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Tracing the Journey: Two School-Based Counsellors 'Coming Out' of the Counselling Room. An Ethnographic Enquiry within a UK Inner-City Secondary School

Submitted by Peter Pearce and Rosaline Sewell

Student No: Peter M00130279

Student No: Ros M00131282

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ABSTRACT

TRACING THE JOURNEY: TWO-SCHOOL BASED COUNSELLORS 'COMING OUT' OF THE COUNSELLING ROOM. AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ENQUIRY WITHIN A UK INNER-CITY SECONDARY SCHOOL

Mental health issues for young people in the UK are relatively common, being experienced by upwards of 10% of people aged between 5 and 15 (NHS Digital, 2018). Evidence for the benefits of school-based counselling in UK schools is also steadily mounting, as is interest in and support for the idea. In spite of this, its provision within schools in England remains insecure and it has been subject to a recurring cycle of development and decline since its inception in the 1960s.

This dissertation comprises a personalised account of the researchers' own shared journey as experienced counsellors who were new to an inner-city secondary school setting and were encountering difficulties working effectively in that new context. Our initial question was therefore: How could we make sense of the difficulties we were experiencing? As our research progressed, social and cultural processes in the school community were identified, and a further question emerged: How might any of the understanding gained be used as a bridge to better connection in this setting?

The research goes beyond the focus on one-one counselling that has been the emphasis of the majority of school-based counselling research and practice. It is believed that as a result the study may illuminate some of the cultural intersections and complexities inherent in the school-based counselling context that the researchers believe require greater attention if the offer of counselling within schools is to become a more secure provision. This intention led the two researchers to adopt a reflexive and ethnographic, insider research approach for the current study, which was undertaken in an inner-city setting in an area of significant deprivation with a very diverse student population. Data analysis began with early data collection, in line with a Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2006 ; Glaser & Strauss,

1967) and our ongoing analysis shaped the continuing data collection. A new theory about adult-to -adolescent process termed ‘tenuous contact’ was constructed and a post-qualification conversion diploma was developed and delivered based on the research findings, which will equip counsellors to work in this sector.

The study will be of interest to professionals concerned with school-based counselling and, more widely, it is hoped that it will contribute to an understanding of social and contextual issues in offering mental health support within education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Both researchers came to school-based counselling with broad therapeutic experience from different settings, including considerable experience of complex, multi-disciplinary teamwork. Ros had also previously worked in schools and education in other roles. Despite this, we each seemed to be repeatedly experiencing incidents in which the place of counselling in the school fluctuated from being seen as an essential part of the school to beings positioned as getting in the way of students' learning. Often, both of these experiences occurred within the same short exchange in this context. We noticed that this was making relating feel loaded for us, as we would wonder what was coming and this left us feeling unsure of ourselves and the work. As we strived to report and reflect on these occasions within our shared supervision time, we gained some reassurance from identifying that we were both having this experience of the setting. We jointly resolved to try to make meaning of this experience to find a way to operate within this setting.

The Emergence and Evolution of Research Questions

We therefore generated an initial research question that was designed to help us with our practice: How could we make sense of the difficulties we were experiencing?

As our research progressed, social and cultural processes in the school community were highlighted, and a further question emerged: How could any of the understanding gained be used as a bridge to better connection?

This study aims to tell our personal stories of journeying from offering individual therapy toward joining together as researchers and beginning to explore our practice from an insider perspective. In this way, we are hoping to illuminate aspects of our work as counsellors within this inner-city secondary school setting. The study has a particular focus on our experience outside of the counselling room and with issues of the 'fit' between counselling and education. Reflecting on the literature, we found that there was a significant gap in research that explores the experience of the school-based counsellor outside of the counselling room and as part of the wider school community and culture. We therefore adopted a reflexive and ethnographic approach to the project research, which allowed us to

observe and record our experiences systematically. In keeping with an ethnographic writing style, data is embedded throughout this report to support the discussions and findings.

Our aim is that the data may illuminate some aspects of the 'lived' experience and social world of our school-based counselling setting so that others in similar situations may compare this with their own experiences.

We hope that the voices of the young people we worked with will 'speak' through the material we outline. We acknowledge that our experiences will, inevitably, have been 'occasioned' and 'contexted' and that we will have played an active part in the 'co-creation' of our 'data', colouring what we have deemed significant and the meaning we have given it through the process of analysis. Other researchers in the same setting would have 'produced' different 'data' and analysed it differently. However, being actively engaged in research has encouraged us to risk our ideas at conferences and to publish our 'discoveries' (or more properly, constructions). The response we have received has shaped the research as we have strived to share our struggles and dilemmas and to engage with our peers within the school-based counselling community.

2. COLLABORATION IN RESEARCH

The school setting was practically and professionally challenging, and we both found working in this environment stressful. In this context, transforming our ideas into practical sessions was a complicated task that always required the pair of us to engage on multiple levels within the system. We were supportive of each other professionally and emotionally. We often acknowledged to ourselves both individually and together that if we had been working alone we would not have continued working in the school, a feeling we continue to share today.

As the context for these developments required constant collaboration it felt important to us that our research reflected this collaborative stance.

Long before we embarked on this formal doctoral research training, we were engaged in reflexive conversations together about our work, in which we tried to articulate our experience of initiatives that were designed to deepen empathy and self-awareness. We had begun writing some of these conversations up and were keen to push ourselves to better understand our work and the impact of it. We were discussing this process with a colleague, who encouraged us to apply for a Doctorate as she felt that we were engaged in work that we could explore at a deeper level. She felt that it would provide us with the opportunity to take our work into the wider field of psychotherapy. Individually, neither of us had ever considered taking a Doctorate but the idea of working together and making a formal research arrangement from the work we were already doing was appealing and felt manageable. Our entry into a collaborative research project has therefore mirrored our existing working relationship. Working collaboratively on the doctoral project evolved naturally and felt like a continuation of our work together.

Both of us have long backgrounds of working collaboratively in other work settings, within a variety of multi-disciplinary settings and co-operatives respectively. Just as it was in the workplace, our struggle to explore, capture and make meaning from our experience on this project was a shared one. Our way has always been to strive to challenge and support each other. As collaborative researchers, we have been encouraged and supported to continue to

work collaboratively by our university. So, what does collaboration mean and what does it mean to us?

Collaboration

Our collaborative relationship developed slowly. Initially it was functional, we knew we could work together. Over time, our trust in each other and the collaboration deepened into a kind of 'second-order' collaboration, where we have become vulnerable to each other, care for each other and have developed together. Mutual respect has been a foundation for this development and related to this has been the sharing of mutual influence.

Immersing ourselves back into the data we were suddenly struck by how much our experience in the Academy had become that of surviving marginalisation as much as researching it. We are aware of how vital our collaboration and mutual support was during this period, as was the informal 'social' relationships that we had developed within the staff group at the academy.

Wider Vision

Collaboration has enabled us to 'see more', and sometimes different, aspects of our work in the field. The shift from 'monocular' to 'binocular' vision has, we believe, supported our accurate judgement of perspective and depth.

Sharing Views

We feel that we have been able to process at a deeper level and gain greater clarity by bringing our separate and different perspectives to the research journey. The process of uncovering differences and of continuing to reflect together has, we feel, helped to create a richer product. This is because our collaborative study contains both of our individual perspectives as well as a single one formed from the exploration of our inter-subjectivity.

Support

Our working relationship is very supportive both personally and professionally. This has allowed and encouraged us to take more risks in both our individual and collaborative work. This individual strength comes from knowing that we are not alone. We have found that we can tackle problems in the workplace together because we provide a united front and back each other up.

Collaboration at Each Stage of the Research Journey

Collaboration has remained crucial throughout the research, analysis and write-up stages of this study. The ability to create a dialectic about writing and thinking has helped us bring forth new possibilities. The outcome has not merely been the refuting of one of our points of view, but a synthesis or qualitative transformation in the direction of our dialogue. Through supportive challenges, we have been able to monitor each other's responses to a situation and have experienced this as a balancing influence.

Balance

We are aware that each of us brings our subjectivity and potential bias to this research. Although we have both worked hard to account for this individually as researchers, the collaborative stance provides a further filter.

Difficulties

To work in the genuinely collaborative way that we intended to and that we feel this project has required has meant making time to discuss, relate and author this write-up together. As two professionally busy people with families and our own set of health and 'life' issues, this proved very difficult at times. Even when we have come together for this process, we have been very conscious that negotiation about ideas and phrasing has taken much longer than it might have for either of us if we were researching and writing-up individually.

Working collaboratively has meant dealing with twice the potential obstacles that present themselves in the everyday trials and tribulations of life. For example, we have encountered three births following difficult pregnancies, six lots of surgery, a hospitalised infant with meningitis, a teenager with ongoing ME problems under consultant care, the redundancy of a

partner after 38 years of service, moving house twice and both of us being on the receiving end of unfair dismissal twice at the Academy and then successfully going through the complicated and scary process of an employment tribunal together that resulted in a 'premature' end to our work in the research environment. Collaboration has therefore meant being willing to let the other person into the minutiae of each of our intimate private lives in order to maintain sufficient empathy. We have grown to understand that we have each carried a huge responsibility for the other's continuation with the project. It has quite literally been a case of 'your problem is my problem' and vise versa. We have noticed that this necessity has moved collaboration far beyond empathy. Our lives now seem to be fundamentally intertwined so that any dilemma for either of us needs to be shared and responded to jointly. In part this has been about the connection built between us. We recognise that it has also in part been about necessity and pragmatism.

We have each strived to remain alive to the potential that 'group think' (Janis, 1972) has to set in within collaborative work and we have tried to remain aware of how we might inadvertently become too much of a cohesive 'ingroup' so that our "strivings for unanimity override … motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action" (1972, p.9).

Such 'groupthink' would, for each of us, mean losing our creativity and uniqueness and our independent voices, thoughts and feelings. We feel that a number of factors have helped to guard against this potentiality. Our consistent attention to reflexivity, combined with values that strive to accept and honour each other's unique subjectivity and our own striving to own for ourselves our congruent responses and maintain an honest and open dialogue.

Though we have worked on this study collaboratively, we are separate individuals with differing circumstances and commitments. To manage this required each of us to sustain empathy with the other's perspective and to respect our numerous differences. In some of the many stressful situations we encountered in this setting this proved difficult, and, at times, we felt close to ending the project.

The nature of our commitment to our collaborative agreement has meant that each of us has been willing to continue at each stage of the process or to wait for the other to overcome whatever life issue has arisen, so we have each needed both patience and tenacity to see this project through.

We are also anxiously aware that such collaborations are a relatively recent occurrence within academic work at this level, though they are perhaps the predominant format for most research and development in many ‘real world’ settings. We have had a positive response from the University throughout and we were encouraged into this collaboration, although we both continue to be aware that we may still encounter traditional academic viewpoints that question the credence of such a collaborative submission.

Risks of Collaboration

We are aware that collaboration carries inherent risks. As we are already a team, others have sometimes seen us as exclusive, and there has been a danger that our collaborative ‘comfort zone’ has prevented us from stepping across to connect with others. We have strived to remain alive to this possibility and we feel that our collaboration has not become a barrier to either of us remaining outward facing to others.

Multiple Writers

Our data has consisted of a number of different ‘voices’ (sometimes in both harmony and discord):

- Each of our individual, first-person singulars, ‘I’.
- Our first person plural as researchers, ‘we’.
- Our first person plural as companions with the participants, students and staff, ‘we’.
- Their third person singular ‘we’.

3. THE CONTEXT FOR THIS STUDY

This chapter will briefly outline the setting for this study, provide an overview of the transitions and changes that this school underwent during our journey and offer some examples from our early journaling.

The macro-educational background for this research was a shift from incremental change (continuous improvement) to intended 'transformational' (fundamental) reform within the UK education system. For example as set out in the Department for Education and Skills report, *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All : More choice for parents and pupils* (DfES, 2005). System-wide change of this sort is, perhaps necessarily, destabilising at all levels and has the potential to be highly disruptive. The present study arises from our counselling work that took place for more than a decade in an inner-city secondary school with students ranging from 11 to 18 years old. Counselling was initially brought in by the special needs department but was soon contracted across the whole school. The school was one of the largest inner-city secondary schools in the UK, with a diverse student population in one of the most deprived wards in London. The student intake was predominantly Muslim, with a high proportion of students being refugees or from asylum seeker families. More than 100 languages / dialects were spoken and the teaching staff were similarly diverse. The school had far higher than usual numbers of students with eligibility for free school meals. More than 80% of children in the catchment area who were aged under 15 belonged to families that were dependent on workless benefits. There were similarly high levels of children with special educational needs. The impact of all these challenges meant that many young people arrived with poor literacy and were often displaced and distressed.

