Understanding boundaries in inter-professional work

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In this paper, a keynote address at the 2008 SERA conference in Perth, I draw on three recent studies of inter-professional work and examine what is happening at the boundaries of schools and other children's services, as practitioners attempt to collaborate to disrupt the trajectories of children who are vulnerable to social exclusion. The rationale for inter-professional work is outlined and the demands to be made on practitioners indicated. These demands involve them in working within systems of distributed expertise, exercising relational agency and negotiating their identities with other professionals and with clients. The boundary work that occurs to enable the initiation and support of inter-professional collaborations is discussed and the nature of the boundaries studied outlined. Here particular attention is paid to a new space of action that appears to be emerging at the boundaries of secondary schools, where preventative work is undertaken by a new role of 'welfare manager'. The implications of this new and demanding work for the professional development of welfare managers are also indicated.

BOUNDARIES AS SITES OF ACTION

I like being at boundaries: the possibilities for action that occur, the unexpected ideas that come one's way and the opportunities to examine other ways of being. The child of a father who was half Welsh and half German and a mother who is half English and half Danish, our home was a boundary zone between different cultures. Later as a researcher, having worked as a teacher before studying psychology, I inhabited a professional boundary between social and developmental psychology and the practice of teaching which eventually led me to Vygotsky's work. He had already done the groundwork, creating a space where conceptualisations of pedagogy were developed in close iteration with his studies of how children think and learn. Since then I've worked in two interdisciplinary teams on large projects. Overcoming tribal assumptions held by, for example, sociology or social policy colleagues about the expertise and motivations of educational researchers has been challenging, but I've never stopped learning.

There are some key points here. Firstly, boundaries are places where social practices are open to negotiation and the ideas carried in established practices are informed by new insights: that is they are places where we can learn. Secondly, they offer opportunities for creativity: even at the dinner table. Thirdly they are socially constructed. Vygotsky and his colleagues in Moscow in the late

1920s and early 1930s talked, wrote, taught and worked with new ideas which drew people in. However, because they were socially constructed they could also be socially destroyed, and Vygotsky and his colleagues suffered from the social forces that Stalin could muster. Finally, they can be uncomfortable places where identities are questioned and priorities argued.

In all of these points I am seeing boundaries between different systems and their social practices as sites of action, places where ideas and people meet. I am not seeing them as barriers to be spanned or crossed by brave heroes who carry ideas to the unenlightened. That view of boundaries is legitimate, but not what interests me. I am proposing that we need to focus on the boundaries between systems to identify the possibilities for action they suggest. In this paper I shall outline why boundaries are important for professionals who work at preventing the social exclusion of vulnerable children; describe some of the ideas we've developed in order to understand inter-professional work at the boundaries of organisations; examine the negotiations which occur between professionals at these boundaries; and try to illustrate how these ideas are analytically useful through findings from a study in secondary schools which ended in September 2008.

INTER-PROFESSIONAL WORK TO PREVENT SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The idea of social exclusion arose in discussions in the OECD during the 1990s, where it was seen as exclusion from experiencing and contributing to society. Room explains:

> Social exclusion is the process of becoming detached from the organizations and communities of which the society is composed and from the rights and responsibilities that they embody. (Room 1995: 243)

The shift, from seeing problems in terms of being disadvantaged to being 'at risk' of being excluded from what society both offers and requires, allowed the State to think about how it might prevent the exclusion of children from what binds society together and their responsibilities to society. The 'prevention of social exclusion' therefore emerged as a new core concept in welfare services in England in the late 1990s (Bynner 2001; France & Utting 2005).

It is usually linked with the idea of early intervention at the initial signs of vulnerability. This version of early intervention was expanded in the report of Policy Action Team 12. The report argued that children and young people can become vulnerable at different stages of their lives through changes in their life circumstances and that early intervention needs to include acting at the early signs of vulnerability, regardless of age, to prevent ultimate social exclusion (Home Office 2000). In brief, services working with children and families needed to take seriously tier two and three levels of need[1]. Of course vulnerability is often complex and may not be evident unless one looks across all aspects of a child's life: parenting, schooling, housing and so on.

