Person-Centered Thinking and Planning: Discover what’s Important to and for the Person

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: In this webcast, Jeff Garrison-Tate explains and demonstrates person-centered thinking and some tools that can be used to encourage your students to develop their own life path and focus on their own person.

Jeff Garrison-Tate: Well, I think again that the process of discovering what’s important to them, and beginning to really explore that, and to allow the dignity of risk for kids to go out and figure out what’s important to them, but also balancing what’s important for them, and then coming up with activities that they can do to get more importance out of their lives and developing plans around that. Often times, I think, in the best interests of the student’s safety, we focus on safety only. If everything is just about safety, then life isn’t too wonderful. So how do we figure out ways to support that student to balance that, to explore those things that are important to them, and through exploration, develop plans based on that?

You have to have important to and important for and find the balance between them. We’re going to be spending a lot of our time on that core concept. So let’s look at a definition of what’s important to a person. So we heard family, we heard faith, and we heard being happy in your life. Well, let’s see if some of that ties to this definition. What’s important to a person includes the things that keeps someone satisfied, content, comforted, and happy. And it’s people to be with and relationships. It’s about status and control, and I don’t mean that means being controlled over someone, but it means that you fit into your community, and you have control over what you want to do in your life. It’s things to do, places to go, things to have, rituals, and routines, and how we are able to control and lead our lives as we define it. It’s rhythm, our pace of life, and it’s things to have. These are things that are important to a person. I heard relationships; I heard those rituals and those routines that often involve faith and then being happy with things in your life.

So we’re going to look at important for, which is the other side of that. So we have to on this balancing act, and now we have for. It’s about health and safety. It’s about prevention of illness, of wellness. In terms of safety, is it a safe environment for their well-being physical and emotional? And are people free from fear? So that’s the other side about health and safety. But it also includes another piece when it comes to important for and that’s how others see people as being valued in their community and contributing to their community.

So when is the ritual? And you just have to go back and identify the specific activity that somebody does at a specific time. So if it’s in the morning when they’re getting ready, a lot of times, you know, a student will come in and they’re not happy at all. And maybe they don’t use words and they’re letting you know by some behavior. And maybe it just tied back to something that they didn’t get that they’re used to getting every day. And so you discover what’s important, too, from that. What makes for a good day and a bad day for somebody? Figure out how we help
that student get more of a good day. How do we help them there? Because through that, they’re figuring out what’s important.

Female Student 1: Family is important to you?

Male Student: Yes, family.

Female Student 1: And it’s important for all of us.

Male Student: On yours it says to check social media, check text messages, check emails before pretty much anything else. And that’s important to you?

Female Student 2: It is to just see what everybody is up to and to see if there’s anything that I need to do to plan my day according to any messages or emails that I get. So yes, it is important.

Male Student: So if you were to miss that, I guess it’s so important for you for what?

Female Student: It’s important for me to get stuff done for the day. On a personal level with friends and family when I check messages, I know they’re ok and healthy. So it’s more of a spiritual well-being. I guess it aids in that somehow.

Jeff Garrison-Tate: What do you have to do during the day? Do you ever rush out like, “Oh my gosh I slept late,”? What is your day like?

Female Student 2: I keep wondering like, “Oh are they okay? Will I have to go home from work?” And so on and so forth.

Jeff Garrison-Tate: So is there something that people need to know or do to support you?

Female Student 2: Check in on me every once in a while.

Jeff Garrison-Tate: Check in, “How you doing? You’re looking like you’re not happy.” What do you look like when you’re not happy or when you’re not feeling as good? Do you know?

Female Student 2: I’m usually very quiet.

Jeff Garrison-Tate: So the people that know you will know that when you’re looking and you don’t have that energy, maybe they need to know, “Hey did you get a chance to talk with your family today?” So if you just rotate, you pass to her and hang on to their ritual. And look down and say, “Hey, it looks like this exercise is important to you. Is that right?” “Yeah.” So write it down under ‘Important To’. “Is it important for you?” “Yeah it is.” So ask the questions and have the conversation, but don’t make assumptions. Part of this is I may want to look down there and say, “Hey, prayer is really important to you. Is that right? Is that important for your
well-being, too?” Or if I said, “Prayer is important to you. I’m writing that down.” I made an assumption. Assumptions take people’s power away.

Female Student 1: Yes, I keep thinking about it over and over again. Sometimes in the process of the day, I’ll just do it in my head as I’m walking to class or something.

Female Student 2: Okay.

Jeff Garrison-Tate: Great, so that’s important to you. If it’s okay, is that important for you? Is that also for your well-being and your emotions?

Female Student 1: I would say so.

Jeff Garrison-Tate: So do you see how they balance? That’s really critical; that’s really important.