

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

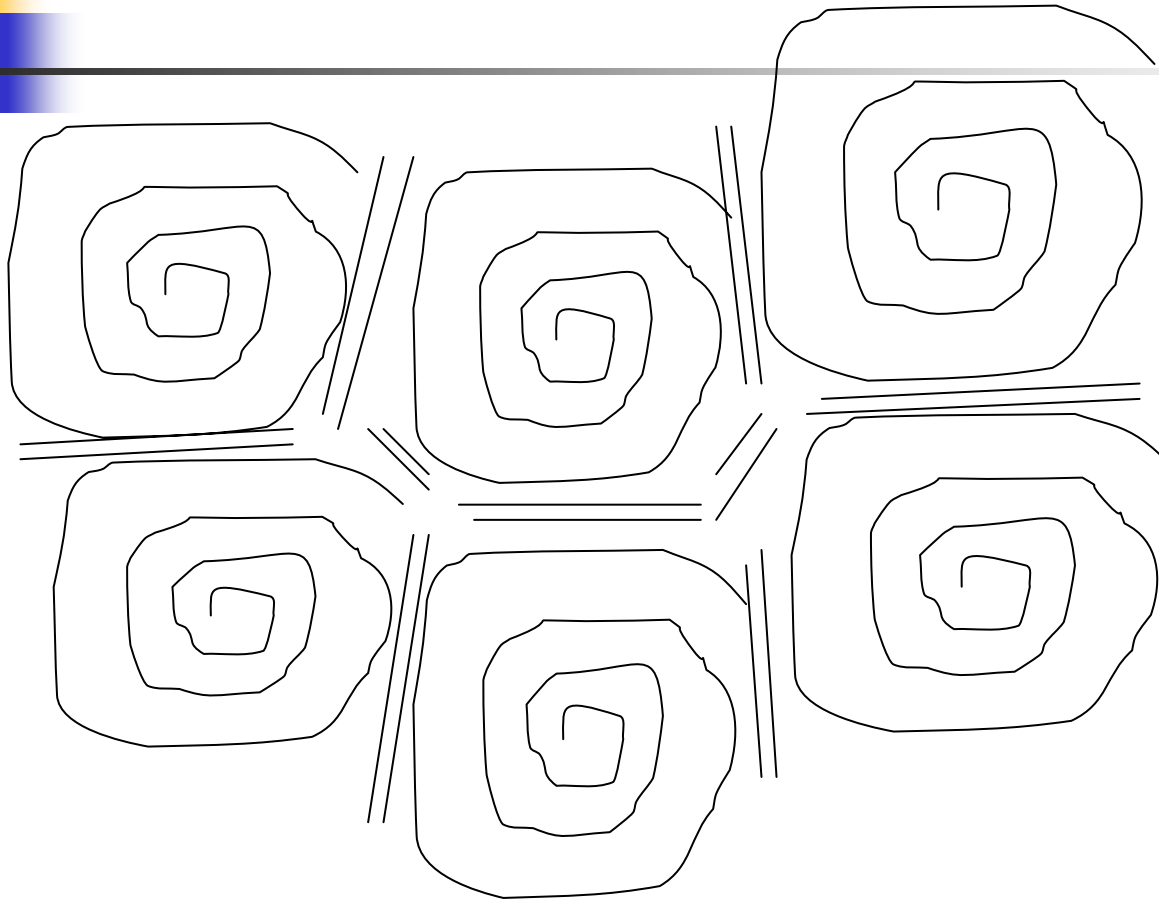
- Leadership and style
- Safety, solidarity and communication
- Tactics around the child
- Role differentiation – planned and un-planned
 - main parent, 1:1 formal learning, 1:1 therapy, 1:1 recreation, 1:1 peer support, class peer support, key worker
- Knowing, understanding trajectory of troubled children
- 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