There are two important ideas for professional practice embedded in these developing understandings. Firstly, social exclusion should be seen as a

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[1] Where tier one is responded to by universal services such as schooling and tier four by e.g. child protection.

dynamic process and not a static condition (Walker 1995). The dynamic is the outcome of interactions of effects across different domains of a child's life and therefore can be disrupted if the responses to it are also multi-dimensional. That means that practitioners, working together, can make a difference. Secondly, because vulnerability may not be evident until a picture of accumulated difficultly is picked up by looking across a child's life, all services which work with children need to be brought into the process of prevention (Treasury/DfES 2007), with universal services such as schools having a particular responsibility for alerting other services to signs of vulnerability. This role is now an important one for schools.

Services which work with children therefore needed to help their practitioners to collaborate (Home Office 2000; OECD 1998) to ensure responsive support for vulnerable children. This belief lay behind a raft of measures in England which aimed at producing joined up responses to the multi-dimensional problem of social exclusion. These have included establishing the government's Social Exclusion Unit; the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003); the subsequent *Children Act* (DfES 2004) which together set out an agenda for more responsive inter-professional work; and the development of children's trusts in each Local Authority (Audit Commission 2008) which are intended to implement the agenda.

Actual government initiatives have included SureStart ,which worked with children and their families from birth (Glass 1999; Melhuish, Belsky & Leyland 2005); the Children's Fund, which set up local partnerships to encourage interagency collaborations across services working with children aged five to thirteen (Edwards, Barnes, Plewis & Morris *et al.* 2006); On-Track, which focused on children and crime prevention in targeted areas (France, Hine, Armstrong & Camina 2004); and extended schools (Cummings, Dyson & Todd 2004), which offer support for families, activities for children, community resources and quick access to other services.

Another element of the OECD discussions about social exclusion has had less emphasis. Alongside increased attention to collaboration between professionals, was an expectation that citizens identified as vulnerable would participate in the development of the services that were to be provided for them. Sinclair and Franklin (2000: 2) summarized the reasons for involving children as: upholding children's rights; fulfilling legal responsibilities; improving services; improving decision-making; enhancing democratic processes; promoting children's protection; enhancing children's skills; empowering; and enhancing self-esteem. The Children's Fund did pick up the agenda that children should play a greater role in developing policy and practice. In 2000 its strategy document stated:

> we want to hear the voices of young people influencing and shaping local services; contributing to their local communities; feeling heard; feeling valued; being treated as responsible citizens. (Children and Young People's Unit 2000: 27)

This strategy required service providers to become more responsive to the needs and strengths of the groups with whom they were working and to tailor provision in collaboration with them. However, it was not always easy for practitioners to

adjust from being the expert who inhabited a culture of specific expertise to learn to recognize the expertise that parents and carers brought to discussions of their children and neighbourhoods (Anning *et al.* 2006; Edwards & Apostolov 2007; Edwards *et al.* 2006).

All these aspirations mark an enormous policy shift aimed at changing the vast bureaucracies through which education and welfare services are delivered. The time-scale for change in 2003 was ten years. The length of the timescale has had two consequences which make boundaries interesting. Firstly, actual collaborations between practitioners who are co-located, or placed in multi-disciplinary teams, or in emergent local networks, are racing ahead of their employing organisations leaving practitioners who work with other professions at times uncomfortably out of tune with their organisations. Secondly, new spaces of action are opening up between these organisations which give shape to the new practices. These spaces may be, for example, local partnership boards, more informal locality-based multi-professional meetings or emergent systems of responsive collaboration, for example, around schools.

Hartley (2007) captures these moves with his suggestion that new work orders of collaboration marked by notions of 'inter' and 'co' are producing new 'affinity' or solution' spaces which don't fit easily with, for example, the pedagogic patterns of curriculum delivery and social order in schools. Our evidence supports this analysis, finding that these new affinity spaces are opening up at the boundaries of more established systems for responsive work which can't be accommodated by more rigid bureaucracies and procedures. However, these procedures were developed to protect practitioners who do high risk work. Practitioners working in these new solution spaces are therefore potentially vulnerable as they make decisions and push forward against the grain of established practices.

