Resistance, paradox and professional identity in speech-language pathologists' perceptions of working with assistants.

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B Sp Path

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Management

University of Newcastle

March 2018

This research was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship

Declarations

Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision.

The thesis contains published scholarly work of which I am a co-author. For each such work, a written statement endorsed by the other authors, attesting to my contribution to the joint work has been included.

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo

Signed: **Dated:**

(Rachael O'Brien)

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank my fabulous supervisory team, Rebecca Mitchell, Nicole Byrne and Alison Ferguson. You are brilliant and empathetic women who have continually and generously inspired, consoled, taught, supported and guided me through the process of completing my PhD. You have opened doors to opportunities previously unknown, and maintained your grace and sense of humour throughout. I've so enjoyed the opportunity of completing my PhD – you've all taught me so much, and I am so very grateful for the good fortune of working with you all.

For my wonderful Mum and Dad. Thank you for fostering a deep love of reading for longer than I can remember, and for valuing learning so highly. Thank you for looking after the boys which allowed me to work, as well as for meals-on-wheels, cups of tea, listening to paper ideas, and for taking pride in what I was trying to achieve. Mum, thanks for always providing the 'soft option' and Dad for understanding my 'twisted little academic bent'. I absolutely couldn't have done this without both of you, and your never-ending love and support. This thesis is as much yours as it is mine.

For my gorgeous little boys – Oliver and Dougal – who don't know life without a thesis in it. You are the most wonderful, energetic and hilarious boys, and I love you more than words can express. You both make me so happy every single day. I look forward to watching you grow and learn new and exciting things. But for now, I am thrilled that we can have much more time together reading stories, climbing trees and playing Lego!

For my lovely husband Sean. I will always credit you with my staying in the PhD program in the first instance. Your encouraging words "what do you want to teach our sons?" enabled me to commit to what felt at the time, to be impossible. You were right – it wasn't. Thank you for your brilliant brain, your quiet strength, and your unwavering faith in me. Thanks for always being my team. I'm thrilled at this point to be looking to our future together – we four.

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1 List of publications included in the thesis

Paper 1 (Pilot)

O'Brien, R., Byrne, N., Mitchell, R., & Ferguson, A. (2013). Rural speech-language pathologists' perceptions of working with allied health assistants. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 15*(6), 613-622. DOI: 10.3109/17549507.2012.759623.

Paper 2 (Perceptions)

O'Brien, R., Mitchell, R., & Byrne, N. (2013). Speech-language pathologists' perceptions of working with allied health assistants. Reconstructing the full employment narrative (incorporating the 14th Path to Full Employment Conference and the 19th National Conference on Unemployment). December 2013, Newcastle, Australia.

Paper 3 (Resistance)

O'Brien, R., Mitchell, R., & Byrne, N. (2014). Resistance to a workforce redesign and perceived professional identity threat. 9th Organization Studies Summer Workshop: Resistance, resisting and resisters in and around organizations. May 2014, Corfu, Greece.

Paper 4 (Paradox)

O'Brien, R., Mitchell, R., & Byrne, N. (2018). Paradoxical perceptions towards the introduction of assistants in speech-language pathology and potential impact on consumers. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences, 32*(1), 117–127. https://doi.org/10.1111/scs.12437.

Please note, this paper was first published online 19th May 2017. It is referenced in *Paper 5* and *additional contributions 2* and *4* as (O'Brien, Mitchell & Byrne, 2017).

Paper 5 (Professional identity)

O'Brien, R., Mitchell, R., & Byrne, N. (Accepted). The role of the speech-language pathology professional identity as a response to a workforce redesign. *Journal of Clinical Practice in Speech-Language Pathology 20*(2).

Paper 6 (Value added)

O'Brien, R., Byrne, N., & Mitchell, R. (under review). What value can assistants bring to speech-language pathology practice? Under review with International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology

2 Additional contributions included in the thesis

The following additional contributions are referred to in the thesis. They were designed to increase the reach of the research by making it widely available within and outside of the speech-language pathology profession and ensure communication with practitioners.

Additional contribution 1: Assistant literature review

O'Brien, R. (2010). Rural speech pathologists' perceptions of working with allied health assistants: A pilot study. Maitland. Written paper submitted to the Institute of Rural Clinical Services and Teaching (IRCST).

Additional contribution 2: Poster presentation

O'Brien, R., Mitchell, R., & Byrne, N. (2017). Speech pathologists' perceptions of working with assistants and consumer focus. Speech Pathology Australia National Conference - working and investing in future innovations, May 2017. Sydney, Australia.

Additional contribution 3: Oral presentation

O'Brien, R., Mitchell, R., & Byrne, N. (2017). Speech-language pathologists' paradoxical perceptions of working with assistants and consumer focus. 12th National Allied Health Conference, August 2017. Sydney Australia.

Additional contribution 4: Poster presentation

O'Brien, R., Mitchell, R., & Byrne, N. (2017). Speech pathologists' professional identity in response to working with assistants. Speech Pathology Australia National Conference - working and investing in future innovations, May 2017. Sydney, Australia.

