IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Engaging Young People through Reflection

Life’s big questions: They’re vital for personal growth but not everybody gets to ask them. In an illuminating interview, Paul Graham shares his observations on the value of reflective conversations for young people.

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Engaging Young People through Reflection

Pondering the right question, at the right time, can be transformative for a young person, whether in school or under the shadow of the criminal justice system. Unusually, perhaps, Paul Graham has observed the power of questions in both contexts. Now a student wellbeing coordinator at a Melbourne high school, he has previously been a case manager with the Department of Human Services’ Youth Justice program. And in Paul’s experience, many of the questions that young people need to ask—want to ask—are the same regardless of the situation in which they find themselves: questions about self, responsibility, beliefs and how to live well.

Context, however, can radically alter how and when life’s deeper questions are asked, and a brush with the law can radically raise the stakes involved in answering them. In Paul’s experience, giving young people an opportunity to explore life’s big questions is necessary, but thoughtful answers don’t come readily with pressure. So whether you’re working with young offenders or students in mainstream schooling, how do you help young people open up and begin their reflective process?

Well, in Paul’s case part of that answer was found on a shopping trip eight years ago. He had just joined the Youth Justice program when the team made a visit to a Camberwell retailer. ‘We already had a set of Strength Cards in the unit that the case managers would often use,’ he recalls, ‘and we decided we wanted to build on our resources to be able to engage more with clients.’ That day, Deep Speak was among the card sets the team purchased, and those cards are now tied to one of Paul’s most memorable experiences involving a young offender from a refugee background.

The youth was on a community-based order for violent offending when he met Paul. ‘Things were pretty settled at the time, which was good. He was going to school which is rare,’ Paul remembers, ‘but there were some barriers in terms of engagement with him.’ An additional challenge was that the youth’s sessions with Paul were very frequent—and mandatory. ‘We were having to see each other twice a week, and there’s only so much you could cover checking on the same things.’ Looking to try something different, Paul just ‘threw in’ the Deep Speak cards. Although concerned that the young man was ‘quite closed off’ and might find the cards too far removed from his experience, Paul took a punt. He put the cards on the table and said ‘Just pick three cards’, curious to see if they could trigger a conversation.

‘What shocked me was how engaged he suddenly became. This was a young man who left a war-torn country. He had nobody. He really, really enjoyed the questions, and I think that was because no one had ever asked him these questions before.’ Unexpectedly, their sessions morphed into a long-denied opportunity for personal reflection. Deep Speak, true to its name, let the young man explore ‘deep questions that he might not have thought about before.’ Soon, the cards ‘started to become part of what we did, getting him to think about, well, what does he believe in and where do those beliefs come from?’

The experience also had a profound effect on Paul, extending his appreciation for the value of reflection in young people’s lives. Giving young people the skills to be reflective is now a key focus for him and, in the school context, he is unafraid to be upfront with students about this—‘I often say to them, I can’t solve things for them, but I can help them reflect.’ Of course, it’s not necessarily a priority for all students, many of whom he meets for one-off brief intervention counselling. But for Paul’s ‘regulars’, who are encouraged to drop in when they need to, reflective conversations are likely to become part of the counselling relationship.

Continued next page…
While students often come in simply to debrief, it’s not uncommon for valuable conversations to begin serendipitously when students spot a few cards on a table. “Oh, what’s that?” they’ll ask. They’re intrigued and pick things up. “Oh, what’s that?” they’ll ask. They’re intrigued and pick things up. Alongside Deep Speak Paul also has Signposts, which he has used for workshops with Year 12 students. The cards were used to help the students reflect on their feelings about finishing school and moving into adult life. Paul invited them to each choose a card that resonated with how they were feeling at that moment and to talk about why they chose it. He laughs at what his colleagues might make of these big picture conversations. “I’m probably not so popular with the teachers because I say to the student “Look, you’re not your ATAR score. There’s a lot more to life!””