DEVELOPING UNDERSTANDINGS OF INTER-PROFESSIONAL WORK

We have studied inter-professional working in three research projects since 2003[2]. In each of these studies we have worked with a Vygotskian / Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) view of learning (Daniels 2001). This framework has allowed us to examine relationships between the individual learning of practitioners as they have developed new collaborative practices and study how their organizations have adapted to their new ways of working: in particular how their practices, which are now laden with knowledge that has originated outside, are accommodated by home organisations. For example, can schools incorporate practices which are informed by the priorities and values of social work as a consequence of school-based practitioners working increasingly with social workers? The short answer to that question is, not easily.

Before getting to the longer answer, I'll briefly outline some of the analytic tools that we have developed in those studies to conceptualize responsive inter-professional collaboration and boundary work (Edwards *et al.*, 2009).

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2 The National Evaluation of the Children's Fund (DfES) (Edwards *et al.,* 2006); Learning in and for Interagency Working TLRP-ESRC: RES-139-25-0100 (Edwards *et al.*, 2009); Expanding Understandings of Inclusion: RES-000-22-2305

A trajectory of social exclusion To try to capture the dynamic nature of social exclusion we have taken the idea of a child's developmental trajectory or pathway as potentially broadly linear, but susceptible to disruption by adverse life experiences. The idea of a trajectory makes clear the importance of wrapping timely collaborative support around a vulnerable child to disrupt a pathway that is likely to lead to social exclusion. Our CHAT perspective also meant that we could see a child's trajectory as an 'object of activity' (Engeström 1999) or problem space that could be worked on by collaborating practitioners and the children and their families.

Distributed expertise. A CHAT view of workplace expertise is to see it as a collective attribute spread across systems, which is drawn upon to accomplish tasks. For Engeström, for example, expertise lies in both a system and in individuals' ability to recognize and negotiate its use. He has described expertise as the 'collaborative and discursive construction of tasks, solutions, visions, breakdowns and innovations' within and across systems rather than individual mastery of specific areas of relatively stable activity (Engeström & Middleton 1996: 4). This system-centred view of expertise is compatible with Boreham's idea of collective competence (Boreham 2004) and Bruner's idea of extended intelligence which can be spread across research labs (Bruner 1996). In inter-professional work the focus is not a single workplace system, but emergent systems outside organisational boundaries. The discursive accomplishment of tasks therefore involves developing an outward-looking stance.

One example: we observed the development of a local system of distributed expertise when a teacher in a unit working with asylum seeking children was faced with the distress of a newly arrived Angolan child. Through local multi-professional meetings run by the Children's Fund the teacher became aware of an art therapy group the child could join, and was able to take the child's mother to an agency who could give her the specialist trauma counselling she needed. The teacher was opening up trails that could be walked later by others (Edwards *et al.* 2006). In every study practitioners have told us how important it has been for them to hear about the specialist expertise that is available locally, through discussions of actual trails followed.

Seeing expertise as the negotiated task accomplishment carried out by that teacher implies an enhanced form of responsible professionalism, as practitioners negotiate their own ways through local systems towards desired outcomes for children. It also raises questions about the purposes and effectiveness of the rigid procedures that have defined bureaucracies. Glisson and Hemmelgarn, writing about organizational climate and outcomes of US children's services in 1998, explain:

> …process oriented approaches emphasise pre-programmed activities which limit employee discretion and responsiveness to unexpected problems and opportunities. In comparison results-oriented approaches focus employee attention on the desired outcomes and require employee flexibility and discretion in the development of individualised approaches to reaching those outcomes. (p. 416)

In other words, practices which responsively help children reconfigure their trajectories towards inclusion demand an enhanced form of resourceful

professionalism, characterised by decision-making which responds to the needs and strengths of vulnerable children and of the other professionals who may be working with them.

Relational agency Working flexibly within systems of distributed expertise can be highly risky for practitioners: the bureaucratic systems of social work and education were developed to protect potentially vulnerable practitioners. However, the more flexible responsive practices of inter-professional collaboration mean that outward-looking practitioners need to become adept at recognising and working with:

i.   the conceptual and material resources that other practitioners bring to bear when interpreting a problem of practice; and
ii. the resources that these practitioners use when responding to those interpretations.

The idea of 'relational agency' which was developed in studies of collaboration in teaching and work with vulnerable adults (Edwards 2005; Edwards & Mackenzie 2005) offers a way forward for understanding and developing high risk, responsive inter-professional work which meets these criteria.

