Having “Courageous Conversations” with students struggling or failing in practice learning settings.

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Aims of the Workshop

1) To understand the emotional challenges practice educators may face when working with struggling or failing students
2) To develop skills and confidence in having “courageous conversations” with social work students in practice learning settings
3) To consider the emotional process at play and their consequences
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Aims of the Workshop

BUT FIRST!!!!!!!
INTRODUCTIONS

ME

• Social work educator for 15 years.
• Long standing research interest in all things practice learning - with a focus on failure
• Currently writing about social work, PREVENT and radicalisation (with David McKendrick).
• Former C&F social worker, play therapist and practice educator. I am a Secret Viking!!!

YOU

• Name
• Where you work and role?
• Any experience of working with a struggling or failing students?
• Tell us a “secret” about yourself that no one else will know!
Limited (but growing International and Multidisciplinary research base about the emotional impact

• 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
• Practice educators felt under intense public and critical surveillance
• Felt threatened by students – possible implications if complaints made
• Lack of support from university and tutors
• Intense feelings of isolation contributing to feeling overwhelmed with situation
• Frustrated

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- Schaub and Dalrymple (2013) – practice educators reported feeling stressed, isolated and did not feel supported.
- Finch (2010) found the experience caused a range of challenging emotions:
  - Guilt
  - Anger
  - Shame
  - Anxiety
  - Frustration
  - Immobilisation
  - Stress
Courageous Conversations
(Beddoe and Davys, 2016)

- Or “saying it as it is”! (Jo Finch)
- 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
Role Play Time !!!!!!
Reflective Activity

• What did you find difficult/challenging about the role plays
• What range of emotions did you experience?
• Why do you think these emotions emerged?
• What did they tell you?
• What new insights has the exercise revealed between you and the “student”?
• Anything else?
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Emotional Processes

- Finch, Schaub and Dalrymple (2013) argued that practice educators were mobilised by persecutory projective processes…
- …which immobilises thinking and reflection
- Compound failure – ignored initial misgivings and then internalised students failures as their own (ibid).
- Practice educators overwhelmed with students difficult of failure…
- And involves unconsciously own experiences of failing –
- Students previous failing issues may also be reawakened.
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Which all can result in:
1) Not following the correct procedures
2) Burying head in sand and hope it gets better on its own
3) Doing too much for the student, i.e. rescuing them
4) Not addressing the concerns explicitly or in a timely fashion
5) Feeling angry and hostile towards the student or university
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Failing to Fail the student

Due process not being carried out (can't uphold fail decision)

Poor quality assessment reports which means can't uphold fail decision

Abruptly terminated placements
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)
Learning Check

• Write down three things you have learnt, thought about or reflected on during this session?

• Write down three things you might now do differently as a practice educator as a result of this workshop

• Any final thoughts or comments
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.

• Go forth and have “courageous conversations”
Bibliography


• Schaub