In addition to this, the school, being large and often not chosen by parents, filled many of its places after the start of the school year with students who had been excluded or were hard to place in other schools who often had to travel long distances from other parts of the city.

The Working Environment

The initial impact of working in that environment on each of us was a feeling of being lost and unsure. The school felt like a hostile environment for both students and staff, one in which counselling, by its nature, did not seem to fit. We constantly talked in supervision

about the daily chaos that seemed ever-present in the school, with teachers raising their voices at students and each other. Students responded to this by shouting back, slamming classroom doors and swearing at each other and their teachers.

Below are examples from each researcher's journal that illustrate the experience of coming into the school environment

Journal Entries – Early Experience - Ros

First Journal entry – Ros

I entered the building. It looked as though it had been built in the 1960s. It seemed modern to me as my school was in a very old building and was part of a convent. As I walked into the reception area, I was struck by the noise level. The reception area echoed as it was full of people shouting, screaming and laughing, both students and staff. The school day had not yet begun, and I tried to make myself heard over the noise as I endeavoured to introduce myself to the receptionist. She laughed as I struggled and then said 'I can't hear a word either', P was warm and friendly, and I felt a connection between us. P shouted across to me, 'wait a minute' but before she finished speaking she was silenced by a loud bell. School had started, and everyone began running to their classrooms. Over the noise of the students running and shouting the voices of teachers could be heard: 'no running' 'move quickly to class'. I was amazed that within seconds the reception area felt silent P said 'now we can hear ourselves speak.'

I was taken through to the Head of Lower School Mr S. I was taken aback by his first words to me.

'I have no idea why anyone thought it was a good idea to have a counsellor in a school, and I don't know why anyone goes to a counsellor anyway. But the special needs department has asked for a counsellor, so here you are. So you are very welcome.'

He smiled, shook my hand and showed me to M the Special Needs Coordinator's (SENCO) office.' M was warm: 'thank goodness you are here. We so badly need a counsellor. I've been trying to get a counsellor for a long time and finally, they've agreed to it.'

I was struck by all the different responses that were going on in me; I felt both welcomed and not valued at the same time. I worried that my time would be wasted at this school and I

didn't really want to stay. There was so much noise in the building that it had a chaotic feel. While M was trying to orientate me to the building and the job, she was constantly interrupted by students who didn't know where they were supposed to be, had lost their planner or were sounding off about an altercation with a teacher. I could instantly see that just having a counsellor available to talk with students could be very useful for the school. I wondered how I would function in the chaos.

I was shown to the medical room, a long, thin, dilapidated room with a faint lingering smell of disinfectant. The door had a latch type lock on it that meant it locked from the inside. I immediately felt reassured that counselling sessions would be private and undisturbed. This reassurance didn't last long. While we sat talking in the room there were several knocks on the door, some were genuine queries, but often there was no one there, sometimes laughter and running footsteps could be heard along the corridor. I became aware of the sense of fun amongst the young people and thought about my role as an adult in the school and how I would manage discipline around the school and what would be expected of me. I know that I also like to have fun and this might help me to engage with young people.

I was struck by the tannoy announcements that frequently disturbed lessons. It wasn't just the fact that there were announcements, it was their negative nature:

> *'The following people will come to my office at 3.30.'*
>
> *'The students who were running through the Dining Hall at break time will see me at 3.30… you know who you are.'*

I noticed that even the announcements that were about positive events were also negative.

> *'Sorry for interrupting lessons. Those who have been selected for the football team need to be at the bus at 3.40. The bus will leave at 3.45, and anyone not on it will be left behind.'*

I felt my heart sink at these words, and by the end of the day the frequent tannoy announcements had begun to weigh heavily upon me. It was something to do with the constant negative comments, which felt intrusive and inescapable. I felt relieved that the announcements were not for me and were unlikely to be, but they still affected me. I thought about the impact this must have on the students.

A lasting image remains my attempt to go to the staff room at break time. The bell rang for the break, and I opened the door to go across the corridor to the staff room, and it was like opening the door onto a stampede. All I could see was a block of students tearing past the door. I couldn't come out of the room. I closed the door again and had to wait until they had all gone by before venturing out of the room. I felt afraid and vulnerable. This highlighted for me how different my own experience of school had been. I had attended a convent school for girls that had 30 students in the entire year, and we had walked in silence along the corridors keeping to the sides with our hands folded and our eyes down. I was aware that this was a school but that it was not like my school. I felt a little afraid of moving around in the large seemingly unruly crowds.

When I arrived at the staff room, I spoke to some people but noticed that I mostly observed others in the room. I was sad to see that most of the conversation centred around negative aspects of the students. For example:

> *A: I've just about had enough of X this morning*
>
> *B: He was a little shit in my class to this morning*
>
> *C: Who are we talking about?*
>
> *B: X*
>
> *C: Oh well he's always the same*

I ran my first group today, and it felt like a complete disaster. I was working in the dining room and was clearly visible through the glass doors. I was given a group of boys who had been referred for 'bad behaviour', and, as I had expected from a group of this make-up, they set out to demonstrate to me just how disruptive they could be. They had found it difficult to sit still in the group, and the large room was unsuitable for a group that was difficult to contain. During the session, one of the students noticed that the floor was slippery and began to improvise a rowing boat whilst in his chair and began 'rowing' around the room. The rest of the group joined him, and the entire group was 'rowing' around the room. I was torn between stopping them and allowing them to move back into the circle. I struggled with my own responses, wanting to be present to them but also wanting them to stop. I was worried that I would be seen and my services would be dispensed with. I just waited to see what would happen. One of the students 'rowed' up to me:

> *S: You don't think this is fun do you, Miss?*
>
> *R: I can see how you do, but I'm sitting here wondering how we are going to talk together and that's what I would like to do.*

He said nothing but rowed back into his place and sat there. He called to the others to come back into the group. I waited for them all to arrive and we carried on. It was a scary moment. I questioned whether I was skilled enough for this work.

My first day was challenging and eventful. I feel as though this is going to be challenging work.

Journal Entries – Early Experience - Peter

First Journal entry – Peter

I feel very overwhelmed by the structure of the institution. It is a reminder of both my poor sense of direction - the layout of the building is quite a challenge to learn - and my poor memory for names. It is especially difficult because of the need to learn two sets of names for staff, the public: Ms Molnar and the staff room: Tatiana.

I notice my embarrassment that I have forgotten the names of some staff that I have met today. I feel particularly foolish that I have forgotten the names of a couple of teachers who have been most welcoming and seemed genuinely interested in the idea of counselling – makes me feel very much the new boy in an environment where all the adults appear confident and authoritative. It all brings back strong memories of being at school and not knowing which class I was supposed to be in next.

Reflection

Notes of this sort recurred throughout my fieldnotes and, I have never wholly lost the occasional sense of being 'lost' in this setting. I have come to understand this as a referent experience for many of the young people I see who are sometimes 'lost' between family values, school values and peer values, between their culture of origin, experienced culture and peer group 'cultural' expectations and between childhood and adulthood.

Journal entry – Peter - Later that first term

All the adults in this setting (if not always all the young people) appear busy and purposeful. They move around the building with confidence and authority, intermittently pulling a student up on their behaviour (amazingly often by name!): 'S, stop that, he doesn't need you hanging off him….and tuck your shirt in!' or just directing and moving young people on: 'Come on, stop blocking the corridor you two…and shouldn't you be somewhere?' 'M, you again, why are you out of class?'

Reflection

Although this, 'micromanaging' of student behaviour and appearance as staff move around the building is aimed at keeping the young people on timetable and within school rules, it does also seem, in some cases, to stamp the authority of the adults over the students and put them 'in their place' in a very different way. We have talked at length in supervision about this and we also recognised our own experiences of feeling 'put in our place' in some of our interactions.

The fire alarm went off frequently, sometimes several times a day, as bored students used it as a way to get out of lessons. This became a regular ritual (that seemingly went unchallenged) with the whole school evacuating the building and lining up in the playground. On one occasion this happened twice during a counselling session.

One early journal entry reads

'School seems to be full of people who don't want to be here, of people waiting for the end of day school bell and the holidays.'

It was into this environment that our counselling service arrived. As counsellors, we realised that our task would be a considerable one if we were going to be able to offer support to young people and across the school. Our role was not always well received or understood; the special needs department seemed to welcome us while some other members of the staff did not. We struggled in supervision to make sense of our work and to understand what we were able to offer in this challenging setting. We identified high levels of 'relational disconnection'. We wanted to find ways of helping people connect. Initially, we were unable to do any more than offer one-to-one sessions. We regularly journaled individually and began

to discuss ideas about how empathy and connection might be enhanced in this setting. We were both aware of how important it felt to make sense of what was going on. Our reflexive practice became established, and we were supported by occasional feedback that showed staff and students were beginning to feel the impact of having counselling in the school. We started to realise that the difficulties we were experiencing were often on two levels, which could be characterised as working within the institutional system and with meeting the young people themselves. We used our supervision and reflective sessions to try to identify the specific problems.

Developments

At this point we were focused on trying to aid connection and were able to offer no more than individual therapy. We were aware of the potential for initiatives that could expand our contact. We began to be interested in the interactions and connections we were experiencing outside the therapy room and endeavoured to deepen our practice inquiry to include what we termed, ‘coming out’ of the counselling room. We were noting and reflecting on these interactions and wondering about the effect of striving to maintain a person-centred posture at all times. At this point, although we had not identified it, we were operating in that environment as practitioner / researchers, striving to understand our experience working as counsellors within the school. The school was moved into what is termed ‘special measures’ by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills), and this meant that it would be selected for closure if its status didn’t improve. A troubleshooting Head Teacher was moved into the school and began to assess the needs of the school carefully, cutting some services and providing new ones. We were invited to a meeting with him to talk about our services and to see whether they would be considered useful. We saw this as an opportunity to discuss all that a counselling service, and we as experienced practitioners, could provide. We presented him with the rationale behind some of our initiatives. A short while later this very supportive Head Teacher, who had a vision for the school, approached us and asked us to set up some of these initiatives. He also had ideas for other initiatives that would help him to meet his objectives. From this moment on we felt that our service had arrived at the school and had been recognised and we began to enjoy the new stability that was being created in the school.

A range of initiatives were developed comprising:

- A student peer support service
- Counselling skills courses for teaching staff
- Reflexive supervision for staff
- Therapeutic group work
- Family work

Throughout this process we were reflecting, recording our conversations verbally and on tape and processing our input. We began to write to enhance our understanding of what was going on in the school.

The staff worked hard to turn the school around, and it received a ‘rapidly improving’ school status from Ofsted. However, the closure that had been threatened went ahead, and the school reopened in new premises as an Academy. The Academy was a very different environment from the original school, and we once again found ourselves and our services marginalised. At our first meeting to discuss the future of the counselling service a senior manager asked, ‘what use is empathy?’ The demographics of the school began changing and so did its ethos. From a place in which staff collaborated to help the students, who were often struggling at home and at school, the school changed to a place in which the ethos was to have ‘zero tolerance’ of behavioural issues. There was a new thrust towards getting some of the students to university. The teaching staff profile changed to meet these new goals with new members of staff being young and predominantly white. Our hard fought-for and very successful initiatives were dismantled under the new system, and we found ourselves having to re-assess the service to suit the needs of this new enterprise. We were faced with a difficult choice. Could we stay and work in this new environment in which we knew we would continually struggle or should we leave? There was one element that remained unchanging, the needs of the students and staff with whom we were so connected. We chose to accept the challenge to remain, knowing that it might prove too much for us but that we were committed to and passionate about the student’s mental health and wellbeing. We tried to look at what a counselling service might look like in this new learning establishment and adapt what we could offer. We once again experienced ourselves as counsellors offering values that seemed to have little resonance within our working environment, and we often felt powerless as, it appeared, the original staff and students did too. We struggled with the question of how we could hold empathy in a changing environment?