Relational agency is a capacity for working with others to strengthen purposeful responses to complex problems. It is a two stage process within a constant dynamic. It involves:

i.   working with others to expand the 'object of activity' or task being working on by recognising the motives and the resources that others bring to bear as they too interpret it.
ii. aligning one's own responses to the newly enhanced interpretations, with the responses being made by the other professionals to act on the expanded object.

Relational agency helps us to understand Engeström and Middleton's (1996) negotiations to accomplish tasks by pointing to the need to develop an ability to undertake these negotiations. But it is not simply a matter of technical skill, the affective, values-driven aspects of professional work are quite central to negotiations around a child's trajectory.

Recognising values and motives Our studies have indicated very clearly that professional values operate as kind of glue which allows different professional responses to be woven together towards a long term goal such as children's wellbeing. Relatively open-ended value-laden goals to which all professions can subscribe give direction to immediate actions on pressing problems of practice. For example, recognising that wellbeing is a shared long-term goal allows teachers to be less worried about attendance when housing is the priority for a child and her family.

Recognising that values are overlapping and goals are similar is, we think, a precursor to more detailed recognition of what gives direction to the immediate actions of different practitioners. Here professional motives for action are central. In CHAT terms the object motive, or what it is practitioners see in a child's disrupted trajectory that leads to their wanting to take action, is what gives direction to immediate actions. Recognising the object motives of other

professionals is key to relational agency, as the expanded understanding of a child's trajectory occurs as a result of recognising and engaging with the different motives of other professionals.

We would argue (Edwards & Kinti, in press) that work on understanding both general values and more precise motives is a necessary pre-requisite to responsive inter-professional work. Boundaries are important, because it is there that values and motives need to be made explicit if collaboration is to occur.

Boundaries There is a large amount of research on boundaries in systems theory research (Midgley 1992; Ulrich 1983). Most of it builds on the work of Churchman (Ulrich 1988) who argued that boundaries are social constructions which define who is included and excluded from interactions and what knowledge is considered relevant in those interactions. Ulrich's development of Churchman's work has paid particular attention to the values that give shape to the boundaries. While Midgley's later analyses, of how differences in values can give rise to differences in where boundaries are drawn and the marginalisation of the less dominant group, have strong practical relevance for inter-professional work with children and families.

Midgley and his colleagues have revealed how users of a housing service for elderly people were marginalised in the processes of service development (Midgley *et al.* 1998). Here the service users were given what Midgley *et al.* describe as a 'profane' status by service providers who wanted to exclude them from discussions about service improvement. This finding has strong resonance with our work, for example, as across the studies we have seen little evidence of carers being included the boundaries that professionals are drawing around their collaborations so that they too might be involved in working on the trajectories of their children.

Boundaries are therefore not neutral places. As Kerosuo (2003), working within the CHAT tradition, has observed boundaries associated with work are often unstable and can be uncomfortable places to be. Negotiating professional identity, that is, a sense of what one should and can do, at the boundaries of organizations, while beginning to articulate new practices is particularly challenging.

REVEALING MOTIVES THE BOUNDARIES

My argument so far is that before we can achieve flexible and responsive early interventions to prevent social exclusion time needs to be given to revealing and examining the values and motives of the practitioners with whom future collaborations are likely. Boundaries are important places as the work that occurs there gives shape to the collaborations that occur as a result. They are also not neutral places, rather they are sites of struggle where different meaning systems and the motives they carry vie for dominance.

In one case study in the TLRP study, school-based participants focused on strengthening a tight boundary around the school that excluded elements of the meaning systems of other services and enabled the school to maintain established within-school social practices. These included labeling children as troublesome, for example, committing 'uniform offences' and 'spoiling lessons' rather than troubled. In the multi-professional sessions the research team set up

most of the school practitioners focused on the maintenance of those categories, despite considerable evidence, such as staff self-descriptions as 'headless chickens', which suggested that the complexity of children's vulnerability was over-stretching the resources and practices of the school.

At the same time, the other services which worked with children who attended the school were beginning to see themselves as elements in a system of distributed expertise which enabled them to look across the lives of vulnerable children; identify the complex components of risk of social exclusion; and work together to disrupt the trajectories of exclusion inhabited by vulnerable children.

