WHY STUDENTS FAIL AND THE CHALLENGES FOR PRACTICE EDUCATORS

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CONTENTS OF PRESENTATION

• BRIEF INTRODUCTIONS
• PERENNIAL CONCERNS ABOUT PRACTICE LEARNING
• JUST DON’T MENTION THE F-WORD!!!!!
• WHY STUDENTS FAIL SOCIAL WORK PLACEMENTS
• THE CHALLENGES
• THE PROCESS IN BRIEF
• CONCLUDING COMMENTS
YOU

• Introduce yourself to someone you don’t know in this room?
• Tell them your name, role and reason or attending today.
• Share a “secret”, i.e. tell the person something interesting about you that not many people know.

ME

• Reader in Social Work.
• Long standing research interest in practice learning, struggling and failing students and suitability.
• Former C&F social worker, practice educator and play therapist.
BRIEF INTRODUCTIONS

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I am a Secret Baker!

• READER IN SOCIAL WORK
• LONG STANDING RESEARCH INTEREST IN PRACTICE LEARNING, STRUGGLING AND FAILING STUDENTS AND SUITABILITY.
• FORMER C&F SOCIAL WORKER, PRACTICE EDUCATOR AND PLAY THERAPIST

I am a Secret Baker!
PERENNIAL CONCERNS ABOUT PRACTICE LEARNING

• Quantity and quality of placements
• Rarity of placement failure in UK
• An alleged “Fail to Fail” in practice learning settings
• Students being passed inappropriately
PERENNIAL CONCERNS ABOUT PRACTICE LEARNING

• Quantity and quality of placements

Most recently raised in Croisdale-Appleby and Narey reports:

• For example, Narey concerned about non traditional placements not preparing students adequately for statutory social work
PERENNIAL CONCERNS ABOUT PRACTICE LEARNING

See for example (Coulshed, 1980; Hughes and Heycox, 1996; Raymond, 2000; Basnet and Sheffield, 2010)

• Rarity of placement failure in UK
  • Failure rate of 2-3% since CQSW, DipSW through to Degree (Finch, 2005)...
  • ....which it is claimed, is evidence of lax standards of assessment
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PERENNIAL CONCERNS ABOUT PRACTICE LEARNING

Dominant in nursing (see for example Duffy, 2004; Shapton, 2006; Rutkowski, 2007; Lawson, 2010; Jervis & Tilki, 2011).....

• An alleged “Fail to Fail” in practice learning settings

.....And crept into social work (See for example, Shapton, 2006, Basnett & Sheffield, 2010; Finch & Taylor, 2013)
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Although no empirical evidence this is the case however!

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PERENNIAL CONCERNS ABOUT PRACTICE LEARNING

“Specific concerns have been raised about the . . . robustness and quality of assessment, with some students passing the social work degree who are not competent or suitable to practise on the frontline”. (SWTF, Interim Report, 2009, p. 24)

• Students being passed inappropriately
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Is practice learning failing?
JUST DON’T MENTION THE F WORD!!!!!
FAIL FAILURE FAILING FAIL FAILING FAILURE

1) SOMETHING YOU HAVE FAILED AT IN THE PAST (FOR EXAMPLE, O’LEVEL MATHS, DRIVING TEST, RELATIONSHIP)

2) HOW DID IT MAKE YOU FEEL AT THE TIME? (USE ANY LANGUAGE YOU LIKE, OR DRAWINGS TO FULLY CONVEY THE FEELINGS)

3) HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT?

4) PASS PAPER TO ME (WILL COME BACK TO LATER – DON’T PUT NAME ON IT!)
“What might indicate a student is failing?”

“I don’t know…but I’ll know it when I see it…that’s a hard question.”

Me interviewing a practice educator

Practice educator interviewee in 2010 research
SO WHY DO STUDENTS STRUGGLE IN, OR FAIL PLACEMENTS?

• Write a list of 5 signs, symptoms, traits or behaviours, ” that may suggest a student is struggling or failing on placement.

• Share your list with person next to you – any similarities or differences?
SO WHY DO STUDENTS STRUGGLE IN, OR FAIL PLACEMENTS?

- Student blames other for own mistakes
- Lack of professionalism
- Lacks analytical skills
- Not following clear and direct instructions
- Dishonest
- Avoidance
- Can’t reflect
- Defensive
- Poor time keeping
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of enthusiasm & motivation
- Off sick
- Cannot see complexity in situations or scenarios
- Concerning value base
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- Lack of preparation
- Too needy (feel like social working the student)
- Avoiding supervision
- Lack of preparation
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Too needy (feel like social working the student)
But!!!!!

• Some of these behaviours, signs, symptoms, or traits, may feel subjective and rather judgmental
• Some of these may be therefore be harder to document, or evidence.
• It is expected that students will make mistakes.
• Knowing what the “signs” are does not always mean practice educators recognise them or address the issue appropriately
• What is good social work practice is a matter of debate.
• Need to think about the emotional dynamics.
• PEs and placements can “let down” students
SO A FAILING STUDENT MIGHT REMAIN STATIC IN A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT AREAS AND MAY HAVE MOVED LITTLE IN FOUR KEY AREAS.

