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From the Battle to the Pantomime: Constructing the occupational therapist through metaphorical stories.

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Introduction: This paper contributes to a debate on occupational therapy practice, professionalism and professional identity within a modernising National Health Service (NHS) in the United Kingdom. Workforce redesign is reconfiguring traditional professional structures and roles. This paper develops a narrative understanding of the changes by focussing on the experiences of occupational therapists working within shifting NHS organisations.

Objective: The aim is to illuminate how professional identities can be constructed and understood through the use of metaphorical stories.

Method: The empirical research was conducted over a 12 month period (April 2006 - March 2007) across 5 NHS organisations in England. There were 13 participants. Each participant was interviewed three times over the year and was asked to keep a monthly diary of critical incidents. The data was analysed within a framework based on a Foucauldian discourse analysis (Kendall and Wickham 1998) combined with theories of narrative identity (Crosseley 2002).

Results: Five metaphorical stories were identified:- the battle, the love story, the magazine, the journey and the pantomime. Each participant told local and specific stories on the theme of NHS modernisation and occupational therapy working lives, to characterise how the reforms become lived and known in occupational therapy practice.

Conclusion: This paper illustrates how the participants draw on the available subject positions within the metaphorical stories to construct themselves as occupational therapists, and how this process is shaped by the discourses in which they are situated.

Benefits: Not only the narration but the recognition of these stories is crucial to both collective and individual professional identities. Metaphorical stories are a compact, easily remembered way to communicate the complex processes of professional identity construction; and can serve as an invitation to see the world anew.

References

Crosseley, M.L. (2002) *Introducing Narrative Psychology: Self, Trauma and the Construction of Meaning*. Buckingham. Open University Press.

Kendall, G., Wickham, G.M. (1998) *Using Foucault's Methods (Introducing Qualitative Methods series)*. London. Sage Publications.