Practitioners' attempts at both defending the school boundary and disrupting it occurred through narratives which carried in them the categorisations and values that were represented on both sides of the boundary. The deputy head as official voice of the school, for example, offered frequent tales of horror and heroism which offered a rationale for the boundary around the school.

In contrast, Clive, the school's educational psychologist, used the multi-professional sessions we set up as a pedagogic space where he could make visible the need for change by identifying the contradictions in the school and between the school and other services. At the same time, however, his language revealed the categorisations that made sense for him as an educational psychologist. The following extract follows immediately after a claim by Carol the deputy head teacher that the school was a sanctuary, away from dreadful home conditions.

> *Clive:* It's interesting it makes me think of boundaries again. There is a sense in which although the child is the same child outside and inside we sort of feel we can almost draw a boundary around the school and say when you are in here you can leave it at the gates or we can minimize the effects yeah….I think we set ourselves a target which is almost unachievable, unattainable in the sense. Um and perhaps the way in which schools with others need to be bridging that boundary differently. It resonated with (name of nearby city) where the teachers' feeling was although a lot of the cause of underachievement and so on lie…are outside the school, it's their responsibility to do something about it. And there's the terrible bind. I think teachers put themselves into feeling responsible for doing something. Of course with one hand tied behind your back.

> *Cathy (one of the teachers):* But isn't this where we feel we are working in isolation, that the school is really quite apart from those, its quite apart from the rest of what is going on. We are .. this is different, therefore we can move up this way because its not going to come in. And that's what we are trying to say.

> *Clive:* ….if you keep bringing people into the school, if you keep doing that the school will burst. Or do you, do you have a school working with and across that boundary, I don't know. Perhaps there is a model that works. But I think we're struggling towards a model that is successful in terms of meeting the children's needs, the family's needs and education's needs and the professionals in education.

There is a lot in this multi-voiced extract: Clive's tentativeness; the use of the inclusive 'we' with teachers in the school to suggest 'relational engagement' (Tsoukas, in press); his 'second story' (Ryave 1978) offering an account of teachers who realized they couldn't solve everything in order to 'normalize'

(Makitälo 2006: 541); the contradiction he has revealed; and his rich metaphor of the bursting school. These can be compared with Cathy's use of 'we' which means 'we teachers'; the attempt to reinforce what the deputy head has said and her difficulty in articulating what she means. However, let's focus on how Clive mediates alternative ways of categorizing the school's practices in the discussion and reveals his own categories.

By using the language of educational psychology, for example, 'effects' and 'targets', he also reveals how he is making sense of situation. This is not a neutral act. Clive's response to Cathy's move was to return to the idea of an over-stressed system which had been discussed earlier and state the contradiction very clearly using an image from the systems theory that was informing his current PhD study; 'the school will burst'. Then through his tentativeness he invited the other participants to join him in the educational psychologist's task of creating 'a model that works'.

Approximately one hour after the interchange between Clive and Cathy, Cathy produced her own 'second story' allowing her to both engage with the educational psychology talk by offering a model while not attacking the categories in use in the school.

> I mean something that just… sorry, something that just came into my head is many years ago I worked in (name of city) for the child guidance service. And the way they worked it there was that the child guidance service… there were offices in each area. I think there were eight offices altogether. And each office then had its own schools and the schools referred to child guidance. In that team, I was a teacher in the team, we had weekly meetings where all the children that were referred by those schools were discussed with the paperwork obviously. That team consisted of psychiatrist, Ed Psych, social worker, teacher and I can see a couple of others but I'm not sure what agencies they were. So then the child is discussed, the presenting problem is discussed and it was decided at that weekly meeting which agency was actually going to be dealing with them, at that time…I actually look back that on that system…as being a very good one at the time.

Here we can see how Cathy had been drawn into the meaning system that Clive had revealed and was licensed by the possibilities it offered to present her own alternative to the school's categories. She was 'balancing at the boundary' of the school and looking out at other possibilities for action. It seems that these narratives and the conversations in which they were located were revealing values and motives to open up opportunities for collaboration.

