

Practitioner answers to the professional development workshop

Transcript Time 24.12

Introduction Time: 00.00 - 00.14.

Gary: Welcome Eoghann MacColl from Centrestage.

Eoghann: Thanks Gary how are you?

Gary: I am very well thank you.

Critical question 1: 00.15 – 05.18

Gary: Just some critical questions about the video we watched with the training with the professional development session with your staff. Can I ask you first, why would you say that this is an assets approach to staff development?

Eoghann: Well here at Centrestage we use a strengths based approach where every individual in the team would be playing to their strengths. We would be looking to have a real mixture of professional people in the team at Connect in Centrestage. So their identity and who they are and the strengths that they bring is crucial to staff development. You know none of us are the same. We are all playing to those strengths. We are very much individuals, but within that we are hoping that there is a crossover and there is a professionalism where we can share and relate stories and by having all of that we can then improve the way we engage with the young people that we see and can capture some of the differences. You know they are all individual people too and they have come from different places too and they have different strengths as well. So we want to try and be able to try and reach those kids and to reach those people and their families too. So having that assets based approach within the team is really crucial to making that happen [01.42].

Gary: And the relationship dynamic with working with the young people who come here it reaches out through that does it (the asset-based approach used to reach people through realising their strengths and their value) [01.51]?

Eoghann: I would say it does. I mean again it is everything that we do, in Connect it is about relationships. It is about meeting the person on the level as an individual you know on first name terms: Where you are from? How you are feeling? Are you hungry? You know, what is your passion? What do you like to do? So that is innately within our team. So you know being who you are and being proud of who you are and shouting from the roof tops about what your talents and skills and abilities are, are what we are all about. You know we do not want to talk about what people cannot do. We want to talk about things that they can do and that means the staff team. If the staff team do not have that then we are never going to reach those young [people] who maybe have issues with self-esteem, and self-regulation and lack of confidence – all things that are inherent in parts of society in Western Europe, sadly. So it is how we reach those people. So we have to be constantly driving forward for the best and thinking positive all of the time. So you know that is not to say that we cannot reflect on who we are and see ways that we can improve on that, but we have to keep that inherent drive towards that positive outcome all of the time [03.04].

Gary: As we have seen in the previous video one of the ways to do that is through music and another way to do that is through art and you do that yourself. You work with young people and make connections through art. Could you speak about that a little bit about that and how it works [03.19]?

Eoghann: Certainly, I mean my background as a visual artist means that that is my language that is the way I communicate with people as an artists but also as an educator and a facilitator. I think that there is something really nice, if you set the project that we set, [and] is very adaptable and is very attainable and reachable for everybody because there is no right and wrong way to present an image of yourself, or your community. It is how you see it and I think the skill from the team, well from my perspective, would be that I would have to, you know, frame that project and make it come alive for those people at a level that they can understand. I worked in a prison centre for five years myself and I worked with a lot of men who maybe would not have found drawing and painting to be their first mode of communication. But it is very interesting if you level the playing field and you give everybody the same opportunity and you actually listen to what they have got to say then they will respond and that is what I have found and that is the same thing in Connect. You will find that kids and young people and their families too because we have also done this with families. And we have done this with our staff team here as well. So you are doing it all the time to a slightly different audience but you are getting not the same results but you are getting good results all the time. But it is about framing it the right way I think Gary. If you do not get that framing bit right it will not happen. So you have to always be mindful of that and you know I think that is not to say you could not do it through another medium like literature or through music or cooking and that would be another way you could do it. It is endless how you could do it, but for me it is about my innate ability and talent [which] lies in my understanding in the way visual art works and that is why the obvious thing to do is to play to your strengths and use your own talents to try and make that happen. So that is where the art came from and that [is] where we found the way we went with it.

Critical question 2: 05.20 – 08.40.

Gary: How might thinking about your personal identity help with your professional practice [05.26]?

