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The Students Exploring
Marriage Trust
The EWR Centre
Cloudesley Street
London N1 0HU
T: 0207 278 0699

Enabling young people to lead the agenda

David Coltart

4th National Relationship Education Conference

Tuesday 6th February 2007

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Explore

- An educational charity
- A volunteer organisation.
- Formerly The Students Exploring Marriage Trust
- Working with young people aged 13 to 21 in schools, colleges, prisons, youth clubs and pupil referral units across the country.
- An Explore event offers young people the opportunity to lead an exploration of lasting relationships, family life and marriage for themselves.



The Explore method

- Learning by experience and active participation.
- Developed by the Grubb Institute of Behavioural Studies.
- Explore brings married couples and young people together for a detailed dialogue where the reality of actual experience of a lasting relationship is explored – case studies & role models.
- The process is structured and facilitated.
- But the young people set the agenda and lead the dialogues.
- Non-judgmental.
- Explore delivers its programme through workshops, half day conferences and class sessions.



Independent Evaluation

- Ratings by the young people were highly favourable. 89% rated their experience as Good to Excellent.
- The young people confirmed (91%) that they had been able to ask the questions they wished.
- The vast majority (82%) rated that the Explore event had positively helped them and had influenced their thinking.
- The young people reported feeling relaxed and interested in an environment conducive to learning.
- The young people's motivation came to the fore and a symbiotic relationship was formed with the couple.
- The service provided by Explore appeared unique in terms of the theoretical underpinning and consequent delivery of the learning process.

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The Relevance

- Consistent with Every Child Matters
- Operates within the curriculum/syllabus of PHSE, Citizenship & RE.
- To educate the whole person.
- Emotional literacy and Relationship Skills Education.
- Recommended by certain Local Authorities.

- The rehabilitation of offenders.
- The prevention of re-offending.

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But, for the young people

- The vast majority of young people today (91%) hold very real and deep aspirations for having a long-term meaningful and committed relationship in their adult life that is probably marriage.
- However, less than 5% of these young people have ever had a meaningful detailed conversation with an experienced adult, parent, relative or teacher on lasting relationships.

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The unique elements

- The belief that young people have great ability to take responsibility for their own education.
- The young people take authority for their own learning and set the agenda.
- The dialogues with the couples – the keepers of the knowledge.
- Experiential rather than didactic – relationship skills cannot be taught through instruction.
- Totally non-judgmental.
- The role of the facilitator.



The Facilitator

- An independent facilitator (adviser-coach) trained by Explore is considered as crucial to creating and sustaining the conditions for “learning by experience” and is particularly valued by the young people.
- The facilitator defines and maintains the boundaries between the Explore task and the day-to-day functioning of the school/prison.
- School/prison staff are excluded from the dialogues and that increases the efficiency and dynamics of the dialogues.
- The facilitator appears not to have a central role to the proceedings but assists the young people in reviewing and defining the process.

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The dialogues

- The couples are prepared but not rehearsed.
- The young people are also given preparation – defining their Hopes and Fears.
- A dialogue is strictly confidential and can last from 30 minutes to 1.5 hours.

- There are 3 types of questions.
- Fact – “how long”, “when” call for a factual answer.
- Permit – “what was it like” allow the couple scope in their response. They can reflect.
- Demand – “what was the impact on your relationship of” requires the couple to have a mental model of their relationship and assess the impact of an event or issue on this reflective model.



The Interaction

- Exploration in Action – the common and predominant pattern of interaction in which the initial high level of Fact questions give way to Permit questions and then a rising number of Demand questions move the dialogue from the concrete aspect of a relationship using it as a basis for asking subjective aspects.
- Stalled exploration – where Demand Questions occur too early and the couple step back.
- Invitation to explore – Fact questions give way to Permit questions but no Demand questions develop.



The Subjects

- The Young People can ask any question.
- Every Group has a different dynamics and interests.
- But questioning covers a very wide spectrum of subjects.

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What the young people say.....

- “It has been a real experience working with the other group members and the couples. This is the third group that I have done and all have been really memorable. Thank you for giving me the chance to be involved. I have discovered how to be more positive in my own relationships.” Young woman at HMP Bullwood Hall.
- “What was good was asking our own questions, actually getting involved ourselves, not just a lecture. We could question without barriers.” Young man from Salisbury.
- “I have discovered and was surprised about the fact that every relationship is different and has its own characteristics” Young man from Norwich.
- I was surprised by how open they were to speak about some obviously personal experiences. It really made me think about relationships.” Young women from South Wales.



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Explore

- In the last 10 years, Explore has worked in over 100 schools, 8 prisons, 3 youth clubs and 2 Pupil referral Units.
- Since 2000, more than 13,000 young people have participated in an Explore event.
- Last year, the number of participants year-on-year increased by a staggering 70% to 4095.
- And the young people continue to rate “learning by experience” and taking responsibility for their own Relationship education highly.



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