3 Additional publications

The following additional publications are relevant to the thesis and are referred to in discussion but are not included in it.

Additional Paper 1

Mitchell, R., Boyle, B., O'Brien, R., Malik, A., Tian, K., Parker, V., Giles, M., Joyce, P., Chiang, V. (2016). Balancing cognitive diversity and mutual understanding in multidisciplinary teams. *Health Care Management review 8/2016.*

Additional Paper 2

Byrne, N., & O'Brien, R. (2017). Speech Language Pathology students' perceptions of factors related to entry and retention for Aboriginal students (Manuscript submitted for publication)

4 Abstract

Over the past decade, research has been emerging regarding assistants in speech-language pathology, particularly in the UK, US and Canada, however, there is minimal information within NSW to support the implementation for the profession. The limited literature available for assistants in speech-language pathology has indicated some reluctance within the profession to utilise this workforce, despite recognition of some of the potential benefits. Similarly, most of this research has not directly investigated the principles underlying the perceptions of professionals. The present research investigates speech-language pathologists' (SLPs') perceptions of working with assistants and focuses on how these perceptions were formed. It examines factors such as consumer focus and the role of the larger health organisation in the formation of such perceptions. While assistants are utilised in the profession internationally and in some states of Australia, it is a workforce redesign that is yet to be embraced as usual practice by all SLPs. A preliminary step in resolving continuing ambivalence over assistants in speech-language pathology is to develop a greater understanding of how SLPs perceive assistants, how this impacts upon their own perceptions of self in terms of professional identity, roles and value within the organisation, and how the implementation of assistants may contribute to professionals, the profession, as well as to consumers and the community.

This qualitative study aimed to provide rich subjective accounts of professional perceptions of a workforce redesign, with a focus on perceptions of individual experiences. The study comprises data from in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 speech-language pathologists from various local health districts (LHDs) across NSW, Australia. The interviews collected information from practising SLPs and asked about experience and perceptions of working with assistants, role, as well as feelings of value within the health organisation and community. The participants were SLPs with between 1-25+ years' experience, currently working in NSW, Australia. Participants were purposively sampled which allowed a range of clinical caseloads, work patterns, age and clinical experience. The principles of interpretative phenomenological analysis were employed to allow deep exploration of perceptions and experiences, as well as principles derived from specific

relevant frameworks from Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) and Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005).

The findings of this research emerged from deep analysis of interviews. The research finds that participants highly value their position as a speech-language pathologist and use this as a marker for their own as well as other groups' status within the larger organisation. This research presents participants' perceptions of a workforce change involving the introduction of assistants in an area without current policies guiding their utilisation. It illustrates how SLPs not currently working with assistants may view the workforce change, and how working with assistants may impact on their understanding of their current role and status within the organisation. This research emphasises the need for greater understanding of the construction and maintenance of professional identities in a changing workforce.

The findings of this study suggest that while working with assistants is a workforce model which has benefits for individual clinicians, professions, consumers, and organisations, real or perceived professional identity threat is a significant source of resistance to such change. Similarly, the findings suggest that a major source of professional identity formation amongst participants includes their relationships and advocacy role with their patients and clients, who are often perceived as vulnerable. These relationships are perceived to be threatened by the introduction of assistants, and as a result, participants perceived that the profession was at risk of losing the strongly held value of consumer focus.

For this thesis, empirical research has been undertaken into SLPs' perceptions regarding assistants. The findings have been disseminated through six papers (as well as four additional contributions including literature review, oral presentations, and posters). This thesis integrates the papers and research output into the overall change management and identity literature and proposes future planning strategies for professions and organisations.

The findings of this research have the potential to inform future workforce planning regarding the assistant workforce across health professions; what factors precede resistance, what resistance may be expected, and how to mitigate such resistance. Additionally, it discusses the potential for professions and professional organisations to be more, not less

inclusive of a vocational tier of their workforce and identifies that an assistant workforce provides a non-traditional pathway into professions. This, in turn, has the potential to provide greater workforce diversity, allowing better reflexivity and responsivity to consumer need.

5 Glossary of terms

Acronym	Definition
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AH	Allied Health
AHA	Allied Health Assistant
AHP	Allied Health Professional
AHPRA	Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ASHA	American Speech-Hearing Association
HNE	Hunter New England
HWA	Health Workforce Australia
IJSLP	International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
JCPSLP	Journal of Clinical Practice in Speech-Language Pathology

LHD	Local Health District
LNR NEAF	Low and Negligible Risk National Ethics Application Form
NEAF	National Ethics Application Form
NSW	New South Wales
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OT	Occupational Therapist
OTA	Occupational Therapy Australia
PT	Physiotherapist
RCSLT	Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
RN	Registered Nurse
SJCS	Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences
SLP	Speech-Language Pathologist
SP	Speech Pathologist
SPA	Speech Pathology Australia