



Professional Identity and Self-Care

Introduction

Two sessions were delivered during the NQSW pilot site work in West of Scotland by Dr Pearse McCusker and Dr Martin Kettle, from the University of Edinburgh and Glasgow Caledonian University respectively.

Rationale and Structure

The sessions build on the research and teaching interests of the facilitators around self-care and professional identity respectively. Although these areas are typically viewed as separate in the research literature, the view taken was that there was a considerable degree of connectedness and that they complemented each other as parts of a session. The interconnectedness is reflected in this quote:

"Self-care is not an indulgence. It is an essential component of the prevention of distress, burnout and impairment. It should not be considered as something 'extra' or 'nice to do if we have the time, but an essential part of our professional identities"
(Barnett, Johnston, & Hillard, 2006, p.263, our emphasis).

Following introductions and exploration of ground rules, for example around confidentiality, an "I am" exercise was used, with participants being asked to complete 20 different, "I am...." statements. The purpose of this was to allow participants to explore their identities and, in particular the relationship between their personal and professional identities. This was followed by a short input by Pearse on Non-Violent Communication and the potential of critical mindfulness, drawing on his doctoral research on the use of mindfulness by social work students, and its potential for broader use by social workers. Participants were also offered the SPARK (which stands for tool Self-reflection Prevention Assessment Resilience Kindness) tool, which was developed originally for child protection social workers as a reflective tool around self-care. Participants were asked to complete and discuss one dimension of the tool and encouraged to take the tool away and use it more broadly.

Following a break, Martin facilitated a session entitled, 'How did we get here and where are we now? Professional identity and reflective practice: reflection on experiences', which gave participants the opportunity to reflect on what they understood by professional identity and the influences upon its development. Participants were then offered this following data extract from the phase 2 SSSC

report on NQSWs by way of comparison, and asked to explore how their definition compared with the following:

“Professional identity is something I carry with me at all times; it is my ethics, my values, and how I approach life. It is how I view the world and how I approach complex situations. It’s how I build relationships and how I work with people. It is not in the work I do, but the way I do my work” (Grant et al, 2019, p.42).

Participants were then introduced to the concepts of fateful moments (Giddens, 1991) and trajectory (Wenger, 1998) as explanatory devices and asked to reflect in how they helped to make sense of the development of their professional identity to date. The session was then summed up and participants were asked to offer feedback and complete the evaluation. In addition, participants were provided with a list of resources.

Dr Martin Kettle, Glasgow Caledonian University

Dr Pearse McCusker, University of Edinburgh

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