The first distinct difference and challenge for us was that the whole school building was glass, with everything on show and no privacy. How could a counselling service operate in this environment? We had already seen the benefits of 'coming out' of the counselling room, so we continued to develop this practice whilst also being reflexive about our experience. We were more visible than ever, which caused its own difficulties. Yet we had chosen to work in this unstable environment knowing that we would find it difficult.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review intends to set the current study in context to help illuminate where it may usefully contribute to available knowledge. The review begins by identifying what is known about young people's mental health in the UK and goes on to detail the history and current provision of UK school-based counselling. As the setting for this study is an inner-city school in an area of significant deprivation, the impact of these multiple levels of vulnerability on mental health and education will then be explored, along with existing knowledge about the work of UK school-based counselling services. The current study hopes to contribute to available knowledge by illuminating the experience of the school-based counsellor within the broader school community so the related literature on the impact of the school environment and whole-school wellbeing initiatives will then be considered. Lastly, as the methodology for this study is ethnographic, the review explores the literature from ethnographic studies in educational settings.

The Mental Health of Young People

> The true measure of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children – their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialisation, and their sense of being loved, valued and included in the families and societies into which they are born. (UNICEF, 2007, p.1)

In 2007 at the beginning of the research journey for the current study, UNICEF conducted an international survey of child and adolescent wellbeing. The UK came bottom of the table for wellbeing and was identified as "having some of the unhappiest children and young people among "developed" countries" (Pearce & Sewell, 2014, p.42).

The most reliable and up-to-date survey of young people's mental health in England, identifies that as many as one in eight 5-19 year olds (12.8%) meet the criteria for a mental disorder (NHS Digital, 2018). This survey is the first to report on the 15-19 year old age group so there are no earlier figures to compare it with. However, figures for younger people

from 5-15 years old record a gradual increase in the prevalence of mental health disorders from just below 10% in 1999 to just above 10% in 2004 and 11.2% in the latest 2018 report.

"The levels of crises and the chronic nature of problems, powerlessness and depression which [we] have encountered over many years working with young people in London would support these concerns, and calls for urgent and appropriate responses" (Pearce, 2014, p.42).

School Counselling in the UK

To set the current study in context, this section outlines the historical development and current picture of counselling services offered to schools in the UK. We shall identify how these services developed and how they are delivered in practice.

History

Counselling began to be developed in UK secondary schools during the 1960s, initially being implemented after the *Newsom Report* (1963) as a response to poor educational attainment. Baginsky (2004) identifies considerable growth in the number of school counselling services from the mid-1960s and 70s, followed by a rapid decline during the 1980s. Bor, Sanders, and Markie-Dadds (2002) attribute this decline to a lack of resources and the belief that the counsellor role was integral to the school's pastoral care team role. Robinson (1996) describes how early UK school counselling was not embedded in the culture of schools nor even monitored. We would suggest these factors are likely to have accounted for some withdrawal of service. Since the 1980s schools have been increasingly accountable for their financial investment and assessment of the effectiveness of a service provider is vital for funding applications. The *Children Act* (HMSO, 1989) enshrined a change in attitude toward the rights of young people and introduced greater requirements for pastoral care within schools in the UK. Mabey and Sorenson (1995) suggest this legislation was instrumental in reversing the decline of services seen in the 1980s and increasing interest in school counselling as an easy to access, acceptable and appropriate means of providing emotional support for young people.

In 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government made independent counselling provision compulsory in all post-primary school settings. This decision came following the findings of the *Clywch Inquiry* (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2004), which was set up after allegations of sexual abuse by a teacher in Welsh schools. The inquiry concluded that, as teachers are in a position of authority there would be benefit in employing adults who were

separate and independent of this system to provide dedicated emotional support within schools. A joint BACP and University of Strathclyde evaluation of this 'All Wales Strategy' indicated that the counselling offered was effective and had led to a range of improvements and a reduction in the workload for teaching staff (Cooper, Pybis, Hill, Jones, & Cromarty, 2013). The most recent report for this programme found that 89% of the 11,500 young people in Wales receiving school-based counselling did not need a further referral, with only 4% being referred on to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) (Perks, 2016).

The Northern Ireland Government has also implemented counselling in all post-primary school settings (NICCY, 2007). The Scottish Government has committed to providing counselling in all schools in Scotland since 2005 (Public Health Institute of Scotland, 2003). However, there is as yet no strategy for how this will be administered.

Current Picture

So we can see that in both England and Scotland, provision is, at present, variable and the longer term history has been one of development and attrition in line with political support and, in particular, education budgets. There is some evidence that "governments are at last beginning to accept that such pro-active spending on the mental health and well-being of children and young people may be an effective and efficient investment in the longer term" (Pearce, 2014, p.42). This was given serious consideration by the UK Coalition Government (2010-2015) as illustrated by the report *No Health Without Mental Health* (HM Government and Department of Health, 2011) which identified how *"*by promoting good mental health and intervening early, particularly in childhood and teenage years, we can help prevent mental illness from developing and mitigate its effect when it does*"* (DoH, 2011, p.2).

This work has been continued with the establishment in 2014 of a Department of Health and NHS England-directed Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Taskforce. This taskforce has reviewed the structure and provision of mental health services for children and young people and looked at ways that access can be improved. The concluding governmental report *Future in Mind: Promoting, protecting and safeguarding our children and young people's mental health and wellbeing* (DoH, 2014) identified the importance of schools, alongside other services, in promoting positive mental health and supporting the recognition of and access to appropriate services when necessary. Following on from this work, the Department for Education report, *Counselling in Schools: A Blueprint for the Future* (DfE, 2016) details a developing role for schools in identifying and supporting

concerns about young people's mental health and sets out an expectation that young people will have access to counselling in schools.

The UK Government's spending on the mental health initiative *Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT)* (HMG/DH, 2011) has now also been broadened to include children and young people's mental health and will include an Evidence-Based Curriculum for Counselling Children and Young People.

So the idea of an in-school counselling service has steadily gained a higher profile in the UK, attracting increasing education and health service support for young people. The amount of literature available relating to the outcomes and process of school counselling in the UK is also growing including the researchers' own published research (Cooper, Fugard, Pybis, McArthur, & Pearce, 2015; Pearce et al., 2017).

Both researchers have been asked to articulate their professional practice knowledge at a national level as members of an Expert Reference Group commissioned by the UK professional body for counselling (BACP) to create a competence framework for counselling children and young people and to translate this into a post-qualification National Curriculum for the training of counsellors to work with children and young people - a hugely important step (Hill, Roth, & Cooper, 2014).

However, despite this positive rhetoric about young people's mental health, Faulconbridge, Law, and Lafan (2015) identify that in 2012 / 13 this sector received only 6% of total mental health spending, which was itself only around 11% of the NHS budget as a whole. Despite announcements of new money for young people's mental health, they caution that this represents only a 2% overall increase in spending on child mental health. The level of commitment in practice could therefore still be questioned. Furthermore, despite declared support for the provision of in-school counselling and mental health services from all political parties, the uptake of these services remains in practice largely dependent upon individual schools deciding to allocate sufficient funding to these services. School-based counselling thus continues to remain an insecure provision in England.

Links Between Poverty, Mental Health and Education

As the setting for this study is an inner-city school with a diverse student intake and considerable experienced deprivation, it is essential to consider the impact these multiple levels of vulnerability have on mental health and education.

Campion and Fitch (2013) identify an association between social deprivation and vulnerability to mental health difficulties amongst young people. According to the UK Department of Health *Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report* for 2012 (Davies, Lemer, Todd, Cheung, & Murphy, 2012) children and adults in the bottom quartile for household income have between two and three times the likelihood of experiencing mental health issues than their more affluent peers. These likelihoods rise still further for those in social care (Burns et al., 2004) or the criminal justice system (Skowrya & Cocozza, 2006).

With a fragile global economy and with the number of families living in poverty in the UK rising (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Child Commission, 2014), we would argue that there is an urgent need for an investigation into approaches that can address young people's mental health. Persistent emotional or behavioural problems increase the probability that a young person will face school exclusion and that they will leave school without qualifications (Green, McGinnity, Meltzer, Ford, & Goodman, 2005; Hofstra, Van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2000; Parry-Langdon, Clements, & Fletcher, 2008). Kim-Cohn, Caspi, Moffit, and Harrington (2003) point out the frequency with which emotional and behavioural issues that began in childhood persist into adulthood. However, Green et al. (2005) suggest in their systematic survey that between 25% and 40% of young people facing these issues do not receive any professional help. We feel that this calls for further crucial research into the contribution that can be made by school-based counsellors into combatting mental health issues in school leavers.

Sadly, in the UK counselling provision currently competes in school budgets with many other priorities. This is particularly true in the inner-city areas of social deprivation upon which our work has focused. We would also suggest that young people in socially disadvantaged areas, who are more likely to be experiencing distress (Murphy & Fonagy, 2013) are unfortunately also less likely to have school-based counselling available to them because of competing demands on limited school budgets. It might reasonably be claimed, however, that these are the very areas where school counselling could make the greatest impact at this early stage in the poverty and mental health cycle.

The Work of School-Based Counselling Services

A consideration of the existing work of school counselling services might help illuminate where the current study may contribute to available knowledge in the field.

The Welsh Assembly developed evidence-based recommendations for best practice in school-based counselling as part of the Stage 1 Report on the evaluation of the *Welsh School-Based Counselling Strategy* (2011). Reprinted in Table 1 below, these recommendations are:

Table 1

Best Practice Recommendations

1	Have sustainable funding
2	Employ professionally qualified counsellors who have experience of working with young people, who access appropriate clinical supervision with experienced supervisors, and who take part in regular, relevant continuing professional development
3	Deliver accessible counselling in an appropriately private but safe setting within the school vicinity
4	Be seen as non-stigmatising by the school community and a normal part of school provision, which is integrated into the school community
5	Be monitored and evaluated by individuals or an agency (in or out of the school) with experience in this specialised area of work
6	Pay due regard to current legislation and guidance, and offer confidentiality within usual ethical and safeguarding limits
7	Respond flexibly to local needs in respect to diversity (e.g. language) and practicality (e.g. availability during holiday periods)
8	Work with and alongside other services and agencies in a collegial manner, whilst maintaining appropriate levels of confidentiality

9	Employ counsellors who are members of a professional body and as such have an established ethical framework and complaints procedure
10	Employ counsellors whose personal qualities will mean that they are approachable, have good listening skills and a manner that encourages a climate for safe and trusting relationships

Note. Reprinted from *The Evaluation of the Welsh School-Based Counselling Strategy Final Report*, 2011, Welsh Government Social Research, Number 23, p.10.

The literature review from this evaluation identified key findings as reproduced in Table 2 below:

Table 2
Key Findings

Young people attending school-based counselling services in the UK are typically referred by school pastoral staff
The most common presenting issues are family-related, followed by anger, school-related difficulties and bereavements
The levels of young people's initial distress when attending school-based counselling services are similar to those recorded at Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
On average, around 60% of clients of school-based counselling are female and, typically, from the middle school years
Clients attend for an average of approximately six sessions, with attendance rates of around 80%
School-based counselling is associated with significant reductions in psychological distress

School-based counselling is consistently rated positively by a range of stakeholder groups and viewed as a non-stigmatising, easily accessible form of early intervention
The evidence is limited on the process, or outcomes of counselling in primary schools.

Note. Reprinted from *The Evaluation of the Welsh School-Based Counselling Strategy Final Report*, 2011, Welsh Government Social Research, Number 23, p.12.

These results pick up a variety of themes that we recognise from our own experience of school counselling. We have found the first contact with our service occurs most often when someone expresses concern about a young person. Frequently this is a member of staff or a relative, and the young person's concerns are often not directly school related. We also agree with the findings of this report about the source of referrals and the importance of early intervention for a successful outcome.

Benefits of in-School Counselling Provision

A series of UK research studies by Cooper and colleagues document school-based counselling as being well received by both teaching and pastoral staff and by young people themselves. They are also described as being easy to access and very responsive to young people's experiences of mental distress (Cooper et al., 2010).

Banerjee, Weare, and Farr (2014), reviewing a UK based national programme, *Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning* (SEAL), found both decreased exclusion levels and increased academic attainment following these targeted school-based interventions. As discussed earlier, attainment levels had historically been one of the chief reasons for considering the implementation of a counselling service in schools. In addition, economists have identified that school-based interventions can lead to health and education savings (Holder, Beecham, & Knapp, 2011).