Eoghann: Okay, so I think you cannot really have a professional practice without having your personal identity and I think if you are true to who you are it is going to shine right through everything you do. You are going to deliver sincerely. If you work in a relationship based organisation if you are not sincere and people do not feel they can trust you and listen to you and believe you it is not going to happen. You know that phrase “*you cannot kid a kidder*”, if you cannot deliver then people are not going to give you it – a true response. They are not going to feel that they can be themselves to you if they are not getting that from you. So, it is very important that you do that. That you frame it in such a way that you get that over right from the start. It is actually very simple it is just about being straight forward, honest, open and accountable and I think if you are that you will get that back [06.30].

Gary: So a lot of it is about building trust and bonds with young people over a set period of time when you are working with them and building up that relationship [05.26]?

Eoghann: Absolutely, if you do not have that relationship and you do not establish that relationship you are not going to get people responding to the questions you are asking them. Of course if you do not get that right from the start then it will not happen but the relationship is absolutely key in everything that we do [07.03].

Gary: But then you will have your own personal value system and you are working with young people. Do you find that you are instilling your value system in these young people that you are working with [07.17]?

Eoghann: I mean personally my value system would be a universal one of hope, optimism, can do, you know confidence, all the things that make us all really shine as individuals. So yes, my personal one is quite a broad one I would like to think anyway but I think you would try to instil that all the time yes. It is about making the world a better place with encouragement, respect and all the things that get you to think outside the box, think about things in a slightly different way. If at school or at home is challenging is there ways that we can help support you with that? Being as understanding as you can be to the needs of the people that you are seeing and who are walking in the door. We often do not know who we are going to see sometimes. We have a list of names but those kids might not appear and there are loads of reasons why that might not be the case. You know this is a holiday today that you are in seeing us and we have kids in today. Now, nobody has to be here today but they are choosing to come here. So it is a choice and it is a deliberate intent to come in and work on something you have been working on during the week. Which is just fantastic to see [08.40].

Critical question 3: 08.42 - 11.10.

Gary: How might thinking about your community identity help with your professional practice [08.47]?

Eoghann: Okay, so obviously we see families and young people from Kilmarnock and around Ayrshire. A lot of the people we see will maybe have quite a low opinion of themselves, of their communities, their perception of the community might be that they are not the best place to be. I would actually completely turn that on its head. I do not see it that way at all. I see everywhere as an opportunity to be amazing places and I would really encourage folk (people) to think about where they are in those terms, because I think that these are communities that have got long histories of amazing people that have achieved incredible things that have been formally recognised. You know we should be really proud of where we are from and the heritage that our towns and our communities have, but for a load of reasons people do not see it that way. So I think that the community identity piece, you know, that is where working with young people is an incredible thing because we can turn that on its head and say: well did you know that this is where the first edition of Robert Burns poems was published? You know which is an international and universal book that everybody knows you know "*Auld Lang Syne*" (meaning times long past). These songs were all published in this town. People think of Kilmarnock as a town that has a heavy industries background and it does, but it actually had a creative industries before it had a heavy industries background and I think that is incredible to think about that. You know everybody knows these songs everywhere and they were written and published here and I think that is massive. We are about to move into a former school in Centrestage which we have taken on as a transfer and that school had two Nobel Peace Prize winners come out of it. The only school anywhere that had two Nobel Peace Prize winners out of it – I mean that is an incredible fact in itself and it is incredible, it is not a coincidence, it almost feels like we were meant to be going there for so many reasons you know. And I think that whole kind of attitude around how important community is, is really important you know and I think we can underestimate that [11.10].

Gary: Is it about the potential of the community [08.47]?

Eoghann: It is about recognising the potential and it is about understanding where it came from and it is also about the whole thing about the potential of it becoming alive again, or well, it has always been alive and it has always been here. So it is about recognising that and then giving that place [or] opportunity to think about it in those terms going forward and having no parameters at all – it is up to you. It is over to you guys actually you can decide how this goes, you have got that empowerment to take it forward (he is talking about empowering the young people) [11.51].

Critical question 4: 12.01 - 15.50.

Gary: The next question leads on from the last question. What opportunities does this open or indeed close off for you as a practitioner [12.01]?