Paul says his own challenge for the future is to continue finding new ways to develop students’ reflective practice whilst helping them build on their strengths—and he believes Innovative Resources’ card sets have a valuable role to play. “I want to use cards more in what I do. It doesn’t even have to be for an activity,” he adds, “it can be as informal as “What’s that? Well, let’s look and answer a couple of questions.””

The cards, he says, are excellent for breaking down barriers. “That’s what I’ve always used them for in the past. I think they’re really good “engaging tools”.”

Scaling for reflection with Growing Well

It sprouted as a mental health resource, and now it’s bearing fruit for students too. ‘I used Growing Well a lot in youth justice,’ Paul explains. ‘I’ve always really liked the cards and pads, so when I came to the school I ordered a set.’ Growing Well was used with young offenders to record their welfare over time. Many presented with serious drug or mental health issues, and Growing Well provided a non-threatening way for offenders to review their progress at three and six-month intervals.

Now, Paul leaves Growing Well out on his table where the cards and pads pique students’ curiosity. ‘I’m a big fan!’ he chuckles. ‘“Being Satisfied” is my favourite pad of them all! I use that more than anything because there are some really, really good questions on it.’

With self-image and self-esteem being significant issues for young people, Paul views Growing Well as an ideal way to help students explore ‘the big picture stuff’. ‘It gets you thinking about how you feel about yourself. Growing Well gives students the chance to go through the list of prompts, tick their responses, then sit back and reflect.’

One prompt that resonates for many students is ‘I am satisfied with my friendships’. The metaphor of a tree growing towards maturity is particularly helpful because it avoids predefined notions about what friendships should look like and empowers students to focus on why they are feeling satisfied or dissatisfied. ‘I can ask “On a scale of 1 to 10, how might you be a 5 or a 6 where you’re really happy with your friendships?”’

It might be about choices they make with their friends or who they hang out with. It generates so much discussion—and that’s just one prompt!’

Autism Awareness Month

1-30 April 2016

The autism ‘puzzle’ ribbon is the most recognised symbol of the autism community in the world, and April is the month to pin the ribbon on! The puzzle pattern reflects the complexities of the autism spectrum, its causes and prevalence.

Currently children aged 5-9 are most likely to be diagnosed with the condition. But intervention therapies and coping strategies help many people to limit the impacts of autism in their adult life.

Innovative Resources is proud to offer its support to the autism community through its conversation-building tools. Funky Fish Feelings, Talking Pictures, Can-Do Dinosaurs and The Scaling Kit—just a few of the resources that autism experts tell us they love to use!
Rosy and Jack
Few books exist that so frankly, but sensitively, invite conversations with children about staying safe and recovering from abuse. Rosy and Jack is a specialist resource for parents, children and human service workers, designed to help young victims of abuse take comfort and learn from the experiences of the characters. For adults, this picture book also underscores the importance of listening to, trusting and loving our children.

CAT NO. 6052 WAS $24.50
Now $12.50

Byron and the Chairs
Byron has a new baby brother called Max. And Byron has a problem: because Max isn’t the only new addition to the household. A little green, beady-eyed monster has also moved in—a little monster called ‘Jealousy’. This lively story follows Byron as he develops the strengths he needs to put Jealousy firmly in its place. Drawing on narrative therapy techniques, author Rebecca Sng demonstrates how jealousy can be talked about in ways that avoid attributing blame or criticism.

CAT NO. 6080 WAS $14.95
Now $9.90

Storm in a Teacup
Explore the themes of life and death, light and darkness, in this moving tale of a teardrop that returns through nature’s cycle to a boy and his grandfather. Created for readers of all ages, Storm in a Teacup can be used in classrooms, workshops and groups to build conversations about meaning and change. No two readers will interpret this picture book the same way.

