

Heidi de Quincey

Responding to the Voice – a therapist’s role in change

Heidi gave us a fascinating insight into the decisions of a speech and language therapist when working with a client and their voice.

There are all the usual ‘factual’ things to consider when assessing someone – health aspects from medication to mucus, environmental factors such as their occupation and vocal load, psychological attitude such as their personality and expectations – all this must be weighed up alongside the nature of their vocal use or voice problem. A therapist is obliged to make a record of the voice – an audio or video recording, or to complete perceptual scales – to have a baseline from which to work, and then to repeat and employ to evidence change. Over and above these factors is the overlay of the client’s age (the voice differs throughout the stages of life), and additionally the investigation into what is going on for the client at the time at which they come to therapy. Do they want to be there and what do they understand? It is veritable detective work.

The relationship between the client and the therapist is key – that connection will be the most important aspect about therapy and about the client’s change. A therapist’s aims may differ from those of the client to a greater or lesser extent but we have a duty to look after their voice and explain as much as possible. An initial aim of the therapist will be to raise the client’s awareness, and to equip them to learn and change – in order that therapy is no longer required and they don’t need to return! Every voice is individual and personal, a fingerprint, and the therapist’s professional response to the voice in front of them will have a life-changing effect on that client.

As a speech and language therapist myself, I found it refreshing and reaffirming to be reminded by Heidi’s talk that there is much that we do within a therapy session and throughout a run of assessment and treatment; therapy of course involves amelioration of a voice but also the constant fine-tuning of the client-therapist relationship within the rehabilitation process.

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