Through our work in schools as counsellors dealing with similar issues and distress levels, we know that, although we can only offer a limited time frame, what we do can be highly beneficial and is valued by key stakeholders as an accessible early intervention.

Place of the Current Study

Previous research (Cromarty & Richards, 2009; Jenkins & Polat, 2006) has identified that counselling in school requires working within an environment with organisational characteristics that impact on the counselling work. This ethnographic study hopes to contribute to available knowledge by illuminating the experience of the school-based counsellor in such a complex environment. There is little in the literature that directly explores this, although interest in 'whole school approaches' to mental wellbeing has grown in the time we have been working in UK schools and conducting this research, with "ethos, physical environment, policies and procedures, provision of services, and relationships with the wider community" (Kidger, Araya, Donovan, & Gunnell, 2012, p.926) each being targeted. This is an area of growing interest and developing research, so it is worth exploring the related literature on the school environment, mental health and similar such whole-school initiatives.

The Role of the Wider School Environment

A systematic review of the evidence concerning the impact that the environment of the school has on young people's mental health would suggest that a dual approach, encompassing both individual and environmental elements would seem likely to have most potential impact. However, it concludes that at present, evidence about the effects are limited, and further, better quality studies are needed (Kidger et al., 2012).

Many studies conclude that the size of a school, the number of teachers to students, the styles of teaching and the quality of interventions may all have an influence on young people's mental health and wellbeing (Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996; Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000). Experienced school 'connectedness' has also been identified as important in maintaining a sense of wellbeing (Lin et al., 2008; Shochet, Homel, Cockshaw, & Montgomery, 2008; Sun & Hui, 2007).

In general, published research has identified difficulties in defining and 'measuring' elements of the school environment like 'climate' or 'connectedness.' Such concepts tend to be comprised of quite disparate aspects, which can be quite subjective. For example, criteria such as "respectful and supportive relationships, commitment to school, participation and feeling safe" (Kidger et al., 2012, p. 926) leave it less than clear which specific factors make a real impact.

When a school is rated highly on attributes such as safety and fairness this can help to foster a sense of community (LaRusso, Romer, & Selman, 2008; Loukas & Robinson, 2004). Likewise, positive peer and teacher relationships are all associated with better mental health (LaRusso et al., 2008; Murberg & Bru, 2004; Saab & Klinger, 2010). To us, these studies seem to underpin our theory that counselling has a role in helping to establish these attributes within the wider school community. In their systematic review, Kidger et al. (2012) identified evidence of benefit from 'classroom-based programs' designed to "improve coping skills or develop knowledge regarding emotional disorders and how to seek help" (2012, p. 926). However, they concluded that many respondents were just unaware of how to seek help within their schools. Our own experience in London schools would certainly concur with the limitations of solely curriculum-based interventions.

Research has also been conducted into the types of whole-school intervention that it might be practical to consider in order to have the maximum impact. The *European Union Dataprev Project, Schools Work Package* (Weare & Nind, 2011) on school mental health incorporated 52 meta-analyses and systematic reviews. They found that most interventions had only small to moderate effects statistically, although these had substantial real-world impacts. They also discovered that these effects were variable and their effectiveness was not always reliable. We feel that complex factors similarly impact on the successful implementation of counselling in different school settings and we hope that this ethnographic research might illuminate some of the subtleties and complexity of the school setting.

In their study, Weare and Nind (2011) identified that the

> characteristics of more effective interventions included: teaching skills; focusing on positive mental health; balancing universal and targeted approaches; starting early with the youngest children and continuing with older ones; operating for a lengthy

> period of time and embedding work within a multi-modal / whole-school approach. (2011, p.i29).

This study also highlighted that some programmes, particularly those that target the whole school, may not be of value unless implemented with, "clarity, intensity and fidelity" (2011, p.i 29).

Other researchers have similarly highlighted how fidelity of implementation impacts such initiatives (Challen, Machin, & Gillham, 2014; Flannery, Fenning, Kato, & McIntosh, 2014). These findings are in line with an earlier literature review which highlighted the 'necessary conditions' for success, including,

> programme design (e.g. clarity of rationale, promotion of effective teaching strategies); programme coordination (e.g. school-wide co-ordination, partnerships with families and the wider community, sense of common purpose); educator preparation and support (e.g. formal staff training); and programme evaluation (e.g. data collection relating to implementation and impact). (DfE, 2011, p.37)

Another consideration is whether the approach taken should be an attempt at blanket coverage or if the methodology and implementation should be targeted at specific issues and age groups? The *Me and My School Project,* (2011) was part of the *National Evaluation of Targeted Mental Health in Schools* (TaMHS) programme. (Wolpert, Humphrey, Belsky, & Deighton, 2013) It revealed that,

> TaMHS provision resulted in a statistically significant decrease in problems in primary – but not secondary – school pupils who had **behavioural problems** at the outset, but had no effect on primary or secondary school pupils who had **emotional** difficulties at the outset. (2011, p.93)

No effect was found for secondary school pupils enrolling with behavioural problems. The report suggests that programmes based in school are focused on improving behaviour and not on resolving emotional difficulties. It concludes this is perhaps because schools are more familiar with identifying and responding to behavioural issues as part of general classroom

management. The authors propose some factors they suggest might contribute to the less consistent and less positive change to mental health problems seen in secondary school students. They believe that individuals' issues may be more entrenched by this stage and, consequently, more difficult to modify. Further, young people may experience the 'overall climate' of secondary school less positively; and, of course, secondary schools tend to be much larger, more complex environments than primaries and it is therefore harder to implement change therein (2011).

The TaMHS workers consulted for 'Me and My School' highlighted challenges such as, "finding a common language to use between mental health providers and schools. They also expressed concern about ensuring long-term funding and the embedding of the effort in the school over the longer term" (2011, p.101) to ensure that initiatives were sustainable. These are issues that we have been concerned about for some time with regard to the role of the school-based counsellor.

Research on the relative merits of whole school initiatives being implemented by either mental health professionals or by school staff seems mixed. Findings for the *UK Resilience Programme* (UKRP) highlight that, "interventions may produce reduced impacts when rolled out and taught by regular school staff" (Challen, Machin, & Gillham , 2014, p. 75). By contrast, Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011) found that interventions led by teaching staff had better outcomes than those undertaken by both school staff and outside specialists. However, they hypothesise that this result may be because joint programs have more implementation problems.

From the literature as a whole, there is evidence that some type of whole-school intervention does have benefits, but the difficulty lies in adapting any programme to accommodate the unique perspective of each school. A DCSF Report on *The Impact of School Leadership* (Day et. al., 2009) identifies that "almost all school variables have small effects. So for aiming to improve schools, the challenge is to create 'synergistic effects'; the accumulations of small effects in the same direction" (2009, p.10). This same report also identifies how, particularly in "schools in more challenging contexts…establishing cultures of care and achievement" (2009, p.3) is key to successful outcomes. Our research in an inner-city school is based on such a profile.

From the research literature review, we have been able to identify that mental health programmes in schools that are to be beneficial need to promote:

- an environment, “that fosters warm relationships encourages participation, develops pupil and teacher autonomy, and fosters clarity about boundaries, rules and positive expectations” (Weare & Gray, 2003, p.7)
- a favourable school climate (strong leadership, positive school commitment) (Corboy & McDonald, 2007; Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D’Alessandro, & Guffey, 2012)
- a service offered by adults that young respondents experience as “friendly, trustworthy and skilled. Teachers and peer mentors were not thought to meet these criteria” (Kendal, Keeley, & Callery, 2011, p. 245)

However, in any implementation we need to be mindful of:

- “the perpetuation of a narrow and de-contextualised ‘programs and packages’ perspective, poor management of time and other resources, and inadequate attention to characteristics of the adults who must carry out planned reforms” (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003, p.303)
- challenges in “finding a common language to use between mental health providers and schools” *Me and My School. Findings from the National Evaluation of Targeted Mental Health in Schools 2008 to 2011* (2011, p.12)
- diffusion processes in complex systems (Evans, Murphy, & Scourfield, 2015)
- the impact of teachers’ perceptions of the school’s organisational climate (Malloy et. al., 2014)

Through an analysis of the research literature, we can now see the extent of the need to address mental health issues amongst secondary school students and have gained an understanding of the approaches that might prove beneficial and cost-effective for schools. By adopting an ethnographical methodology, we hope that we will be sensitive to some of the issues of language and culture identified in this literature and contribute to identifying gaps in this critical area of research.

Ethnography in Education

Lastly, as the methodology for this study is ethnographic, it is worth reviewing the literature from the rich tradition of ethnographic studies in educational settings from the UK and abroad (most notably, the USA). In the UK this tradition is situated within the sociology of education, whereas in the USA it has predominantly grown out of cultural anthropology. Delamont and Atkinson's comparative reviews of research from these two traditions (1980, 1995) suggest that American studies have more frequently focused on the classroom impact of differences in ethnicity, with "the teacher as agent of cultural imposition" (1995, p. 34), whilst the British tradition focuses more often on social class and elements that limit both teachers and students, both "subject to the everyday disciplines of work"(1995, p. 34). According to Gordon, Holland and Lahelma (2001/2014), the theoretical and methodological approaches that have predominated within this field include research on social interaction, cultural studies, critical ethnography, feminism, difference and diversity, postmodern and post-structural ethnography and materialism. We will briefly review these areas to help situate the current study.

Much recent research has been focused around the creation and change of symbolic orders through social interaction (Silverman, 2006). From Jackson's, *Life in Classrooms* (1968/ 1990) onwards, these studies have illuminated much about the complexity, ambiguity, competing interests and hidden curriculum at play within everyday classroom processes. These studies have also helped to bring out political issues. For example, reviewing earlier work, Hammersley describes how differentiating students by academic-behavioural standards tends to polarise their attitudes to those standards, with those ascribed to the lowest groups rejecting "it and the values it embodies" (Hammersley, 1990: 104-5). Other important themes from this research have included how power in the classroom can be seen as a process of negotiation (Delamont, 1976; Larsson, 1993). Studies following this theme have focussed particularly on processes of control within schools and on initial encounters in which 'the order-that-is-to-be' (Davies, 1983) tends to be negotiated. For example, Hammersley (1990), researching in an inner-city school similar to the setting of the current study, describes the structure of teacher-pupil relationship within the school as super-ordinate-subordinate, while other studies have explored student's negotiation, challenge and resistance to this (Beynon, 1985). Ethnographic studies in education have also sought to explore the effect of educational policies on the work of teachers and, illuminatingly, this research has highlighted the

importance of the micro-politics in a school (Ball, 1987; Gillborn, 1994a). Troman (1996) for example, describes teachers having, "a strategy of resistance within accommodation" to educational reforms (1996, p. 485).

Cultural studies have arisen from frustrations with the interactionalist approach. Sharp, for example, argues that the emphasis on policies has meant that the sociology of education has unwittingly missed "the "whole" with its richness of texture and underlying structural logic" (1981, p. 281). In attempts to counter this some studies, such as Kehily and Nayak (1996) and Nayak (1999), have shifted from a focus on resistance to explore broader challenges to cultural hegemonies.

Critical Ethnography is similarly judgemental of micro-ethnographic approaches, and instead aims to conduct research that might "free individuals from sources of domination and repression" (Anderson, 1989, p. 249). For example, Corson (1998) suggests that studies of a single school should be accompanied by reflection on the impact of wider social structures. Critical theorists, for McLaren, "*begin with the premise that men and women are essentially unfree and inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege*" (2007, p. 171, emphasis in the original).

Feminist ethnographies have sought to move the previously invisible woman to the centre of both observation and analysis. They have gone on to emphasise differences amongst girls and amongst boys in order to disrupt dualistic thinking (Epstein, 1996; Grant, 1992; Mirza, 1992). Feminist researchers like Stacey (1989) have also usefully addressed methodological and ethical issues within ethnographic research, highlighting the potential for "manipulation and betrayal" (1988, p. 21) that the relational nature of this methodology can have.

In the USA, early ethnographic studies in education such as Ogbu (1974) raised issues of difference and diversity, exploring minority students' experience of school failure. Ogbu suggested a group adaptation might exist, maintained by several factors: loss of the wish to compete because of inequality in educational outcomes; teachers treating members of the group differently; expectations and policies based on definitions from the dominant group.