CAT NO. 6054 WAS $29.50
Now $14.95

Communities of Hope
Here’s a step-by-step blueprint for a strengths-based approach to community capacity building, designed to guide people as they create resilient, flexible, well-connected communities. Now over ten years old, Communities of Hope remains an excellent introduction to its subject. It contains a comprehensive three-day workshop plan and reproducible handout masters that can be used and adapted build and empower today’s communities.

CAT NO.8003 WAS $44.50
Now $19.90

Kids’ Skills
Bingo! It’s the Ben Furman classic that teaches how to convert problems into skills. The 15 simple steps of the Kids’ Skills method are designed to create dynamic and playful partnerships between carers and children. Kids’ Skills does not blame children or parents for difficulties. Nor does it eliminate the need for childhood professionals. But it does invite children to become active participants in solution-finding, and it’s a must-read for primary and pre-school teachers, early childhood workers, psychologists and parent support workers.

CAT NO. 8004 WAS $31.95
Now $19.90

Doing Change
Want to shift old patterns and do things differently? The changes we are looking for rarely happen ‘out of the blue’, but with a few surprisingly simple strategies, we can be proactive change-agents for ourselves and others. Doing Change explores the connections between our emotions, words and body, and includes practical suggestions and activities for relieving stress, regenerating relationships and more. Learn from some inspiring conversations from the suite of master therapist, Rob McNeilly.

CAT NO. 8014 WAS $31.95
Now $29.95
Beating Diabetes with a Strengths Focus

It’s World Health Day on 7 April, and this year the World Health Organization is spotlighting diabetes—especially type 2 diabetes and its impacts on children and families.

Type 2 diabetes today accounts for around 90% of all diabetes cases worldwide, and the number of children and young people affected has increased dramatically. The incidence of type 2 diabetes has risen in countries of all income levels, and is closely linked to unhealthy eating, physical inactivity, weight gain and obesity. Now, there is a globally agreed target to halt the rise in diabetes and obesity by 2025—and there is growing support for social workers and educators to be actively involved.

As clinical social worker Elizabeth Eliadis argues, treating the health issues associated with diabetes requires ‘a much more comprehensive intervention’ than traditional nutritional counselling or the treatment of comorbidities like anxiety or depression. ‘It is crucial to address the behavioral and lifestyle changes of the child and the family’, and, she adds, ‘many fundamental principles of social work are essential when working to treat childhood obesity, including family systems theory, advocacy, cultural competence, and strengths-based perspective.’

Here at Innovative Resources, we know that a strengths perspective and identifying strengths can be invaluable for helping families make changes of any kind. The Strength Cards (or Strength Cards for Kids) offer diverse ways to help children and young people identify and build on small steps towards positive lifestyle changes—without exclusively focussing on weight or fitness goals. Below are some approaches to try:

• Pick three cards representing strengths you already do well (e.g. ‘independent’ ‘kind’ and ‘organised’). Can you think of some healthy activities that let you practise this strength? For example, going for a walk independently, showing kindness by helping with others with physical tasks, or being organised to eat well.

• What strengths might you choose for inspiration when change feels hard—for example ‘patient’, ‘committed’ or ‘brave’? What strengths did you in the past when you faced a similar situation?

• Are there any strengths that might inadvertently lead to less good health? For example, is being ‘generous’ associated with taking cake or sugary foods to a friend’s house? Does ‘playful’ mean playing computer games? How could you change the way you demonstrate the strength?

• What strengths might you gift your children or each family member to acknowledge effort and decision-making that promotes good health? Perhaps you might choose ‘careful’ for checking the ingredients of packaged food at the supermarket, or ‘flexible’ for making time for physical activity.

With a little creativity, other card sets published by Innovative Resources can also be adapted for conversations about lifestyle choices, including Choosing Strengths, Wonderful You! (perfect for complimenting young children for effort), Age of Adventure (useful for contemplating how decisions made now affect our opportunities as older adults), the Positive Parenting Cards and Two Worlds.