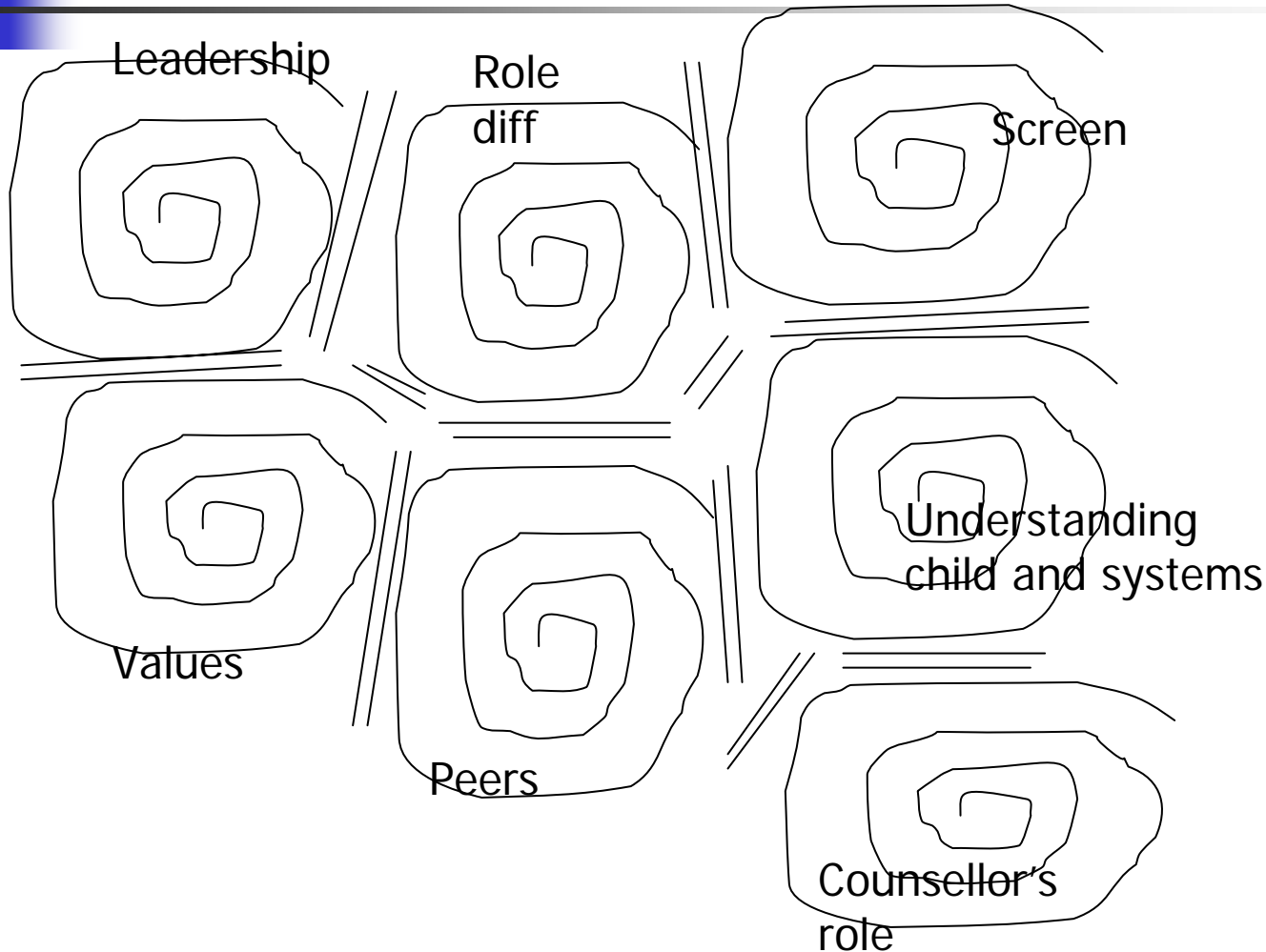
Analysis – two perspectives

- Psychodynamic/
systemic theory
- *Schools as
containers*
- *The of 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





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