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PIVOT Stage 1: Personal Constructs of Practice

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PIVOT Stage 1: Personal Constructs of Practice

This activity can be viewed in action. See the  video clip 'PIVOT Stage 1' in the related resources section of the website.

Purpose

This activity helps you to examine the ways in which you see yourself and others with whom you have worked, particularly in relation to being a social worker. It is the first stage of thinking about professional identity and values (and the first stage of PIVOT).

When

As a stand-alone activity at any time in training. However, it is particularly helpful near the beginning of training when the intention is to progress to PIVOT Stage 2. This activity is also recommended at the beginning of any post-qualifying studies or in any situation where there will be an individual focus on professional growth, development and learning, such as a new supervision relationship.

Where

This is a learner-centred activity that involves dialogue between two people. It can be a good workshop exercise, peer to peer as well as between student and tutor.

Facilities and equipment

- Quiet space for two people/pairs to think and discuss (see setting and style below).
- Instruction sheets.
- Pens and spare paper or notebook for any extra reflective thoughts or jottings.
- Card, scissors and glue or sticky tape.
- 'Element' cards. A pdf containing the element cards is available from the documents section of the website. You can print out the nine elements, the question and the order of numbers and stick them on to card. (Thick paper will suffice but card is better.) Or you can write the text on to small index cards, in which case you will need ten cards (this includes one for the question that is asked during the activity).
- Personal Construct Grid. This has been provided as a pdf for you to print out (see the documents section on the website). If you can expand this on a printer or photocopier to A3 size it will give you more space.

Time required

The whole video clip is around thirty minutes, so allow half an hour if you wish to view all of it.

Setting and style

As in any social processes, conversational and understanding skills will be called upon. You will be exploring personal views, meanings and values. The following is a reminder of some usual, but important guidelines:

- Use a quiet space or room in which a relaxed atmosphere can be created.
- Try to guarantee freedom from disturbance.
- Have a table for you both to sit at, side by side or at the corner of one end, with good elbow room available for both of you.
- Whether this activity happens between peers (student to student) or between a student and a tutor, a brief but clear discussion about confidentiality and, where applicable, anonymity needs to take place.

Of particular importance in all PIVOT activities are the aims of helping to identify and clarify your own (the student's) personal perspectives, meanings and understanding. The PIVOT process is designed to help you explore and reflect *in your own words*. This is a central aim of the exercises from which you will gain most benefit. There are no 'right' or 'factual' answers. It is your personal meanings that are important and, as the student participant, you can choose how much detail to go into.

Activity



Remember you can view this activity in action between two people. See 'PIVOT Stage 1' in the related resources section of the website.

To begin you will need to create and have in front of you:

- nine Element cards
- the 'question' written down on a piece of card or paper
- the Personal Construct Grid.

All these are available as pdfs in the documents section of the website.

- 1 Read through all the instructions first, with whoever is facilitating.
- 2 Take the nine Element cards and spread them out.
- 3 Numbers 2, 4 and 8 already have an element written on them: Me as a pre-qualified worker; Me as a student social worker; The qualified social worker I want to be.
- 4 You need to write the name of a social work colleague you know, or have known, on each of Element card numbers 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9. These need to be a mix of people you perceive to be examples of 'good' and 'poor' social workers (at least two of each).

It is acknowledged that this is your own subjective view. A first name is all that is required – the cards will remain with you. However, you may wish to think about what to do if the person facilitating this activity with you could know who you are naming on the card. The important thing is that you know who you are referring to, can recall them in the exercise, and their memory conjures up definite feelings in you of a good or a poor example.

- 5 Element card number 6 is a choice of your current or any previous supervisor or mentor in social work or social work related practice. This can be someone who evokes any kind of memory (good or poor) but, if in the past, should be someone who was significant. Again, just their first name needs to be written on the card.
- 6 You will be thinking about three cards at a time. Use the following number combinations (found also on the numbers card). There is no 'magical' reason for this order – it simply ensures that all the elements are captured through the exercise.

1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9	1 4 7	2 5 8	3 6 9
1 5 9	3 5 7	2 6 1	4 5 8		

- 7 Move the first three Element cards (numbers 1, 2 and 3) so that they are directly in front of you. Now, your facilitator (your tutor or your student colleague) reads out the question card:

In terms of what is important to you in social work, which two of these are similar in some way but different from the third?

What do the two have in common?

And how, by contrast, is the other one different?

Think about and reflect upon the three people named on the cards. Then, as part of this reflective process, choose two that are similar but different from the third. In other words, ***in terms of what is important to you in social work***, choose two people who have something in common as practitioners that is not shared by the third person.

- 8 You need to come up with a description, such as a short phrase or maybe just a word, that characterises what you feel two of the people named on the cards have in common. This is known as the 'similarity construct label' and is recorded on the Personal Construct Grid. Either you or the facilitator should write this phrase in line 'A' in the column headed 'Similarity construct label'.
- 9 The facilitator then asks:

And how, by contrast, is this other one different?

Write this word or phrase on the Personal Construct Grid. It also goes on line 'A' but in the right-hand column headed 'Contrasting/different construct label'.

The 'similarity' and 'contrasting' labels are, together, one construct. These labels are not necessarily logical opposites – rather they represent a contrast that is meaningful to you. See the examples in the box below which illustrate this point.

Constructs

A construct is a representation of just one way in which someone views someone or something. Constructs are bi-polar. In other words, they have a contrasting label or pole at each end.

Example constructs

Approachable	–	Rude
Vulnerable	–	Safe
Warm and friendly	–	Cold and distant

Read the examples again. But this time insert the words 'as opposed to' where the dashes are. A construct always represents a contrast, so you need to spell out both labels before you can be sure of the meaning intended by the whole construct.

In the activity you were asked to think about similarities and differences in terms of 'what is important to you in social work'. Below are examples of responses to this question, in the form of constructs, from two student social workers involved in an earlier PIVOT pilot.

Construct 1

Doesn't think through the child's position – Understands the child's position.

Construct 2

Passionate about what we do – It's just a job.

- 10 Repeat steps 6–9 using the other number combinations on the card. This means the facilitator asks you the same question each time but you think about the question in relation to a different combination of three cards or 'elements'. As you go you need to complete as many constructs from A to J on the Personal Construct Grid as you find helpful. At the end of the process the Grid should have up to 10 constructs.
- 11 When you have completed the activity keep the cards and the grid safely in a folder. You will need the grid again for the activity in PIVOT Stage 2: Professional and Personal Values in Practice.

A few comments on the process of construct elicitation

Just occasionally someone gets a bit stuck. They cannot think of what to say about the elements on the three cards in front of them. Don't worry. Allow just enough thinking time – then simply move on to another three cards.

Sometimes the interviewee may want to state two separate constructs from the same three cards. That's fine as well; just represent them on the grid.

There is no *right* amount of constructs required for this activity. If you begin to struggle, for example after about six constructs, it may be because you feel you have exhausted the possibilities at this time. Try another three cards and decide between you and the facilitator if you have come to a natural end. However, you may complete eight to ten constructs with relative ease. It is rare that more than ten constructs will help more in progressing with this activity.

A note for the facilitator

Remember that for this exercise it is the participating student's views, the student's meanings and the student's benefit from reflection that is being sought. The student's 'struggle' to arrive at their own words is all part of the value of the reflective process. If they are completely stuck, by all means help them talk through their thoughts. But resist the temptation to suggest words as they will be yours and not the student's.



This activity can trigger a lot of thoughts about what you value and what you see as important in social work. Allow yourself some thinking time afterwards and jot down any reflections you want to capture or keep from these moments.