Fordham's study (1996) of black identity formation and school achievement highlighted high-achieving black students' fear of being seen as 'other' by their own community, which

she identified as foregrounding group cohesion and egalitarianism, in contrast to the more individualistic and competitive drives of academia. Hemmings identifies such African American school achievers as employing “strategies of self-negation, self-fragmentation and self-synthesis” (1998, p. 330). In the UK, multiple studies in secondary schools have highlighted how black and white students experience schooling differently, suggesting that even well-intentioned teachers might unwittingly reproduce racial stereotypes, generate conflict and perpetuate existing inequalities (Gillborn, 1994b). Work on difference has moved away from focusing on differences between and toward “’difference within’, social categories and identities related to class, gender, ‘race’ / ethnicity, dis / ability (impairment) and sexuality” (Gordon, Holland & Lahelma, 2001/2014, p.197).

Postmodern and post-structural ethnographies write the ethnographer into the text, producing more dialogic accounts and highlighting the investment that researchers have in their research.

Much educational research, including the present study, carries the inherent challenge that it is aimed at addressing particular aspects of educational practice or contains specific intentions to ‘improve’ the school experience. It is our hope that the focus on multi-layered processes, practices and meanings that an ethnographical approach allows will go some way towards addressing this challenge.

5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter will describe the attention we paid to ethical issues throughout our research study and its write-up. It will detail the processes we undertook to negotiate ethical clearance and describe the considerations that arose in the specific circumstances of this study. It will also outline the process we followed to evaluate how best to act in these circumstances as researchers. Ethical considerations regarding children and young people are complicated. Concerns about informed consent, confidentiality, dignity, rights and issues of unequal power were all present and in need of sensitive attention.

Ethical Clearance

This study received ethical clearance through the formal process of a written submission and the presentation of our Learning Agreement. In addition, undertaking this research within a secondary school setting meant that pre-existing structures and identified 'gatekeepers' helped to ensure that the safety of the students was maintained. We required the explicit agreement of these gatekeeping structures for each stage of the research process and we always ensured that we adhered to their requests.

These gatekeepers and the school structures that were in place went through a number of iterations as both personnel and the school setting changed in the course of its transformation into an Academy during our research journey. This meant that we needed to clarify and renegotiate consent on a number of occasions. At the outset of the project we had a conversation with the Principal of the Community School, who was interested in the project, admired our work and encouraged us to go ahead. She asked us to meet her again once we had more details about our intentions. She explained that she would need to make sure that the study complied with ethical requirements before she could give her permission for the study. At that meeting, she clarified some specific considerations around ethics in the school and working with young people.

At that school, she was the gatekeeper and she needed to both agree to the proposal herself and put the project before the School Governors to seek their agreement. Following success at this stage, we then had to present our Learning Agreement to her, which she, in turn submitted to the School Governors, who ultimately agreed to the study.

When the Community School became an Academy, we went through the process once again with a new Principal who herself had had considerable experience of research taking place within schools. We were required to present the outcome of the investigation thus far and to discuss the way forward. She also made some suggestions for interesting areas of study for our work. All this information was again submitted to the Governors before we were permitted to continue our research. While this new Principal was in the post, we were required to meet with her regularly to update her on our progress and discuss any issues that had arisen.

The third Principal who took the role did not become the gatekeeper for our research; instead the Deputy Principal took over this role. We were not required to complete the review process again as the Academy itself had not changed. The Deputy Principal met with us regularly to review our work and question some of our processes; she was very concerned about what we were going to do with the data. The sessions no longer felt helpful and we began to feel as though we were being watched and monitored. This had the effect of making us attend even more carefully to ethics at every stage of the project.

Achieving this ethical clearance was only step one of our attention to ethics at each level of the research process, from data collection and analysis to representation in this study.

Informed Consent

Although we were working in a school with access to young people, we did not intend to interview students directly about any of our work. We hoped that the focus of our work would be an exploration of our experience as school counsellors outside of the counselling room. We were more interested in conversations in the corridors and the staff room than in the one-to-one work with young people. The Principal of the Community School suggested that we should keep journals and record our conversations with staff and students concerning the counselling service, as these might prove helpful in our research. She identified the need to anonymise these comments before she would feel comfortable with their incorporation into the research write-up. All of our data has been carefully anonymised to comply with this.

The first Principal at the Academy felt that we should try to capture some data directly from young people. In collaboration with her, we decided to focus on an initiative that was planned to run with year eight students as part of the counselling service. The Principal suggested we devise a pre- and post-initiative questionnaire. We produced Plain English Information Sheets describing both the initiative and its intended evaluation. We asked the school to send these sheets to parents and the pastoral care staff agreed to telephone any parents who had English as an additional language to ensure that they could understand the information sheet or have it read to them in their home language. The intended initiative was also discussed with each year eight group.

This process was time-consuming and required considerable coordination, but we felt that the quality of our information, a clear assessment of any potential risks inherent in participation, and our clarity in communicating to any would-be participants both the aims and possible consequences of taking part would all be instrumental in striving to achieve genuine and informed consent. A small number of the year eight students decided not to participate in either the initiative or the evaluation and arrangements were put in place for them to have another activity (extra PE) in place of the initiative. Their confidentiality in making this decision was also respected and protected.

Much of the literature dealing with ethical issues that relate to research with young people emphasises competence and decision making and centres around the notion of children's rights (Article 12 in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1989). Therefore we worked hard to try to give the young people the same right as adults to decide whether they wanted to take part in the study.

Despite the considerable efforts described however, our early attempts to ask young people in this setting to complete written evaluations was confronted with refusal, a lack of trust or literacy issues that meant students had difficulty completing the written evaluations unaided. They seemed shaming for many young people, potentially marginalising them further and associating us with other, conditional, evaluative adults, which was unexpectedly counter-productive. We consequently abandoned this approach, feeling disheartened and as though we had failed as researchers.

Adolescents as Vulnerable Respondents

Through reflexive conversations we had as co-researchers, as well as through discussion with the School Principal and by returning to the literature on research work with young people once more, we began to illuminate this early attempted research experience for ourselves. Punch identifies how young people "experience unequal power relations" (2002, p. 323) with adults in their lives and this view is supported by Quest and Marco who identify young people as facing "social vulnerability" (2003, p. 1297). Moore and Miller describe young people who experience factors that further marginalise and restrict them as "doubly vulnerable" (1999, p. 1034). All these factors certainly applied to perhaps the majority of the student population in the setting for our research, given that more than one hundred languages were spoken between them and a majority were asylum-seekers or from refugee families living in an area of significant deprivation. Young people facing these kinds of "overlapping marginality" (Madriz, 1998 p. 7) might be expected to 'feel vulnerable' in taking part in any research as a consequence of their past experiences of authorities (Birman, 2005; Liamputtong, 2006). They might also be wary of outsiders and give "unreliable answers" (Heckathorn, 1997, p. 174) to enquiries about themselves and their families. Indeed, this proved to be our initial experience in this context.

As a result of this research and due to the support of the Principal, our Academic Advisor and Research Consultant, we began to realise that we might not be able to rely on our respondents being straightforward in their responses in this context and, as such, we needed to adapt our research technique. The Principal remained keen that we do our research. She suggested we keep journals, which we were already doing, and make anonymous notes of what she called 'unsolicited comments' relating to the counselling service within the school. She asked us to send an email to all staff explaining what we were going to be doing and inviting anyone to talk about it. Later that week, she announced the research to both staff and students at a whole school assembly, detailing its nature and explaining how we were going to collect data.

Several staff asked about the research, offering to be part of focus groups that, due to timetabling, never happened. There was a great deal of enthusiasm in the school for the

project. We followed the Principal’s suggestions and, as requested, began recording anonymised data from staff and students, taking care to maintain the anonymity of this data.

Some of this data has been used to write sketches and scenes in order to outline the context in which we were working. To preserve anonymity, names have been changed as, in several cases, have genders. The scenes were devised using stories and dialogue from the data as a base; they are not enactments of real dialogue and thus are not recognisable. We intended to use these to talk at conferences and as teaching material. We presented some of these within the school on INSET training and in mental health talks we were asked to give. Some of the scenes are amusing, some are difficult to watch. The staff response was positive, the scenes stimulated considerable discussion and reflection on roles, the school organisation and the unique position of the counsellor within the school. By choosing what to present at various times, we made our position clear and, as a result of this transparency, the staff engaged with us. We also wrote and performed scenes from the data when we facilitated emotional literacy workshops for young people. The young people engaged with the scenes too, which seemed to support a process of reflection and perspective taking.

Confidentiality / Anonymity

We have changed the names and some of the biographical details of all the participants and the school itself and have taken care not to include any information that might enable their identification. Paying considerable attention to anonymity and confidentiality in this way has become an established ‘custom’ within most qualitative research in order to protect research participants and settings, and it has felt crucial to attend diligently to these ethical considerations throughout our study. We strived to carefully consider what we record in our journals and how we could anonymise these journal entries and our write up. In some cases we chose not to include some data, and in others we sought to protect participants by making use of aggregated illustrative dramatisations. We only used such illustrative, aggregated dramatisations at presentations and conferences. Further, we wrestled with the issue raised by Kelly that

> to tell an ethnographic story anonymously or pseudonymously about a school is necessarily to decontextualise or 'falsify' it (Coffey et al, 1996) except insofar as the researcher-writer can provide those contextualising factors which are necessary for a full understanding of what it is that makes the school worth studying in the first place. (2009, p. 10)

We found this process, as Kelly describes, "to be a balance between anonymity and illumination" (2009, p. 10). How might we provide sufficient contextual information to help the reader assess the validity of the study without revealing the school identity and location? In our specific process any data titled 'Journal' or 'Supervision Notes' is original data which has had initials and sometimes biographic details (gender, ethnicity etc.) changed. Any material titled 'Scenes' or 'Examples from Practice' and written in dialogue form has been written using the data only as a base, so they are aggregated, illustrative dramatisations.

The Ethics of Analysis

A central challenge to the integrity of any approach to analysis and coding is that it necessitates some removing of information from one context and placing it into another when, inevitably, the 'data' is not isolatable and comparable but 'occasioned' and 'contexted'. We have strived to be alive to the context throughout both our data collection and analysis and where, possible, we have maintained enough of the context to enable the reader to assess the validity of any meaning we make from our data for themselves.

The Ethics of Representation

Boyden (2004) has pointed out the importance of care in the presentation of research findings if unintended reinforcement of existing stereotypes is to be avoided. For this reason, we have endeavoured to be reflexive about the examples we have chosen to provide, for what purpose and in what way each of them has been 'storied.' We have also tried to remain aware about what aspects of each of our lived experiences we might be omitting. We recognise that our meanings are necessarily partial, co-created and incomplete.

Again, the best practice (which was not possible here due to the nature of our exit from the research context) would have been to return our report to participants for co- / counter-interpretation and include these alongside our own.

The Ethics of Being Insider Researchers and Participant Observers

In this situation, we have been insider researchers. We believe that this ‘insider’ position brings possibilities that result from our long and shared understanding of the setting, the story and the ‘people.’ We have also been acutely aware of the problems of credibility that this can give rise to, both within the organisation and when reporting research findings to an outside audience. The potential existed that we might be dismissed internally as ‘just the school counsellors’ and externally as ‘biased’. Careful consideration has had to be given to both our own biases and our manner of accounting for our pre-existing relationships with some of the respondents/participants. We had a shared history with some research ‘participants’ and so we needed to be mindful of the impact that might have at all stages of the research process, the write-up and then the dissemination of the research.

The Ethics of Ethnography

Hammersley discusses the idea of ‘toleration’ in ethnographic research at length, defining toleration as, “not challenging - perhaps not even openly evaluating - actions or attitudes of which one disapproves or views with which one disagrees” (2005, p. 37). This can be an issue throughout the research process. Hammersley describes ‘toleration’ more specifically within analysis and write up as, “portraying beliefs or activities in a way that is unaffected by one’s own attitude towards them, and writing about them in a manner that does not communicate any evaluation” (2005, p. 37).

