my physical environment
- My position in relation to other people

Acknowledgements

Prof Stephen Kay guides me in this process. Gill Crofts is a fellow traveller. I thank them for helping me to become.

References


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