The Direct Observation

The Focal Point of The Practice Educator Assessment
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Congruence

The direct observation becomes the point of contact between student and practice educator where 'perception' of performance becomes reality.

This can create congruence between the student's perception of themselves and practice educator's opinion or a mismatch can occur.

How can we iron out subjectivity?
Timing and Journey

When to complete the direct observation is worth considering:
- completing this too early can cause anxiety to students and may be counter productive (induction)
- before the mid point seems appropriate/ an agreed point
- the 'journey travelled', from an assessment point of view is effective for comparison and development
- mid way point informs the developmental second phase of placement, what is to come and what is expected

As the placement progresses though there are higher stakes present as the journey through the placement continues particularly within final placements

Further on in the placement timeline, the higher the expectations are, therefore this can become more challenging towards the end particularly when further development is not evidenced
Concept of 'good enough'

- In my article, (Edmonds, 2016) I discuss the challenge of the good enough benchmark and how this is actually evidenced.

Is it easier to assess in Placement one as the expectations are lower?

- There are higher stakes present in the final placement - failure decisions are challenging. Current research (Finch and Taylor, 2013) suggests there is an impact on PE of failure and when PE make fail recommendations this is aligned to concepts of professional integrity (Finch 2010).

Formative assessment (low stakes) or summative assessment (high stakes)
The template for DO using PCF framework does not offer a pass/fail criteria (Focus group request for participants who might like to discuss further, please sign up)

- However it could be argued that all assessment begins with summative assessment and that formative is merely summative plus feedback (Taras 2005), the challenge is how this is recorded on the current templates used.

As an off site PE, direct observation with service users is crucial however there are some discrepancies within this as often meetings or presentations are also used without service users being present.

- What would a 40% (good enough on an academic scale as part of marking criteria) interaction with service user look like and from a service user perspective would this be good enough?
Student evaluations

I have been an off site PE for 7 years (16 students in total) with a range of HEI providers

All placements in the voluntary sector within a range of settings such as treatment services with adults with severe learning disabilities, asylum seekers outreach and refugees advocacy, criminal justice substance misuse services

Courses MSW, BASW, BSC Applied Nursing (Learning Disability) and SW

Evaluations taken place after assessments have been completed and all reports completed

Out of 16 students, 15 passed and 1 failed final placement

It was through the experience of recommending a failure decision which influenced my thinking in considering the role of the direct observation within the assessment.
Evalative Comments

Comments on the direct observation specifically -

**Q How did you experience the Direct Observation process**

'I always felt nervous when I am observed however I found it easy to speak about the difficulties I had and my strengths'

'To begin with I found it to be a difficult process but after the first couple I did find it helpful and used the sessions in a constructive manner'

'I was observed doing 1 to 1 sessions, I found it difficult but appreciated the opportunity to reflect on my own practice'

'It was very useful. Chrissie made it as simple as possible. I felt it was a positive thing being used to help me rather than to catch me out or discredit me'

'Quite difficult in fact it felt harder to be natural, also nerves possibly affected how I performed'

'Of the direct observations undertaken I don’t think I wholly showed the practice educator my abilities and it was difficult to arrange the observations'
Further Evaluative Comments

These comments relate to the feedback session after the Direct Observation

Q Was the feedback and reflection session after the direct observation useful?

'Reflection sessions helped my awareness of things I do unconsciously. They certainly provided food for thought and allowed me to build on my practice'

'It was incredibly useful, I felt very lucky to be able to identify my own areas for improvement'

'Yes it allowed me to think about what I did well and what I found difficult'

'Yes it was always very in depth and alerted me to many issues that I would not have considered'
Findings

• Whilst the Direct Observation can be challenging for students, its importance is vital and significant as part of the assessment

• The process produces anxiety, challenges with arranging it from an off-site practice educator perspective, contrasting evidence about this (Humphrey 2007)

• It plays a key role within the assessment of recommending pass/fail

• There remains still some ambiguity in whether pass/fail should be explicit on the template and how to assess this, which is in part due to the challenges present in setting a baseline standard therefore in my experience consultation with service users and other colleagues would be essential (proposed focus group)

• Whilst consultation with service users after the direct observation is key, there are issues here in relation to empowerment as it can depend on the statutory issues for themselves and compliance with agency (Shennan, 1998)

Fishbowl group questions
Question 1
What type of situations do you think provide the best evidence of practice skills for the direct observation?
Question 2
What do you think students want from the direct observation?
Question 3
How do you actually assess whether a direct observation is good enough?
Thanks for your participation!
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