For these reasons, bsocial constructionism
eing, ‘insider researchers’ in this setting, occupying the dual roles of researchers and professional school-based counsellors has required significant reflection and careful

navigation of the situation's complexities throughout the research. At times we have removed the possibility of toleration when the professional ethics of counselling have necessitated action of some sort. On occasion, we have observed practice that we felt to be detrimental to a young person both on individual and institutional levels. As a result, and following peer supervisory discussion, we recognised we had a professional obligation to address these issues. When necessary, we have tried to take action in a constructive and supportive manner, although all parties have not always been open to hearing our concerns. It has been important for us to remain reflexive about the situated nature of judgement and ethics. Making sense of these moments of 'ethical intersectionality' has become an important aspect of our research analysis and findings. On a number of occasions, our action was clear in practice though it was not always easy. In fact, our reporting on institutional practices did, over time, bring our work and research in this setting to a close. We struggled more with what to include in our write-up and how we might represent it. Although identities are sufficiently anonymised to be unidentifiable by others, we have been concerned by how participants might feel if they read and recognised elements of themselves in our write-up, particularly where our ethnographic write up details what Newkirk describes as 'bad news' (1996, p. 13). These representations have the ability to shame or hurt participants. For this reason we have, in some cases, decided not to record or include aspects of our 'lived experience' in order to protect participants. Best practice, which was not possible in this case because of the manner of our 'exit' from the research setting, would have been to distribute our draft report to participants and ask them to comment on its accuracy and validity.

Our work was monitored throughout this research process. We were regularly asked to show our data and any written work that we had produced to the Deputy Principal for approval. She was the Designated Safeguarding Officer at the Academy. We were asked to inform her of any activities we were involved in relating to our work that took place outside the Academy.

We began to share our ideas and emerging findings through presentation at a variety of counselling conferences as part of our process of evaluating the credibility, resonance and usefulness of our on-going research. The Deputy Principal asked to see our conference material and checked that we had not named the Academy and that no staff were recognisable. Through this process, we began to be acknowledged as expert in this field and we were invited to speak at conferences and to publish. All of this material had to win approval before we could take it into the public domain. We were asked to write a book

chapter for *Next Steps in Counselling* (Sanders, Frankland, & Wilkins, 2009). The chapter described the work of a school counsellor, and we wrote from our experience and our reflections on our research. This work also had to be approved before we could send it for publication, and a copy was put into the Academy library.

Lots of the anonymised data that we used in the conferences had been converted into sketches that we performed. We found that this was the best way to illustrate our working environment. We were concerned that some of the sketches might not receive approval as they didn't present the Academy in a favourable light. However, they did receive approval alongside the comment ‘I'd love to see you act these out, very entertaining, we're all in there, but it's hard to see where…except for you two, I can see that you're just playing yourselves!’ These comments helped us to see that we had paid due attention to keeping our data anonymous.

6. METHODOLOGY

Preamble

This section will examine the philosophical underpinning for both the data collection and analysis strategy of this study. It will describe the process of selecting an appropriate methodology, including those we initially considered but ultimately rejected, and then detail the methods we eventually chose to employ.

Research Domains

As identified, our research questions evolved as follows:

Initially, we asked how we could make sense of the difficulties we were experiencing as school-based counsellors? As the research progressed, certain social and cultural processes in the school community were highlighted, and a further question emerged: How could the understanding we had gained be used as a bridge to future connection in this setting?

As our research interest was an attempt to make sense of the difficulties we were experiencing as school-based counsellors, the decision to dismiss quantitative research approaches, with their emphasis on generating numerical, quantifying data, was easy. Qualitative approaches generating, 'thick description,' seemed much more appropriate. Fetterman (2010) identifies that qualitative methodology offers a very appropriate inquiry method when there is an absence of literature on the topic of study. This was certainly the case for our intended research topic. Given it was relatively unrepresented within the existing literature, exploratory, qualitative approaches seemed a good fit.

Seale describes the various inter-related and competing methodological paradigms within qualitative research as being "positivist, naturalistic, constructivist, or postmodern" (1999, p.465). In exploring the best methodological fit for us and considering what to discard, we have tried to keep in mind Seale's emphasis on qualitative research as a "craft skill, relatively autonomous from the need to resolve philosophical disputes" (1999, p. 465).

Research Philosophy

Epistemological and Ontological Positioning

This study is informed by a constructionist position, centring around the belief that reality is constructed rather than objectively ‘discovered’ and recognising that constructs are always a subjective and “social interpretation” (Hansen, 2004, p. 134) informed by both context and time. Positivist methodologies seeking objective ‘truths’ were therefore easy to discount, and we sought a compatible relativist, constructivist-interpretive methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As contemporary person-centred therapists, we see existence as being socially constructed through cultural views and practices (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 2009) so we believe that both our understanding and experiencing are “socially, culturally, historically and linguistically produced” (Finlay & Evans, 2009, p.19). Our study therefore adopts a social constructionist viewpoint, seeing individuals as inextricable from historical, political and social influences.

Gergen challenges empiricist accounts of knowledge with the idea that “all claims to knowledge, truth, objectivity or insight are founded within communities of meaning-making” (2001, p. 2*)* so ‘truth’ becomes, relative, ‘local’ and ‘situated’.

Finlay and Evans similarly describe how “our situatedness, determines our understanding’ so “two researchers studying the same phenomenon are certain to interpret and understand that phenomenon differently” (2009, p.19).

As contemporary person-centred therapists we similarly strive to hold a relativist stance that recognises multiple meanings, subjective realities and the intersubjective. We believe that the therapist’s identity and standpoint cannot help but impact the therapeutic relationship and process, and like both Gergen and Finlay and Evans, we therefore think this is also true for the research process, which becomes a synthesised product of the participants, us as researcher(s) and our relationship. As researchers, we recognise that we are part of the world being studied, not merely external to it and, consequently, any meaning we make is, as Finlay and Evans point out, information both about the research domain and our own “preoccupations, expectations and cultural traditions as researchers” (2009, p. 19) and any understanding we gain must remain tentative and situated.

With this more critical view of what research can and cannot show, our recognition that our ability to critically self-reflect about the ways in which each of our backgrounds,

assumptions, positioning and behaviour affects the inter-subjective dynamics of the research process therefore becomes crucially important.

Adolescents as Vulnerable Respondents

Our early attempts to ask young people to complete written evaluations were disheartening, as they were either met with refusal and a lack of trust or hampered by more practical literacy issues. These aspects are explored in more depth in Chapter 6: Ethical Considerations.

Following these unsuccessful evaluation attempts and with the support of the School Principal, our Academic Advisor and Research Consultant, we began to consider a more participant-observer position for our data collection strategy and we started systematically recording reflexive journals and fieldnotes.

An Ethnographic Approach

Initially, we had thought to use a phenomenological approach, as this fitted both our person-centred orientation and our attempts to understand people's lived experiences from the perspective of the individuals themselves. However, following these disheartening attempts to elicit young people's experiences and as our focus became more concentrated on interactions outside of the therapy room (and within the school) phenomenology seemed to offer only a partial fit. Our question was evolving to focus on our own experience of our difficulties in the school context. A methodology involving observation, recording and reflexivity thus seemed appropriate. Our literature research and discussions we had with both our Academic Consultant and Advisor led us to consider ethnography as an alternative methodology. This seemed a better fit, as it seeks to study a situation from within and learn from people, with the primary instrument of social investigation being the researchers themselves, as participant observers.

Ethnography similarly seemed to fit well with our contemporary person-centred orientation as therapists striving to maintain an openness to the whole-person-in-context. As McLeod asserts

> ethnographic research is uniquely capable of capturing the quality and characteristics of the "lived interactions" ... in a way that does not seek to trivialise or over-simplify these encounters, but instead is willing to interpret them within their social context. (2001, p.68)

Ethnography has become something of an umbrella term for qualitative research involving in-depth descriptions of everyday life. The ethnographer's task "is to describe ways of life from an insider's, or emic, perspective, in a manner that is comprehensible from an etic, or outsider's, point of view" (Reimer, 2012, p. 185). So the task is both descriptive, as one must write a description of a setting or experience that is layered, rich, and contextual, and theoretical as one must situate insider beliefs and practices within a larger theoretical context, linking the local to the theoretical. The educational anthropologists, LeCompte and Preissle define theories as "statements about how things are connected" (1993, p. 118).

Educational ethnographers Mills and Morton (2013) provide ethnographic principles that we felt were a good fit with our person-centred approach. Firstly, their idea that ethnography is more than a method or tool, more a way of thinking or seeing, akin to Rogers' (1980) description of person-centred attitudes as 'a way of being'. Secondly the idea "that ethnography demands empathy" as it demands "the ability to understand and be attentive to the feelings of another on their terms" (2013, p. 4). Lastly, Mills & Morton describe how ethnography can be exposing and disquieting for researchers who are "exposed to the profound complexities of the social... worlds of which ethnographic researchers are a part" (2013, p. 4), questioning the things others take for granted, making the familiar strange and not jumping to conclusions, exploring meaning within the cultural frame, patiently learning what something means, even a term or an object.

One danger of ethnography is that it might produce stereotypes of a group. This felt particularly important to us as we are both aware that ethnography has historically been guilty of 'othering' research subjects and there remains a lively debate within the research community about the politics of representation. Ethnography as a discipline underwent something of a reflexive turn in the 1980s and 90s and has moved towards more of a constructivist, as opposed to a realist, perspective. This more reflexive and critical ethnographic approach felt like a good fit for us. In a benchmark publication Clifford and

Marcus identify how "ethnographic truths are …. inherently partial - committed and incomplete" (1986, p. 7), and so it is important that, as ethnographic researchers, we strive to explain why we focus on some things and not on others. As Haraway (1999) identifies, we must, instead of seeking objectivity, act as a 'modest witness' at best, knowing that we impact on what is taking place but that these effects should not be seen as contaminating the field but rather, as adding to it, while taking account of what the impact might be.

In the well known text *Real World Research* Robson describes ethnography as involving "an immersion in the particular culture of the society being studied so that life in the community could be described in detail" (2011, p.142); the ethnographer's task to effectively join the group. This did not quite seem to capture the ethnographers' position, given our broader reading of the contemporary literature. Ethnographers remain the outsider to some degree, the translator or in-betweener, eventually no longer belonging either to their own culture nor to the one they study. This interested us not least because, to be effective as school-based counsellors, it seemed we needed staff and students to trust that we would respect the 'rules' and 'culture' of the school, but we also needed to remain neutral in not enforcing regulations on a daily basis as did other staff. An objective of our ethnographic approach has been to better understand our own culture through studying another one at close quarters.

Crang and Cook (2007) detail four strands of critique that have been levelled at ethnographic research:

1. its history is that of attempts to essentialise cultural 'common denominators' as if they had been discovered by a detached researcher
2. 'subjects' have tended to be treated as having one singular cultural identity
3. 'cultures' have been seen as isolated, bounded and homogeneous entities
4. conclusions have been seen as 'mere subjectivity'

They recognise that "research is an embodied activity that draws in our whole physical person, along with all its inescapable identities" and that "research on social relations is made out of social relations" (2007, p.9). Furthermore, not only are the researchers embedded in these multiple contexts but so too are the 'subjects'. Our task as researchers is therefore to be aware of and to use our partial and situated, subjectivity.

As insider researchers this ethnographic study has involved us trying to "make the familiar strange" (Holliday, 2007, p.13) in order to see it afresh. This proved a particular challenge within a school setting in which we all have our own referent experiences. We have strived to engage our person-centred attitudes in the service of this task, and aim for empathic participation with a range of actors (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995/2011). We have tried to put ourselves in a range of other participant's shoes and even tried to record our fieldnotes in this range of different voices and then shift back and forth between these differing perspectives, to honour the 'truth' of each one. We see this as akin to what O'Leary has described as "multi-directional partiality" (2012, p.17).

Reimer identifies how, "validity-rich ethnography is transparent" (Reimer, 2012, p.183) so, in line with this contemporary ethnographic practice we have not tried to write ourselves out of the study but we will instead try to identify for the reader how we have been participants in the creation of knowledge and have sought through this experience to better understand our own experience as school-based counsellors. Mills and Morton (2013) identify how all ethnography involves a process of reflecting on bodily and emotional sensations and finding a way to go between self and other. They question the need to differentiate between ethnography and auto-ethnography, sharing Delamont's (2007) critical perspective on the need for a new, separate term for the genre of self-writing. We have sought to give critical attention to our thoughts, feelings and experiences, striving for what Ellis describes as "systematic sociological introspection" (1999, p.671) in order to shed light on our own experience and 'culture' and we have tried to consider how we 'locate' ourselves within the text.

Strengths and Weaknesses of this Approach

In choosing to make use of an ethnographic approach we were aware that some critics dismiss this methodology as too subjective, insufficiently rigorous and merely journalistic, whilst others (with whom we feel more aligned), believe that it is an ideal way to inquire into the meanings which give form and content to social processes.