The narratives were also doing other work. They carried the intentions of the speakers and of the professional tribes that gave rise to the language used. The narratives were used to both give access to specialist worlds and to attempt to shape the emerging landscape that was the new system of distributed expertise in ways that reflected the meaning systems of the actors. Despite the accounts appearing to have equal weighting in the sessions, the implicitly mediated representations of the different professional tribes showed signs of what Mehan (1993: 264) has described as 'ranking on a vertical plane' with, for example, Cathy the teacher, engaging with the projective narrative offered by Clive the psychologist. Boundary spaces are not benign neutral places. Rather they can

be sites of struggle over identity and knowledge and in particular whose knowledge prevails.

THE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDY

The study This study[3] has revealed a new boundary space in the making and allows me to (i) examine the analytic usefulness of some of the ideas outlined so far and (ii) raise questions about how English secondary schools are dealing with the prevention of social exclusion and children's wellbeing.

Over sixteen months in 2007-08 we examined how schools were responding to policy demands that they become part of local systems of services for children which were aiming at disrupting children's trajectories of exclusion. The project set out to identify:

- the challenges facing schools and teachers as they contributed to preventing social exclusion;
- features of schools which gave rise to preventative practices which included working responsively with other professionals; and
- the shifts in teachers' professional practices which enabled them to work in preventative ways with other professionals and vulnerable children.

The study was particularly timely, as although schools don't have a duty to collaborate with children's trusts, several trusts are seeing schools as local organising hubs for devolved local partnerships. One might therefore expect that boundaries of schools would connect with boundaries of children's trusts, with some mutual informing of practices on either side of the boundary. We worked intensively in five schools and then checked the findings with teachers in a further 46 schools across England through oral or written questionnaires in the Summer of 2008.

Attainment and wellbeing: the sacred and the profane? The most striking finding in four of the five case study schools was that the academic systems were becoming increasingly distinct from the pastoral systems. This separation was in part a function of workforce remodelling which encouraged the employment of non-teaching staff; and in part a result of revised professional standards for teachers which made teaching and learning responsibilities essential for progression through them. As a result, former pastoral staff such as heads of year and form tutors were focusing increasingly on target setting and monitoring academic progress while pastoral work was passing to the new post of 'welfare manager' or their equivalent, who were paid as teaching assistants. Twenty nine of the 46 larger sample of schools reported similar developments in 2007-08. Alongside these changes, which had been driven by a desire to focus more intensively on pupil attainment, we found a new space of action or solution space emerging, where the reconfigured pastoral systems of the schools took forward their concerns about children's wellbeing to develop relationships with other practitioners and it is this I shall focus on.

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[3] Expanding understandings of inclusion: implications of preventing social exclusion for practices in schools. Research team: Anne Edwards, Ingrid Lunt and Eleni Stamou

These spaces formed a solution space between schools as academic systems and children's services in local authorities across England. Practices in them engaged with the socio-emotional problems identified in school, but which could not be accommodated by schools as academic systems. The fact that welfare managers had the time to take seriously problems of children's wellbeing that couldn't be dealt with elsewhere was mentioned in every school.

> They (the welfare managers) are completely there for the wellbeing of the child. (Deputy Head Teacher)

> The interpersonal stuff (of being a form tutor) is totally subsumed by paperwork, bureaucracy and routines. (Form Tutor)

Welfare Managers were also able to reveal the extent of children's need for help. For example, through the within-school data collection systems they were operating, they noted the accumulation of low level disruptions and early signs of vulnerability in ways that had not been done before. Schools, of course had carried out their safeguarding responsibilities, but had not, for example, dealt with the more pervasive problems of children's mental health. Welfare managers were revealing problems which the schools' academic systems had long rendered invisible and could not cope with.

While using the term 'sacred' for the academic and 'profane' for the welfare systems may initially appear overly dramatic, schools were drawing clear boundaries around their academic systems and moving their expanded role in promoting wellbeing to beyond that boundary.

Boundaries as social constructions? Welfare managers were constructing new systems which, although running in parallel with the school academic systems, were based on different purposes and methods of communication and were focused on children's socio-emotional health rather than academic achievement. In CHAT terms they had different objects of activity, tools and rules.