Eoghann: Speaking personally but thinking about Connect I think the amazing thing that we have done is some fantastic pieces of work with a community, facing aspects (dealing with problems). The Council and the Government had offered money for our participatory budgeting programme and we were able to, and this came from the young people as well, we put a couple of bids into two participatory budgeting opportunities in the last six months and we were able to secure funding and the young people were able to secure funding to run a small gallery space in the Burns Mall – which is the local shopping centre in the Town Centre of Kilmarnock. That all came about from a family engagement workshop that I was running on a Thursday night with families a visual art workshop. Not a million miles away from what we have been talking about already, but one of the young people who attended that her mother was able to make a contact with the Burns Mall with themselves. So after we secured the funds the kids themselves secured the funds to make this happen. We also found a venue and a lot of the work the kids have made both on our outreach of Connect in the Primary Schools (children between the age of 5-11), but also here with the secondary schools who attend who are then able to then showcase that work out in the community. They were able to attend [and] we had a gallery preview the way you would have in any gallery. The local press came along and gave us two pages. It was great publicity mothers and fathers; grandparents; and brothers and sisters all came to see it. We sold work and one of the young people created a book and the book we got fifty copies printed and we sold the whole edition and it was really exciting stuff. Drawings and paintings and a digital offer [we showed] all kinds of art. We had fashion and we had other pieces of work as well. So that was an example of how we could look at our community in a positive light and through our professionalism and through our practice we were able to engage with families. It also came through the young people. The young people led that in a way and by that happening it opened other doors. So I know the Burns Mall want us back to do it again. I personally think with the move up to the new premises we have incredible opportunities to do that kind of a thing on a national scale. I would actually like to see it happening on an international scale. I think we should be having artists and musicians coming to see us from around the world because I think that suddenly becomes again about putting our place on a global map. We are a wee (small) town near to Glasgow and sometimes kids come to Kilmarnock from outside of Kilmarnock and this is the biggest place they have been to. They have never been to Glasgow (City Centre). So we are the biggest place they have been to (Kilmarnock Town Centre) but it is about blowing all that out of the water and saying we are actually a town in Europe in the world and I think it is really crucial that we celebrate that. We always have been and we always will be – so why do we not just run with that? Instead of deciding that we have to think that we have to go somewhere else to be a creative person and we have to be somewhere else to be important [15.26].

Gary: So that sense of community can be extended to a broader sense of community [15.31]?

Eoghann: Absolutely, I mean you know if that is a school community that we go into and become a part of then that is a great thing too but then they come back out to us as well. It is about taking away parameters. It is about making folk (people) feel like they belong but also that they can go out and share all at the same time – if that makes sense [15.50]?

Critical question 5: 15.50 - 18.00.

Gary: How might it be applied in different context and to what degree is it generalisable – talking about the assets-based approach how it can be generalised and used in different contexts [16.07]?

Eoghann: I think it is highly applicable in different contexts to be honest I really do as I said already I think you can reach people. It is about how you approach it and how you frame it you have to give it the right context and give people the right language that they understand to get that hook to catch [them] and become involved in it – because if you do not give them the right kind of lead in they will look at you blankly and go what are you talking about? But if you give them the right lead in they are going to give you the answers. They are going to give you something that they feel and from there and you know my thing is visual art, but it could be done through any other means quite easily, but again it is how you frame that part of it. And I think we are very good at that at Centrestage. Actually I think we are really good at reaching people from different backgrounds and different experiences and particularly people who would not be the first to put themselves forward to communicate in that way [17.09].

Gary: And there is a healing process that goes on during this a well for some of the young people – is there [17.14]?

Eoghann: I think there is. I think when you ask people to think about their self-identity about their community identity and about their family identity they are going to [...] it might bring up negative things. For them negative connotations (themes associated with negative feelings) it will [have], but that is a nice thing to work through and that can also lead it in different directions. I think interestingly it tends to be overwhelmingly positive. Maybe that is because of the way we deliver it but you also do get situations of more negative conversations coming out of it, but that again is part of that addressing and healing as you say. There is no doubt about it [18.00].

Critical question 6: 18.00 - 24.12.

Gary: The final question – thank you. How would you apply an assets-based approach to professional development in your practice and context [18.10]?

Eoghann: I think we already do that fundamentally [18.18].

Kate: The interprofessional bit [18.23]?