Questions that Can and Cannot be Addressed by Ethnographic Methods

Ethnography can help illuminate how meaning is made and used and inform about the mutual, cultural nature of life and the meanings people describe in their own words. It can,

therefore, be a method of choice when seeking to answer 'what is going on here' and can provide answers about how people interact with each other and what they do. Observing a setting in this way can open up further questions connected with the initial area of interest. Ethnography is appropriate when it is important to find out what a person needs to know in order to be able to function in a particular setting. It can identify social rules in a specific context, helping the researchers to understand both how individuals operate within the setting as well as about the organisation as a whole.

As a methodology it cannot be used to answer questions about the prevalence of particular behaviours or beliefs, cannot be used to measure outcomes or effectiveness and cannot provide causal explanations. We hope that the study will invite readers to engage with both the research setting and with our own position and experience as insider-researchers. Lastly, we hope it might also evoke reflection on readers own circumstances and understandings.

Ethnography and Grounded Theory

As identified, we had heard criticisms of ethnography producing potentially descriptive, merely 'journalistic' findings and possibly lacking analytic clarity. We were aware, even from our pre-research journaling practice, that we were amassing large quantities of seemingly unconnected descriptive data and were concerned to ensure that we would have an analytic frame that might help us focus what, at this point, were wide-ranging, quite undigested observations. In going to the literature on ethnography, we were struck by the lack of attention many ethnography textbooks gave to models of analysis, with grounded theory (GT) being a rare exception (Gobo, 2008). We therefore began to explore GT as a potential analytic framework for this ethnographic study.

Glaser and Strauss, the originators of grounded theory (1967), emphasise the importance of researchers having 'no preconceived ideas' either when conducting fieldwork or when analysing the data. To this end, some grounded theorists suggest not engaging with the relevant literature in the belief that this could narrow one's field of vision analytically, resulting in a focus on certain aspects of the data and the consequent neglect of other, equally important aspects. The contrary argument is also put forward by Tuckett (2005) that going to the literature may help sensitise researchers to subtle features of the data. This debate did not seem to be such an issue for the present study as literature on the specific area of the school-

based counsellor's experience outside the counselling room within an educational setting was almost non-existent. Furthermore, the posture of surfacing our potential biases and hypotheses so as not to impose them out of awareness was a familiar and supported intention for both of the current researchers. We began to discuss the implicit purpose behind this guiding principle in GT, that is for the data to be analysed without preconceived hypotheses so that the analysis process might lead to theory development, grounded in the data (Holloway & Todres, 2003). We were unsure whether these implicit theory creation intentions of GT could be a good fit for our constructionist, critical ethnographic position. Our position as insider researchers in this setting in particular meant that we were aware that we were not free of our own theoretical and epistemological beliefs and wanted to own and use these within both the fieldwork and analysis process.

Our thinking about the analysis process shifted in coming upon the work of Charmaz and Mitchell (2001/2014) who suggest reciprocal benefits for ethnographers in making use of grounded theory, which might “increase the analytic incisiveness of their studies” (2001/2014, p. 160). They identify how Glaser and Strauss’s early works relied on extensive field research and began with “gentle guidelines” (2001/2014, p. 161) that she suggests risk becoming mechanistic, rigid impositions. They outline how, through the ethnographic practice of locating oneself as researchers in the narrative, the “distanced writing and objectified presentation of data typical of most grounded theory reportage” (2001/2014, p.161) may be averted. Equally, they suggest that, used with sensitivity grounded theory can “assist the ethnographer in focusing, structuring and organising” (2001/2014, p. 162), all of which were aspects we had been struggling with.

We had initial concerns that the Grounded Theory practice of line-by-line coding (Glaser, 1978) would not fit with our ethnographic fieldwork approach and would potentially isolate data from its context. However, Charmaz and Mitchell (2001/2014) recognise the concern that such line by line coding might be a good fit for interviews and more structured conversations but fit less well with the recording of observations and incidents that we intended to collect. They suggest that line-by-line coding may impose “conceptual limits when conducted acontextually” and that therefore, “coding whole anecdotes, scenarios and sketches may work better for ethnographic observations than line-by-line coding” (2001/2014, p. 166).

We have found that Charmaz and Mitchell's (2001/2014) ideas on grounded theory seemed to address some issues we had been struggling with, namely:

1. The challenges represented by being insider researchers
2. Finding ourselves overwhelmed and collecting broad-ranging and unfocused data in our fieldnotes

Methods – Plan of Inquiry

Overview

This study is a participant / observer research study exploring the community at an inner city secondary school using ethnography. It focuses on the experience of the two researchers as school-based counsellors, but moves beyond their one-to-one therapy work in a school setting with the intention of illuminating some of the cultural intersections and complexities of this context that we believe require attention if the offer of counselling within schools is to become a more secure provision.

Participants

Participant/Observers – The researchers were working in the school as counsellors and were therefore insider researchers for this work-based research. As a brought-in service we were also slightly outside of the setting, which made observing the environment somewhat easier.

Staff – 'Unsolicited comments' from 35 staff members are included in the data

Students – 'Unsolicited comments' from 123 students are included in the data

Materials

Individual and Joint Notebooks were used to record journaling, observations and reflexive conversations in supervision. Real names were not used in order to protect anonymity and the notebooks were kept in locked cabinets for confidentiality.

Digital Recording Equipment - A hand-held digital machine was used to record the researchers' reflexive conversations and some supervision sessions. These were downloaded to password-protected files on the researchers' personal computers. Originals were erased after downloading. The material discussed on recordings was anonymised.

Computer – Each researcher used their personal password-protected computer to transcribe the digital recordings that had been downloaded.

Procedure

Data Collection

Multiple forms of qualitative data were recorded as follows:

- Individual journaling by each co-researcher. This included 'subjective audits' of situations that brought about strong feelings
- Recording of 'unsolicited comments' from students and staff
- Recording reflexive conversations between the co-researchers

Each researcher made careful notes of their experiences in the research environment in an attempt to record observations, reflections, experiences, keywords, conversations and verbatim interactions. The researchers encouraged each other to write freely in personal journals and not to filter out emotions or ideas.

Observations recorded interactions with each researcher individually as well as student and staff members' interactions with each other and with the researchers as a team. Close observations were recorded concerning the set-up of the organisation, who related to whom, the connection between staff roles and lines of communication within the system. At the outset, the researchers data collection encompassed a wide range of observations which, in line with the literature for best practice in writing ethnographic fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995/2011) included:

- taking notes about our initial impressions, using those available to all our senses
- focusing on our personal understanding of what was significant and trying to allow any strong reactions we might be having to happen as well as noting how others in the setting are reacting

- trying to move beyond each of our own personal responses to explore what we are experiencing in the setting and what is meaningful to us
- writing our notes as systematically as possible and not just looking at 'what' but at 'how'
- casting our nets wide, writing about a range of interactions, looking for different types of events / interactions to describe
- striving to re-create these lived moments and capture meaning in a way that preserves 'indigenous meaning'. This has felt important for our understanding of young people as language and meaning are sometimes difficult to capture for us as adults

We have strived to record descriptive fieldnotes that represent a range of observations and perspectives, some are written from a distance and some comprise moment-to-moment accounts with a narrative that describes events and interactions. Fieldnotes were written as soon after the events as possible but, of course, there were times when this was not possible because of more immediate activities in our insider research setting.
We are aware that our fieldnotes focus on some parts of the action and not on others and are products of our individual and collaborative active processing.

We observed that journaling changed over time for both of us. We became less descriptive in our recording of situations and our reflexivity developed, though we wished to stay sensitive to uncertainty and variation and to honour and record different points of view.

Reflexivity

The researchers engaged in reflexive practice to process the data at weekly intervals with the aims of trying of making meaning from the data and generating further areas for observation.

Coding the Data

Analysis followed an inductive, grounded theory approach (see the Ethnography and Grounded Theory section for a discussion of the selection process and intentions and the Analysis section for a more detailed account of the process) with analysis beginning from iteratively generating codes in order to enable an understanding of the data and shape continuing participant observation. Over the course of the study we derived more than 200

initial codes. Data that seemed to fit into more than one coding was copied and put into each relevant coding, so that no data would be lost.
Through a comparative, interactive and emergent approach, moving back and forth between our participant observation and analysis, initial codes were combined, altered and refined to produce more focused and selective codings. The most frequent and significant codes were raised to tentative categories and given shorthand titles to help the researchers understand each other in discussions. In this document, category names are written with inverted commas around them such as ‘above and beyond’, ‘relational capital’ and ‘tenuous contact’. These labels had meaning for us and we referred to them regularly throughout the research process.

Researchers’ Journals – All journal entries were anonymized when recorded. Gender and demographic details were changed for data that was used in the study to avoid recognition. Journal entries were dated and notebooks were kept securely in a locked cabinet when not in use. The contents of these journals was regularly shown to and discussed with the ethical gatekeepers in the school (see Ethics section).

The researchers did not actively seek to illicit opinions from staff and students in the observed environment. Comments were recorded only when students or a staff member approached us to discuss our input within the school.

Staff and Student ‘Unsolicited Comments’ – Use of this as a data stream was suggested by the Principal, one of the gatekeepers of the school.

No direct quotes from staff or students have been used in the study. Wording has been changed and vignettes and scenarios have been produced as aggregated examples that remain illustrative of the data but which also maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

Supervision – The researchers made written recordings both individually and jointly of issues and themes discussed in supervision as soon as possible after the sessions to ensure greater accuracy.

Recordings – The researchers recorded reflexive discussions and some supervision sessions, which were transcribed and discussed later. Themes arising from these discussions were noted.

Development of Ideas and Dissemination

The findings and ideas generated from the study were disseminated in a report, at conferences and by publication.

Throughout the project the researchers presented the ideas that emerged from processing the data at national and international conferences (see Doctoral Products). The ideas arising from the research have also been published in journal articles and book chapters (see Doctoral Products). Feedback and peer discussion from this dissemination has been used to shape further participant observation and to further bring these constructs forth.

Some of the data has been used to create vignettes and scenes to be presented at conferences and used in teaching materials to illustrate the context and complexities of the work of a counsellor in a school setting.

For example, in this vignette the counsellor is asked for their professional opinion and this is then seemingly passed over.

> Teacher: Peter, do you see Mohammed?
> Peter: Yes we've just started to work together – he's in one of the groups
> Teacher: Well I haven't seen any improvement yet, in fact if anything he's even worse when he comes back from your group – I think we ought to refer him to CAMHS – what do you think?
> Peter: Well it's very early days, he doesn't seem to have a mental health problem. He's had lots of interventions. I'm concerned that yet another referral may seem like another rejection.
> Teacher: I think I should start a referral – CAMHS have a bit of a waiting list.

And in this scene the counsellors' sessions may be compromised by the need to find another room.

> Teacher (stepping into room): I need to set up in here for French Oral exams today
> Peter: Oh this is the room I use for counselling sessions

Teacher: Sorry, I assumed somebody told you, there are some classrooms empty but I don't know which ones.
Peter: OK (leaving)
Teacher: Do you usually work up here tomorrow?
Peter: Yes
Teacher: Only we're up here tomorrow. . . and maybe next week as well

The findings from the project have been used to develop a post-qualification training course for counsellors working with young people (see Doctoral Products).

7. ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter details the analysis process for this study. It will detail what process was undertaken and give examples of the coding processes involved.

The Method Used for Analysis

This study made use of a grounded theory approach to the analysis process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) (see the Ethnography and Grounded Theory section for a discussion of the selection process and intentions). In accordance with this approach, we did not keep to a traditional division between a data collection and data analysis phase, but instead, we began analysing our data from early on, reading through our journals and fieldnotes individually and together, so there became a dynamic relationship between analysis and data collection. In beginning this analysis process we read the data aloud to each other so that we could feel the impact of what we had written, and noted our thoughts, feelings and reflections as we read. This interactive and iterative process seemed a good fit for this collaborative research. We began to have reflexive conversations about the possible meaning of fieldnote data and tentatively began to order it by breaking it down into smaller units, which we labelled with a code.