Within the schools these emergent solution spaces operated separately from, yet alongside, schools' behaviour or discipline-based academic systems which were oriented towards orderly behaviour and preparedness for learning. However, welfare managers also looked outwards, beyond the school boundaries and the space of action they were creating there opened up the possibilities for tier two and three responsive preventative work with other professionals.

Schools welcomed the emergence of a separate system, as the responsive practices of prevention were incommensurate with the established achievement-oriented practices of the schools. The boundaries around the new solution space were still being negotiated during the study, as these senior teachers from different schools explained.

> They (welfare managers) started a year ago and it was a new role, we hadn't had it before so it's kind of continually being invented. I think that's a source of frustration for them because sometimes the boundaries aren't as clear as they would like them to be. And that's an ongoing conversation.

> … we have been aware of the fact that (the academic and pastoral) systems don't necessarily marry together - and we're aware of trying so that people are not duplicating things or anything is falling through the net.

Distributed expertise outside schools? The external liaison which linked within-school preventative systems with external agencies was increasingly carried out by the welfare managers. However, the expertise of welfare managers and their contributions to external systems of distributed expertise were difficult to discern. Their knowledge was mainly situated. As former teaching assistants they knew the schools and often the families: 'I mean we know the child'. They were eager to learn about aspects of vulnerability, attending day courses whenever feasible. However, the primary benefit of these courses was the new contacts they could make: new resources to be woven into the support of children.

One welfare manager explained how she drew on the expertise of social services as a result of meeting social workers at short courses.

> I've got the sort of rapport with social services that I can ring them up for advice…now I would automatically ring them…can you give me some advice. And it if it is not you who should I go to?

On the other hand it was not clear how social workers were ranking the knowledge of the welfare managers. Schools were approached to help social workers include details of school attendance in their case notes and there were examples of social workers asking schools, and thereby welfare managers, to explain difficult issues to children which they may not have accepted from social workers. In brief, welfare managers were primarily being asked to support the intentions of social workers rather than being regarded as practitioners who might inform those intentions. If there was a knowledge hierarchy, social work was ranked higher than being a welfare manager.

On the other hand, welfare managers were beginning to draw social workers and other collaborating professionals into the prevention-oriented systems they were establishing as they followed children's trajectories and requested support. But here again a sacred and profane divide was evident as the expertise of parents was rarely drawn on to help reconfigure a child's trajectory. Instead, parents were frequently presented as part of the problem, rather than potential partners.

Revealing values and motives? Discovering the expertise distributed across local systems was also an important aspect of within-school 'multi-agency meetings' where welfare managers reported building up their knowledge of where support outside the school might be located.

> And sometimes I sit there and think actually, you know, that might be useful. And you jot it down. And then maybe a few months later it is something you can tap back into. I find that part very useful. (Welfare Manager)

However, this learning was quite serendipitous and oriented to knowing who to call on rather than an exploration of values and motives.

We found no evidence of meetings being set up specifically to enable the sharing of values and motives as a precursor to informed inter-professional collaborations. Instead these within-school multi-agency meetings focused on

solving problems identified by schools. As a consequence, welfare managers were placed at the boundaries of schools, trying to create, interpret and navigate local systems of potential support driven forward by their concern for specific children. It is difficult not to see them as potentially vulnerable practitioners.

Relational agency? I suggested earlier that knowledge of values and motives were central to the operation of relational agency. I also argued that relational agency was key to responsive inter-professional prevention. Respondents to the oral questionnaire did recognise the importance of relational agency. The most highly rated statement about what school-based practitioners have to learn in order to deal with the prevention of social exclusion was 'working flexibly with other services to support a child involves developing new insights into the priorities and practices of other services'. This was the 'relational agency' question, inserted to test its validity as a concept for the development of inter-professional work. Thirty four of the forty six identified it as one of the three most important aspects of inter-professional work, making it the most highly rated item from six.

It was clear that welfare managers were learning from the practitioners external to their schools as they actually worked with them on problems identified in schools. They were expanding their understandings of children's trajectories through these experiences and were becoming aware of the motives of other practitioners and how they would be able to respond. One deputy head teacher described their work as 'building up an intelligence' around a child so that strategies can be put in place to reduce vulnerability. However, as I have already indicated, this process was rarely reciprocal.