So on Thursday 7 April, take a moment to consider how you might respectfully promote healthy lifestyle choices among your clients or students—or do a little advocacy for social policy reform—and help halt the rise of type 2 diabetes in our communities.

Strengths Approach to Supervision (2 days)

This workshop is designed for anyone who gives or receives supervision, from managers and educators, to team leaders present or future. Using group discussion, exercises, demonstrations and hands-on tools, participants will learn to apply a strengths approach to supervision conversations, with the aim of building reflective, creative and effective supervision agreements and relationships. Such relationships play a major role in building organisational culture and worker satisfaction, and ultimately create better outcomes for clients. The workshop will explore:

- The principles and skills of strengths approaches to practice
- ‘Traditional’ supervision compared to strengths approaches to supervision
- How our values intersect with supervision
- The functions of supervision
- Supervision practice and building supervision goals
- Your ‘Vision for Supervision’
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Supervision agreements

DATE: Wednesday 15th & Thursday 16th June, 2016
VENUE: IR Training Room, 62 Collins Street, Kangaroo Flat (Bendigo)
COST: $435.60 inc. GST

Stay the Night

Why not stay the night? Register for May’s back-to-back ‘Strengths Approach to Practice’ and ‘Tools of the Trade’ workshops (May 9th and 10th) for the special price of $375.00. Save $60.00.

Strengths Approach to Practice

Everyone has strengths. Our qualities, capacities, relationships, values, stories, experiences, skills and material resources can all be strengths. But ‘The Problem’ can easily be experienced as all-consuming, keeping clients and services alike stuck and creating barriers to change. Strengths-based practice focusses squarely on identifying, mobilising and celebrating clients’ strengths.

Social workers, counsellors, managers, educators—and anyone who works with others—can become a catalyst for building cultures where strengths and connectedness flourish, so that clients build resilience, capacity for lasting change and genuine ‘agency’ in their own lives. This highly engaging and practical training facilitates participants’ learning of strengths-based principles, skills and resources that can be applied immediately in their work.

DATE: 9th May, 2016
VENUE: IR Training Room, 62 Collins Street, Kangaroo Flat (Bendigo)
COST: $217.80 inc. GST

Tools of the Trade

In this highly interactive workshop participants will experiment with a wide range of original, Australian-made resources for opening up meaningful conversations with children, youth, families and adults. With a unique mix of playfulness and soulfulness, this workshop aims to deliver a hands-on experience of the role of artifacts and visual metaphors in adding potency to conversations about strengths, hopes, goals, values, relationships, feelings and the changes people want to make in their families, organisations and lives. Topics include:

- Creative ways to use resources to identify, mobilise and celebrate strengths
- The importance of building emotional vocabularies
- Storytelling as the fabric of counselling, therapy, team and community building
- The latent power of visual metaphors to enhance conversations
- Different learning styles and questioning techniques to invite curiosity, reflection and conversation
- Elements for creating respectful, inclusive, safe environments for conversations and groups

DATE: 10th May, 2016
VENUE: IR Training Room, 62 Collins Street, Kangaroo Flat (Bendigo)
COST: $217.80 inc. GST

New Workshop Package!

Discover Your Top 8: A focussed approach to practice development

Innovative Resources is offering a new workshop package that aims to support your organisation identify the changes—the Top 8—that would make the greatest difference to your outcomes for clients and the experiences of practitioners.

Our Top 8 sessions go to the heart of your service’s performance and will leave your practitioners feeling energised and ready to support further practice development.

In this 1-day workshop participants will:

- Review the benefits that critical reflection can have for staff practice development, employment longevity and self-care.
- Consider how worker practice development can support client outcomes.
- Learn how a ‘Top 8’ series of sessions can work.
- Define the ‘Top 8’ practice issues for your area of service delivery.
- Develop a series of questions that will drive your organisation’s ‘Top 8’ performance.

Register your interest via our website or email info@innovativeresources.org to find out more.