

The Practices

The primary practice that we are advocating is:

- Reflexive Practice: The ability to analyse one's own practice against a variety of benchmarking frameworks. This would build connections with: emotional literacy, self-awareness, motivation, and systemic influences including parental, cultural, societal, economic etc.

There are two aspects of Reflexive Practice worth highlighting:

- Non-Oppressive Practice: the use of relevant theories and concepts to actively expose and transform prejudice both in ourselves and others.
- Multi-Disciplinary Practice: the ability to use a variety of professional disciplines in thinking and behaviour to enable the service to become more accessible.

These form the framework that the theories can be attached to.

How might we deal with some of the inherent contradictions in the above processes?

It would be worth noting the particular importance of 'Active Listening' to facilitate the operation of these practices.

The Qualities

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| ▪ Honesty | ▪ Insularity |
| ▪ Humanity | ▪ Superficiality |
| ▪ Humour | ▪ Arrogance |
| ▪ Humility | ▪ Prejudice |
| ▪ Integrity | ▪ Insecurity |
| ▪ Trust | ▪ Identification |
| ▪ Accurate Empathy | ▪ Deceitfulness |
| ▪ Respect | ▪ Fear |
| ▪ Care | ▪ Defeatism |
| ▪ Hope | ▪ Judgementalism |
| ▪ Love | ▪ Defensiveness |
| ▪ Resilience | ▪ Pessimism |

These attach the practices to the theories.

How do we cultivate these qualities in ourselves, colleagues, and clients?

How do we demonstrate these qualities to our clients within professional boundaries?

The qualities, generally taken for granted, cannot develop without actively exploring the oppositional nature of the conflicts listed above.

The Theories

- Attachment - The importance of a positive significant relationship between child and carer within the first few years of life.
- Attunement - The result of a 10 year research project by the Wave Trust, indicating that the lack of a significant relationship between a child and carer in the first two years of life causes an emotional trigger for violence to develop.
- Brain Development - the impact of oppression/oppressing on physical brain growth.
- Reparenting/Empowerment - do vulnerable children need a re-parenting experience or empowering? Perhaps both?
- Person-centred – do people have an innate sense of purpose or is it a taught/learned quality?
- Psychodynamic - early childhood being the source of all adult difficulties.
- Cognitive Behavioural - changing thinking will change behaviour.

How can these be applied to the self and taken forward in new directions?

- Gender Continuum – Turning the conventional hierarchical model on its side in order to facilitate learning - The impact of oppression, Patriarchy.
- Cultural Identity Theory – Racism, acknowledging the impact of oppression & oppressing on individuals and groups and working actively to transform these. This process is crucial in facilitating the development of identity as opposed to the more superficial 'image'.
- Gang Culture – What would influence a young person to become either a Child Soldier or a Peer Activist?
- Language – labelling, connected to identity, 'Children/Youths'.
- Education/Learning Styles – Building learning capacity through appropriate curriculum and personalised learning. The use of concepts such as 'multiple intelligences'.
- Community Education - Capacity building for voluntary/community groups and individuals. e.g. Peer Activists, Roma Assistant Teachers.
- Partnership/Networking – The transition from collaboration to Integration.

- Individualism / Collectivism – depending on the cultural background of the client, this concept could have a critical effect on the value of any interventions offered. Are we striving for independence or inter-dependence?
- Iceberg of Professional Practice – Most of the reflection on professional practice that occurs centres on the visible or 'waterline' aspects, as opposed to the hidden, 'below the waterline' impacts of oppression, which would be more useful in facilitating professional and personal development.
- Zero Sum / Non-Zero Sum – Qualities such as 'love' and 'care' are not finite resources; if focused on a particular client, it does not mean that there is necessarily less for another.

This is not an exhaustive list of the possibilities and should be used when appropriate.

Which of these theories are oppositional and which are collaborative?

The Application

- Experience / Practice
- Training
- Self Learning
- Peer Group Learning
- Professional Boundaries
- Risk Management
- Supervision
- Team Building
- Management
- Partnership
- Evaluation

These facilitate the relationship between the other three, and contribute to the quality of service

How do we navigate the conflicting experiences we have during this process?

The Environment

- Partnership - Collaboration / Integration with statutory and voluntary sectors
- The creation of a service delivery structure that instead of being based on history and availability, has been re-organised around the needs of children and families and accessibility.

- Appropriate systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the work. For example, targets: who writes them?, what is the purpose behind them and how is their attainment managed? I.e., How can targets be used helpfully as opposed to acting as diversions to the effectiveness and quality of the service?
- The variations in socio-political contexts across Europe have to be taken into account when using any aspect of this Framework.
- The Media – whether they are manipulative or responsible.

- Social capital –
‘Social capital is a set of attitudes and mental dispositions that favour co-operation in society, and... equals the spirit of community.’

Social Capital Foundation

‘A dominance of high bonding horizontal social capital at the expense of vertical integration may be pathological in consequence’¹

Kwame McKenzie

How do we use these concepts within the contexts of: the individual, the family, the wider community, the national and international communities, in partnership with other statutory and voluntary agencies?

Without a supportive environment most innovation will eventually retreat into habitual behaviour.

Summary

It is a model that emphasises the ‘Why’ and ‘How’ rather than the ‘What’. We feel that an enormous amount of ideas are generated around different types of interventions in an effort to initiate changes of behaviour in this client group. An equal focus on our motives and on devising more effective ways of delivering services would generate greater success.

The model is based on a foundation of three practices:

- Reflexive Practice
- Non-oppressive Practice
- Multi-Disciplinary Practice

The model then emphasises the importance of human qualities, such as Honesty, Integrity, Trust and Resilience, that are critical to service delivery and yet not the focus of any practitioner or policy maker training.

Theories devised by academics, researchers and practitioners around the subject of children and families also deserve consideration. Theories such as attachment, attunement and brain development should shape the delivery of services.

Penultimately, the model focuses on the application of the above, underlining aspects such as evaluation, training and professional supervision.

Finally, the model underlines the importance of appropriate service delivery structures and other contextual influences to ensure effective outcomes for vulnerable children & families.

The Framework ends with the quote below. This rather simple sentence is, we feel, of great importance, as it can be used to transform our need to defeat the arguments and thoughts of others into an attitude that is based more firmly on collaboration, understanding and creativity.

This work with children and families is extremely difficult. One of the reasons for this is the amount of often unresolved and generally unnamed emotions that are connected with these situations. If, as practitioners, we spend a great deal of our time directing these emotions at each other in ultimately unhelpful ways, rather than in using our energies to fully understand the essence of how each other perceives and in considering how these might combine to create new solutions and new perceptions, then surely we are wasting opportunities for development:

'Oppositional conflict should be seen as a dynamic that can promote creativity, rather than the more common competitive and attritional process.'