Schools counselling and the management of troubled children: a wider systems perspective

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Context and Site

- Context: welfare and education combined, new “emotional” expectations on schools

- Site 1 - school – school counsellor, strongly led, planned, strong values

- Site 2 - school – school counsellor, facilitative, negotiated, strong values
Method

- Collaborative/reflective enquiry group
- Chaired by co-researchers with two different perspectives
- Groups widely representative of whole staff teams
- Discussing the management of certain troubled youngsters
- Analysis of talk attractors – players, content, form
- Analysing transcripts as a group
Findings

- Early analysis proposes a number of key factors in the staff groups’ management of troubled children.
- They may change as more of the group analyse the transcripts.
- Factors are as follows…
Factors

• Leadership and style
• Safety, solidarity and communication
• Tactics around the child
• Role differentiation – planned and un-planned
  main parent, 1:1 formal learning, 1:1 therapy, 1:1 recreation,
  1:1 peer support, class peer support, key worker
• Knowing, understanding trajectory of troubled children
• Commitment to child
• Family recognition, communication, support
• Containment
• Energy and endurance
• Self-knowledge
• Rescue imperative
• Peer interaction generally incl at home
• Screen and other factors
• Mirroring – transference and neurology
• Value base – inclusion, gender equality, anti racist etc
• Procedure, rules, protocols, ways of doing
• Cognitive and socialisation training
Analysis – two perspectives

- Psychodynamic/systemic theory
  - Schools as containers
  - The emotional lives of children and families

- Complexity theory
  - Non-linearity
  - Dynamic
  - Synergy
  - Attractors
1 Complexity reflections – attractors, basins and saddles
1 Complexity reflections – deep and shallow basins

- Leadership
- Role diff
- Screen
- Values
- Peers
- Understanding child and systems
- Counsellor’s role
1 Complexity and Attractors

- Fixed point attractor (deep) – repetitive behaviour
- Torus attractor (deep) – when graphed looks like standard bell curve
- Strange attractor (shallow) – highly complex but patterned
- Chaotic attractor – commonsense meaning
2 Psychodynamic/systemic reflections - process

- Process – containing “space to think”
- Impact and boundaries of counsellor’s role in the school – “in or out”
- Staff mirroring family projections
- Staff developing trust and coherence
- Inclusive values of who attends the collaborative group
2 Psychodynamic/systemic reflections - containment

- Containment as a development of object relations
- Staff as parent containers
- Staff themselves contained by manager, family, their inner security, continuity
- Containment and its contributing factors constitute deep attractors
2 Psychodynamic/systemic reflections - attachment

- Rooted in psychoanalytic assumptions and in ethology
- Reciprocal co-claiming process between parent and child
- Categories of attachment disorder in children signal different interventions
- Creating conditions for attachment incl secure base, confident staff, relationship building, limit “splitting”
- Main deep attractors are parenting processes
Implications

- The factors, categories, outcomes we construct are problematic;
- They can be refined by iteration, computing, etc;
- They challenge the idea of replication, and of what is necessary and sufficient;
- Maybe the best we can do is establish some fixed points (eg protocols/structures) and preferred clusters of strange attractors;
- How different is this language from that of the psychoanalytic/systemic perspective?
- (What we do know is the collaborative method is a powerful vehicle for change).
Issues in discussion

- Chiara - Synergy - positive? Negative
- Laura - ecological approach - synergy between providers - need a tool
- Jane - FC research, problems in measuring dynamic process - centre based work in Scotland “something more” - assessment plus
- Wendy - inadequate tools
- Ulla - Swedish outcome studies in 131 FCs, mediating factors,
- Hans - looking for new frameworks for outcome research, residential and contextual practice
- Susan - process/relationships - linearity ruled the roost - eval of 295 CP programmes, how to know about new system change? Need for more focused approach
- Elena - Working in complex situation - health and ss integration, acceptable reading of complexity - split between teaching and evaluating - making synergy understandable
- Anita - Lasker
- Chris - attractor