1) IN THEIR DEPENDENCE ON SUPERVISION
2) IN THEIR RESISTANCE TO CHANGE – HOSTILE OR PASSIVE RATHER THAN PARTICIPATORY IN LEARNING EXPERIENCE.
3) IN ABILITY TO RELATE THE FACTS THEY ARE LEARNING TO THE NEEDS AND DEMANDS OF THE SITUATION.
4) THEIR EARLY CONFUSIONS MAY DEEPEN AND EXTEND IN MORE AREAS OF THEIR WORK.
THE CHALLENGES
WHY IT IS DIFFICULT TO FAIL? (WHAT THE LITERATURE SAYS)

• PES NOT USING COMPETENCY MODEL OF ASSESSMENT APPROPRIATELY (KEMSHALL, 1993; ERAUT, 1994; SHARDOw AND DOEL, 1996; FURNESS AND GILLIGAN, 2004; SHAPTON, 2006)


• PES NOT ADEQUATELY SUPPORTED BY AGENCY AND/OR HEI (SHARP AND DANBURY, 1999; FINCH, 2004B; VACHA-HAASE ET AL, 2004)

• ROLE STRAIN OR CONFUSION (FISHER, 1990; PROCTOR, 1993; OWENS, 1995; COWBURN ET AL, 2000, DUFFY, 2004)


• RULE OF OPTIMISM (VACHA-HAASE, ET AL 2004; FINCH, 2005)

• HOPE THAT THINGS “SORT THEMSELVES OUT” WITHOUT INTERVENTION (GOOD ET AL, 1995; HOFFMAN ET AL. 2004)

LIMITED (BUT GROWING INTERNATIONAL AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH BASE ABOUT THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT

- Bogo et al. (2007) – Failing students causes value conflicts for practice educators.
- Gizara and Forest (2004) – “I think that it’s an extremely emotional, gut-wrenching kind of experience…I don’t think it feels good on any level.”
- Basnett and Sheffield (2010) – Experience of failing student a negative one.
- Schaub and Dalrymple (2013) Practice educators reported feeling stressed, isolated and did not feel supported.
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• BOGO AT AL (2007) – FAILING STUDENTS CAUSES VALUE CONFLICTS FOR PRACTICE EDUCATORS.

• GIZARA AND FOREST (2004) – "I THINK THAT IT'S AN EXTREMELY EMOTIONAL, GUT-WRENCHING KIND OF EXPERIENCE…I DON'T THINK IT FEELS GOOD ON ANY LEVEL."

• BASNETT AND SHEFFIELD (2010) – EXPERIENCE OF FAILING STUDENT A NEGATIVE ONE

• SCHaub AND DALRYMPLE (2013) – PRACTICE EDUCATORS REPORTED FEELING STRESSED, ISOLATED AND DID NOT FEEL SUPPORTED.

• FINCH (2010) FOUND THE EXPERIENCE CAUSED RANGE OF CHALLENGING EMOTIONS

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SHAME
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- FINCH (2010) FOUND THE EXPERIENCE CAUSED RANGE OF CHALLENGING EMOTIONS: GUILT, SHAME, ANXIETY, FRUSTRATION, STRESS, IMMobilisation, FAILING.
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  - Guilt
  - Anger
  - Shame
  - Anxiety
  - Frustration
  - Stress
  - Immobile

Practice Educator
- Sadness
- Shame
- Anger
- Helplessness
- Persecuted
- I don’t know what to do!!!

Student
- Projective Identification
- Guilt
- Not my fault
- Persecuted
- I don’t know what to do!!!
THE PROCESS IN BRIEF

• RECOGNISING (AND ACKNOWLEDGING) THE STUDENT IS STRUGGLING.

• IDENTIFYING THE AREAS, CONCERNS, DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OR ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED (AND LINK THEM TO THE PCF)

• MAKING THESE CONCERNS/ISSUES EXPLICIT TO THE STUDENT

• INTERACTING IN CREATIVE/DIFFERENT WAYS TO SUPPORT THE STUDENT TO ADDRESS THOSE AREAS OF CONCERN/DEVELOPMENTS.

• REVIEWING TO WHAT EXTENT THE ISSUES HAVE BEEN ADDRESSED AND HOW FAR THE CHANGES MADE MEET THE REQUIRED STANDARDS.
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Need to acknowledge and reflect on the emotional climate and think about what is being communicated.
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This should be the process for all students.

