

Experience of a participant on the Critical Companionship component of the Pilot Multi-Professional Consultant Practice (MPCP) programme

It should be noted that the critical companions on this pilot programme were external and they were not, as were the programme facilitators, familiar with CC practice and theory. Some of the external critical companions recognised that they would be learning a new role, as nuanced in this participant's account.

One participant shared her experiences of critical companionship (CC) at the celebratory conference at the end of the programme and was happy for us to share her experience in this written account which she and Angie created together.

I experienced my CC as a metaphorical and experiential journey. Some meetings involved us walking in nature away from the work environment and we both found that it made a difference to the quality of our thinking and ability to articulate our ideas more clearly without interruptions, with space and importantly, with time. Our relationship gave us a different opportunity to talk, especially as there were no constraints imposed by appraisal systems. We openly challenged and supported each other. Our discussion was honest, trusting and open without judgement.

This programme and what I learnt from the CC strand gave me space and bravery to look at myself, my goals, how to grow. Also, my critical companion felt that engaging in the CC role gave him time to reflect on his own practice which he found stimulating.

Like others, this participant found the language of CC inhibitory and quite difficult at first. She said, 'I had to look up definitions of words repeatedly and didn't do this whilst with my CC as I didn't want it to interrupt or distract from the purpose of the meetings or flow and direction of the conversation. If anything, mobile phones should have been banned!'

Rather, I reviewed the words and themes later as an aside and as part of the course programme learning:

I was better able to understand the words by the end of the 9 months, but did not find the language itself helpful and I preferred not to put words or headings into the CC meetings as I found them constraining and for me, unnecessary labels and categorising. I therefore put it aside until the final meeting where I reflected and could see how certain words related to the principles and framework. I still struggle with the terminology and feel it runs the risk of making the process too academic or focussed on language.

But I did value CC as I was able to de-construct the 'walls' I had been putting around myself and it helped me to get my 'feelings out without fear that by talking and expressing certain frustrations or concerns it would be damaging to my career. It also helped me look at myself and make plans.

And despite finding the language of CC difficult at the beginning, Angie recorded that in her conference presentation, she said:

'Mutuality (being with) and reciprocity (reciprocal giving and receiving) helped me to see what my role was and plan with those who needed to be involved to grow the service

together. *Mutuality* became part of our work with staff and at meetings. Together we moved from meso to macro working across systems. *Particularity* and *graceful care* played a part too. And I felt less alone and was able to express myself in an open way.'

Over time, she had become more familiar with the language and found she could acknowledge what was being played out and could articulate the terminology to define a particular way of being over time. However, she felt that it would take longer than the 9 months of the programme to be able to use it to recognise what is going on in a CC relationship and the processes and strategies being used.

Finally, on reflection, she felt as though she was melding coaching, mentoring and CC together.

'My critical companion recognised that there are different styles of CC and the nature of the relationship would bring this out and be different, too, with different people. Moreover, as my service development work is benefitting from CC, I will continue to use it and have advised that the principles should be used on future Multi-Professional Consultant Practice programmes. More help and support on the programme would be needed to enable a greater chance of being able to utilise the CC model to its full benefit.'

At the conference, there was an interesting discussion about how important it is not to let academic language get in the way of embracing new theoretical learning. One participant suggested that it is generally the same with every new academic field that we enter and, specifically, with all the new theoretical frameworks presented in this MPCP programme!

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After this presentation, an interesting discussion about how important it is not to let academic language get in the way of embracing new theoretical learning. One participant suggested that it is generally the same with every new academic field we enter and, specifically, with all the theoretical frameworks presented in this programme. Haven't we all experienced becoming familiar with theory by figuring out how it relates to actual practice and how it can help me? She concluded that we **can** embrace theoretical language and go on the journey. 'It is not a barrier', this participant said.

Another presenter shared that she, as a clinical supervisor, had used CC principles which had enabled an important conversation on emotions. David, an experienced practitioner reported that he had intentionally developed skills for *high challenge/high support* by focussing on his own enablement skills and those of the teams with which he worked. This led to doors opening on developing ways of working, locally and nationally, and 'breaking patterns on how we do things' which successfully 'turned everything on its head'.