Eoghann: I think we do already grasp that approach quite well. I think we are quite good at it. The interprofessional part of it I think would be again a very interesting thing for us going forward because here at Connect we are all creative people with different disciplines within that team. But Centrestage is a huge organisation with different, relatively speaking it is a huge organisation, where we have got chefs; we have got tech team (technicians); we have got the theatre experience; the café bar experience; we have got all these different ranges of

activity – of professionalism and skills that I think we can tap into even more when we are all in the one site. And I think that interprofessionalism will really start to fly when we do that. I mean it already exists you know we have a chef in here next week with a group of young people. The food part of their sessions is really big and we really find that they get a lot from that. But I think what will happen ... so therefore the chef will come in and he will create ... he will make something for the kids to eat that they have asked for and then again that is a whole new dialogue and narrative that will come out of that. So we do not really know where that is going to end up. We might find there is a couple of wee guys (young people) in there that are budding chefs (potential chefs) just waiting to happen but they are not even aware of that often our kids might have, not phobias, but issues around food. So again if we can take any of that away by offering kids things that they have never had before. You know healthy options all those things. I mean a lot of the kids will tell you they will not look at fruit, they will tell you they will not look at veg (vegetables), but we made a curry last week and the curry that they made, with the help of our chef, they all ate. So there is something in there about interprofessionalism I think that is absolutely huge about reaching people in ways [20.24].

Gary: What we were thinking was you talked about moving all the different communities that are located around the town into one location into the school. [This] would be an advantage because there would be interprofessional ways of working by bring all of the communities together and you could share assets. Could you talk about that [20.46]?

Eoghann: I can I can talk about that more. This is something that we already do. But I think when we are all in one site Connect I think at the new premises at the new Centrestage (meaning there will be more opportunity for interprofessional ways of working to occur at the new site). There has been a lot of chat (discussion) about [where] Connect fits into that because Connect is effectively all over it. Connect has to be all over it. The kids have to be able to go and see the guys in the kitchens. They have to be able to sit and do some drawing and painting with me they have to be able to do all of that stuff, health and fitness as well. That is another part of what we do as you know. I think everything roundabout wellbeing and about who we are has to be there just innately there [24.22].

Eoghann: We were talking about the fact that Centrestage comes onto one site going forward (bringing all of the separate communities onto one site) and the opportunities that will enable for transprofessionalism (interprofessionalism) across all the different projects that Centrestage is and how that will impact upon Connect. So that is going to have a huge (massive) impact on Connect because it is going to enable any individual young person to access one of the many different professional opportunities that they have at Centrestage. You know whether it is the kitchens which will be right there, or the workshops where the guys are making tech for the productions of a set, or whether it is to do with the lighting the technical side (for theatre stage productions). Whether it is the café which will also be going full pelt (very busy) I would imagine, the classes we have with the older generation (intergenerational activities) they “Gie It Laldy!” (a reference to a Centrestage community programme which aims to create conversations and connections through musical themed memory activities for people who have retired), in these classes where kids could then go in and give their time to volunteer and gain experience in working with older people. We also have Aspire a theatre company which is for young people with physical and mental disabilities. So that would enable kids to access that community as well in a really positive way and with the Catalyst programme too (designed to help people who have been in prison reintegrate back into the community), which is connected with the Bowhouse Prison (in Hurlford near Kilmarnock). So again, all these things are already happening and we have families where there might be a mother and father who are accessing the Catalyst programme while their son is actually accessing us (Connect programme for disadvantaged

young people). That is already happening, but once we are all in one site the opportunities for that interprofessionalism and crossover of skills and abilities are going to magnify to a greater degree [23.10].

Kate: Can I just ask a question it just occurred to me might you find it useful to use the professional development workshop around different aspects of identity across the different teams and across the different professional groups that are working at Centrestage [23.32]?

Eoghann: I would say yes and I think that there is no doubt that that would make a lot of sense Kate. I think we very much, you know, we have got the hash tag one team and we are one team. We all work towards the same set of goals and ethos all the time. So I mean this is born out of the work that we have done with yourselves and I think there is a lot to be said for it being rolled out across the whole team and I can certainly try and make that happen. I can only see that as being a positive no doubt [24.10].

Eoghann: Thank you Gary [24.12].