Who was shaping the new preventative landscape? These new spaces of preventative action were being shaped by the schools as they moved welfare concerns outside the dominant academic systems. The preventative practices that developed in these new externally-oriented solution spaces were seen as 'plugging a gap' between the alerting role of schools as universal services (Treasury/DfES 2007) and the high need crisis-driven work of social services. This description of welfare managers' work was representative:

> (these children wouldn't meet the criteria for referral to mental health services) But they desperately needed someone to give them some one to one time and help them get their heads round what is going on …. Then (the welfare managers would ask) can anyone offer us some advice help or support about what we should be doing?…It just seems to have a more positive agenda. (Deputy Head Teacher)

Practices were therefore being driven forward by welfare managers often supported by members of the schools' senior leadership teams who were doing just was government demanded of schools, identifying vulnerability and setting up early interventions. There was frequent evidence of 'rule-bending' by welfare managers or senior teachers as they became impatient with external procedures when, from the schools' perspectives, immediate action was needed. In summary, the new preventative solution space presented itself as a new site for action, with new practices being led by school-based staff who operated outside the academic systems of the schools.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

I've presented a snapshot of work at an emergent boundary space between schools as academic systems and the other services available to support children. This space became important, as expectations that schools would contribute to preventing social exclusion became increasingly apparent. At one level we have revealed that schools were responding to these new demands in creative ways, through workforce remodelling. At another level this study has raised some important questions about where these developments might be heading which are informed by the more general work on inter-professional practices and boundaries I outlined earlier.

What do the concepts we've developed to describe and perhaps operationalise preventative inter-professional work tell us about what is happening in and around secondary schools, in England at least?

- The welfare managers were following children's *trajectories* and were aiming at disrupting their progress towards social exclusion through early preventative interventions which were focused ultimately on their re-engaging with schools' academic systems. The goal of wellbeing therefore has a strong educational element.

- Welfare managers were drawing on *expertise* distributed locally to help them solve the problems they had identified. They were, as a result, establishing new connections or pathways of collaboration which could be mobilised to support children in future. However, there was little evidence of schools' substantive contribution to local expertise. The professional expertise of teachers was contained in the increasingly tightly bound academic system, leaving welfare managers as the main representatives of the preventative systems. Given their potential role in children's trusts, it would seem that there is still a great deal to be done to achieve inter-agency collaboration at an organisational level.

- While engaging with other practitioners, welfare managers were *'expanding' their understandings* of children's trajectories and how other practitioners may respond to them. However, there is little evidence that other practitioners were approaching them for child-focused collaborations which might result in their reciprocally learning from the welfare managers. This may, in part be because the expertise that that welfare managers offered was heavily situated in knowledge of specific children, and in some ways little different from the knowledge that carers might bring. There is certainly evidence to suggest that the preventative space where welfare managers worked was seen as 'profane' by social workers and therefore there was little to be learnt there.

- Wellbeing was a long-term value-laden goal that could be espoused by everyone drawn into the solution-space created by the welfare managers. However, there was little evidence of attention to different *motives* for working together. Because work was solution-focused, attention centred on 'knowing who' might help, rather than revealing and emphasising their different readings of a child's trajectory so that it might be seen in its complexity and more complex responses arrived at.

- *Boundaries* are erected to protect. The welfare managers found themselves outside the boundaries of the higher status academic systems of schools and the crisis-driven heroic work of social services, yet carried considerable responsibility for the wellbeing of children. At the same time the expertise offered by parents was given profane status to separate it from what might be offered by the welfare managers. I would suggest that we cannot be satisfied with a preventative system that is regarded as profane yet sits between the two systems that should be collaborating to prevent the social exclusion of vulnerable children and sidelines the contributions of carers.

We were, of course, examining an emergent system. Nonetheless, if this analysis is even approximately valid, we need to face the challenge of moving preventative work from its current status. It needs to be elevated from simply carrying out the work that cannot be accommodated in schools, to one which is highly valued and which would allow welfare managers or equivalent roles to operate as resourceful practitioners and to negotiate with some equality with potential collaborators. Appropriate training and professional standing for the role is simply a first step, but I suggest an important one. Another, is for practitioners in schools and other agencies to be helped to unpick the components of wellbeing in order to reveal the extent they do subscribe to similar values.

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