... need to acknowledge and reflect on the emotional climate and think about what is being communicated...
COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS
(BEDDOE AND DAVYS, 2016)

• CONVERSATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH SOME SORT OF EMOTION

• PARTICIPANTS MAY FEEL ASHAMED, APPREHENSIVE, UNCOMFORTABLE, ANGRY & EMBARRASSED

• CONVERSATIONS MAY BE CONFLICTED BY INTRODUCING DIFFERENT IDEAS, VALUES OR BEHAVIOURS

• CONVERSATIONS MAY CAUSE CONFLICT

• NEED TO THINK ABOUT THOSE OBSTACLES IN HAVING SUCH CONVERSATIONS
THINGS TO THINK ABOUT (ADAPTED FROM MACLEAN 2012)

• ARE THE EXPECTED STANDARDS SET AND CLEARLY DOCUMENTED?
• DOES THE PRACTITIONER (IN THIS CASE THE STUDENT) UNDERSTAND THE STANDARDS?
• IN WHAT WAYS ARE THE STANDARDS NOT BEING MET?
• WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR THE STANDARDS NOT BEING MET?
• WHAT SHOULD THE STUDENT DO TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES?
• WHAT SHOULD I DO?
RESEARCH FINDINGS (FINCH, 2010):

PES WHO FIND THE PROCESS OF FAILING “EASIER”

• DO NOT SEE THE ASSESSOR/NURTURER ROLE AS CONFLICTUAL – CAN ARTICULATE THEIR ROLE

• HAVE A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR GATEKEEPING ROLE.

• HAVE CLEAR EXPECTATIONS OF A STUDENT, I.E. THAT THEY ARE A RESPONSIBLE ADULT LEARNER WITH “THEIR PART TO PLAY”.

• SEPARATION OF STUDENT WORK FROM THEIR WORK.

• HAVE A SOPHISTICATED UNDERSTANDING OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS – GO BEYOND TICK BOX APPROACH

• USE “FEELINGS” REFLECTIVELY TO HELP UNDERSTAND AND AID THE SITUATION.

• UNDERSTAND THAT FAILING STUDENTS ARE AN INEVITABLE “PART OF THE JOB”

• STUDENT FAILURE NOT FELT AS PES FAILURE. (SEE FINCH & TAYLOR, 2013)

• OVER REP OF AMPSS IN ABOVE GROUP?
CONCLUDING COMMENTS

• WORKING WITH A STRUGGLING OR FAILING STUDENT IS AN EMOTIONALLY PAINFUL EXPERIENCE.

• STUDENT WILL BE PROJECTING DIFFICULT AND CHALLENGING FEELINGS ONTO YOU.

• BUT I WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO BE REFLECTIVE AND CONSIDER THESE FEELINGS AS A FORM OF COMMUNICATION.

• ALSO NEED TO CONSIDER DYNAMICS CREATED WITH THE UNIVERSITY – OFTEN CAN BE SPLITTING OR UNIVERSITY GET BLAMED.

• NEED TO DOCUMENT, ADDRESS CONCERNS IN TIMELY AND EXPLICIT FASHION (DON’T IGNORE).

• SEEK SUPPORT (COLLEAGUES, UNIVERSITY ETC)
USEFUL READING?

• FINCH, J. (2017) SUPPORTING STRUGGLING STUDENTS ON PLACEMENT: A PRACTICE GUIDE, POLICY PRESS, BRISTOL

• FINCH, J AND POLETTI, A. (2016) ITALIAN AND ENGLISH PRACTICE EDUCATORS EXPERIENCES OF WORKING WITH STRUGGLING OR FAILING STUDENTS IN PRACTICE PLACEMENTS IN TAYLOR, I ET AL (EDS) ROUTLEDGE INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION, ROUTLEDGE, LONDON

• FINCH, J. (2015) "RUNNING WITH THE FOX AND HUNTING WITH THE HOUNDS" SOCIAL WORK TUTOR EXPERIENCES OF WORKING WITH STRUGGLING OR FAILING STUDENTS, BRITISH JOURNAL OF SOCIAL WORK, 45 (7) PP2124-2141


• FINCH, J, SCHauB, J & DALRYMPLE, R. (2013) PROJECTIVE IDENTIFICATION AND THE FEAR OF FAILING: MAKING SENSE OF PRACTICE EDUCATORS' EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES OF FAILING SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS IN PRACTICE LEARNING SETTINGS, JOURNAL OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE,


• FINCH, J AND TAYLOR, I. (2013) THE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ASSESSING A STRUGGLING OR FAILING SOCIAL WORK STUDENT IN PRACTICE LEARNING SETTINGS, SPECIAL EDITION – FIELD EDUCATION, SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION, 32 (2) PP:244-258 DOI: 10.1080/02615479.2012.720250

• FINCH, J (2010) FINCH) CAN'T FAIL, WON'T FAIL - WHY PRACTICE ASSESSORS FIND IT DIFFICULT TO FAIL SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PRACTICE ASSESSORS' EXPERIENCES OF ASSESSING MARGINAL OR FAILING SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS. DOCTORAL THESIS, UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX. AVAILABLE FREE: HTTP://SRO.SUSSEX.AC.UK/2370


• SHARP , M. & DANBURY, H. (1999) THE MANAGEMENT OF FAILING DIPSW STUDENTS - ACTIVITIES AND EXERCISES TO PREPARE PRACTICE TEACHERS FOR WORK WITH FAILING STUDENTS, ALDERSHOT, ASHGATE.