At first we tried to generate as many ideas inductively from our early data with these initial (open) codes as we could and, following Charmaz (2001/2014), we strived to do this open coding quickly with codes staying as close to the data as possible, allotting each a gerund, (verbs ending in 'ing') emphasising processes and actions. We sorted the data by 'type': journal entry, comment/feedback and reflexive conversation. As a coding emerged from the data, this cued us to seek more information about this coding, shaping our continuing fieldwork observations and helping us decide what settings and events to focus on back in the field as participant observers in order to see if this coding could be filled out further and additional insights added. In this way, and in line with grounded theory, our participant observations became explicitly driven by these emerging theoretical concerns, with new scenarios and observations selected for their potential to deepen or extend an emerging category from our analysis through such 'theoretical sampling'.

We also strived to make use of constant comparison throughout our analysis process, comparing every code with every other coding as new occasions or quotes emerged from the field and going back and forth between the codes that had been identified and the fieldnotes. By comparing and combining them, the long list of initial codes was organised into sub-categories which were themselves also compared and combined. Inside our fieldnote journals we both developed a range of sub-divisions like ‘institution’, ‘teacher-student,’ etc. to help us to think about these experiences and open them up further to be considered in different domains. Other divisions we began to add during our reflexive conversations were things like ‘roles’ and ‘ethics’ etc. which we used as ‘floating criteria’. We frequently re-ordered and changed these, striving to bring a critical stance to any sense of an ‘absolutist reason’ that began to emerge.

We analysed each section together, striving to stay true to the original material in our notebooks, recording what we noticed as memos and endeavouring to process our feelings about each section.

Example of Conceptual Memoing: ‘Conversational Ruptures’

Fieldnotes record many entries about what might be described as ‘conversational ruptures’ when, with ‘good intentions’, one or both of us found ourselves speaking in ways that seemed uninvited / counter-cultural in that setting. On occasion we found our currency of communication was not taken seriously, as it was concerned with the ‘fluffy' emotional side of life, for which there often wasn't the ‘luxury’ of time when it might prevent the ‘serious' task of education. At other times, even with the same staff, a similar invitation to discuss counselling-related work might be contexted as uncomfortable or could even be received as a threat.

At first, we each had the experience of feeling we had spoken out of place or beyond our remit or that we had opened a channel of communications about the perspective of a young person, the teachers or ourselves that was unwelcome or, at times, ‘unspeakable’ and taboo. We noticed that these conversational ruptures often seemed to be performed around the domain of feelings rather than behaviour and we therefore began to seek ways by which we might avert these ruptures. We hoped to invite a lifting of the ‘grammar’ from ‘disruptive’ to ‘distressed’ or from ‘attention seeking’ to ‘attention-needing’. We considered how we might change the ‘punctuation’ of how staff constructed a young person's experiencing so that there wasn't a full stop after the description of their behaviour but rather space to try to understand what that behaviour might indicate about their experience.

Artificial example, based on journals

> Teacher: S is on your list to see, she's very difficult in class, there's always some sort of drama. She's just attention-seeking.
>
> Ros: Yes, that sounds difficult for you in class, counselling may be a good option for her to get the attention she needs.
>
> Teacher: …Thanks, Ros.

We tried to code as soon after the event as possible, keeping our codes simple and staying close to the data. We initially intended to collect a wide range of data that might illuminate a broad picture. Through an iterative, cyclical research process of collecting, coding and comparing events from the fieldnotes, initial codes have been refined. This has continued to help us hone the ongoing data collection process and define the research area more clearly, identifying a smaller, more manageable set of central codings to explore using selective theoretical sampling. Higher order, more abstract or core, 'theoretical' concepts or categories began to emerge. We have had moments of 'discovery' in which themes and ideas have jumped out of the data and hit us in the face. The concept of 'tenuous contact' was one such experience. We are aware that it is perhaps more accurate to say that we created (constructed) rather than discovered these new ideas / concepts.

We discussed the more theoretical / abstract categories for relevance, validity and robustness. We tried to process their meaning further in the context of the study by sorting our many memos into the relationships between the concepts and finally, grouping them under further revised headings that became our findings. The process felt like putting together pieces of a jigsaw without first seeing the picture.

Throughout this process, we have been concerned about reducing and possibly diluting the data. We were worried that some of it might be lost or uncoupled from the context so we have strived to be reflexive about what draws our attention and how our fieldnotes might contain unacknowledged assumptions so as to remain reflexive about our subtle biases.

8. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Our initial question focused on making sense of the difficulties we were experiencing in the school setting and evolved to consider how any of the understanding we gained might be used as a bridge to connection.

Through the cyclical coding process described above, two Core Concepts of the 'theory' emerged and we grouped them as follows into two different domains to organise what the data had illuminated:-

1. **Organisational / Context – the importance of a consideration of the counsellor in the system within a secondary school setting**
2. **Relational / Contact – the importance of a consideration of connection and relationship when working with adolescents in this setting**

These core themes will be discussed in this chapter along with the connected sub-themes feeding into each. The interplay between these themes will also be explored.

1. Organisational / Context

Introduction

The data brought out many examples that illuminate aspects of a school as a complex system, with all the participants in it nested within multiple domains. As both protagonists and observers we experienced how often an action in one domain caused unexpected consequences, and sometimes conflicts, in others.

A scene constructed from the data illustrates this:

An email was circulated stating that no initiatives or counselling sessions could take place over the next two weeks as the students were working towards their exams. During this time, however, we were permitted by a Year Head to continue to see a group of boys as we had uncovered that they formed a known gang and the work was therefore considered important. We met for a session and were summoned to the office and told that we should not have seen the group because of exams and that we had disobeyed a directive from the leadership team.

We explained why we had seen them and were told that the class teacher had complained that the boys were not in her lesson. We thus became aware of the complexity of the levels of permission and communication in the school. The next day all lessons were suspended for a talk from the police about violence as this was considered a high-priority topic. This whole incident left us feeling confused and concerned: how could we operate in this system and offer counselling without unwittingly stepping on another staff member's toes?

Note to reader:

In the interests of confidentiality (BACP, 2018)

Any data which has been titled, 'Journal' or 'Supervision Notes' are original data which has had initials and sometimes biographic details (gender, ethnicity etc.) changed. Any material titled 'Scene' or 'Example from practice' and written in dialogue form has been written using the data merely as a base, so they are aggregated, illustrative dramatisations.

The sub-themes which became grouped under the Core Concept of Organizational Context are as follows:

1.1 Differing Ethics and Intersecting Cultures of Education and Counselling

1.2 Language and Grammar

1.3 School-Based Counselling as a Publicly Performed and Evaluated Experience

Each of these sub-themes will be developed below.

1.1 Differing Ethics and Intersecting Cultures of Education and Counselling

a) Differing Priorities

From early on, each researcher's journaling began to record the challenges of holding a therapeutic purpose within an educational setting, at times foregrounding different priorities.

Journal Entry Peter

Problems in the staff room today with a subject teacher. He challenged me about taking one of his most difficult students out of his lessons and said that the student must not miss them. I found myself apologetically explaining that no amount of lessons might make someone better at a subject if there are reasons that make that student unavailable to learn because of their distress and pre-occupation. After a while, he seemed to understand.

Journal Entry Ros

Had yet another conversation with Mr A this morning about the importance of counselling when a student has so many issues that they bring to school with them that they are unable to make much use of the learning environment. I'm feeling a bit like a tape recorder now! I seem to say this every day to someone – sometimes it feels like taking on an obstacle race just to see a student – I sort of feel as though they think I want to impede the learning – in my best place I feel very calm and know that this explanation is part of my job. On a difficult day, however, I feel irritated and want to say, fine leave her in class, and I could have an extra break! I am learning a lot from Peter in this area, he seems to be able to be much calmer than me and to have so much more patience when talking to staff.

Journal Entry Peter

I was spoken to very rudely again by Mr B – I explained the need for counselling and the importance of it again when a student is experiencing a chaotic environment - Ros seems to be good at getting the teachers onside. I must talk about this in supervision – I need support.

The data shows that we began to gain another perspective as a result of various observations. Processing this data helped us to develop an understanding of how teaching staff were positioned concerning 'performance' and 'conformity'.

Journal Entry Peter

I overheard a conversation in the staff room today that left me feeling great empathy for Miss R who had spoken so rudely to me in the classroom when I had gone to collect a student. She had been called into the office and told off about the exam averages for her class. She was crying and being comforted by Mr G who told her that he had experienced the same thing last year. I felt awkward, and left the staff room. I began to get a sense of the pressure she was under, which might account for her very brusque manner the other day.

Journal Entry Ros
There was turmoil in the staff room today. The entire wall was covered with coloured graphs mapping the progress of each class in the school. The charts showed where improvement needed to be made and named each class teacher and the teaching teams to which they belonged. The teachers were very vocal, some were angry, and others were crying. Someone had written graffiti on the charts in multi-coloured pens. Some were laughing at this. Others stood looking at it in disbelief. A member of the senior team came in and tore it down angrily. She shouted 'This is so childish, Ofsted are coming and you are all accountable, so you had better wake up to the idea!' She then read out a list of names that needed to see her in the office after school. I haven't seen anything like this before; it was disconcerting and made me think about how shaming this incident was.

Analysis of these incidents in the data drew out how the related 'cultures' of therapy and education held different 'currencies' for results and 'success' at different times (at a macro level, 'attainment' versus 'well being' for example) and also sometimes held differing models about how to get there. On occasion, what we as counsellors might have seen as a therapeutic step forward in self-definition for the young person, who may perhaps have clumsily tried out their individual agency and asserted their view in opposition to other young people or to an adult, might be seen as a step too far within the classroom.

b) Individual vs Group

Lots of the early data shows us feeling shocked, irritated and misunderstood in some interactions with staff about individual students and records our struggle to process this experience. An early journal entry illustrates this:

Journal Entry Peter
I had an awkward encounter with a senior staff member today that has left me feeling disturbed. I needed to report a serious situation that required mental health intervention for the student's mother. She disclosed a mental health problem previously unknown to the school as the reason for repeated lateness for which she was continually getting detention. I asked whether there could be some leniency about the detentions in the light of the new information. The senior staff member replied 'you do your job and I'll do mine!' I thought

that I WAS doing my job! This has left me unsettled in this new environment – has my job changed? How is my role seen here – how can I begin to have the conversations that will need to happen if there is to be understanding and clarity?

This incident and other similar ones had a significant impact on us, and we have worked to process the possible meaning of this data, moving back and forth between recording such repeated interactions and analysing these experiences.

Journal Entry Ros

A shocking moment for me today. When I went to collect D from class, Miss H announced 'I'm glad you're getting all this individual attention D, whilst those who behave themselves just have to plough on with lessons regardless – including me. Maybe I should be disruptive – perhaps I could have counselling.' I just didn't know what to make of it. It was shaming for my client, and I felt cross. Thinking about it more, I realise that Miss H must be so stressed to say something like that. It does seem to be difficult for anyone to have individual attention if they need it.

Journal Entry Peter

Y told me today that he had asked Mr L about moving seats. We had discussed this as a solution to getting distracted in class. He had been told that he couldn't. In the staff room later his teacher, Mr L said to me that Y had asked to move seats and that Y had said that I thought it was a good idea too. I replied that it sounded from Y like it might help. Mr L said to me 'I really can't change the whole class' seating plan for one boy who will probably cause trouble wherever he sits, I have to think about the whole class. The last time I moved him, the boy who I sat next to him… Well, the parents made a complaint. I can't just move one child on a whim.' I apologised and said that I hadn't thought about how this affected the whole class. This made me think about my working with an individual and a teacher working with a class of 30 students.

Journal Entry Ros

When I went into a classroom to pick up a student today, the class was in chaos, and my client wasn't in so I left. I have been thinking about how I wouldn't like to have a whole class of students. I was reflecting on being a drama teacher in another setting and thinking about – this is why I never opted

to teach in school – how much I would have hated the discipline aspect. Then I was thinking – every day classes are like that – I have a lot of empathy for the teachers who do that difficult job managing so many students in one go. I'm glad it's not me.

A memo records our construction of a tentative map of these experiences.

Memo: 'conflict of ethics'

Exploring the personal impact of these repeating incidents reveals the idea of a potential 'conflict of ethics' with the school system. We are coming to understand these as moments that illuminate how the counsellor and teacher roles position each differently. Our data frequently identifies difficult interactions and potential relationship rupture when these differing primary concerns intersect and can move into opposition.

Our training and practice as counsellors position us to foreground concerns about the well-being of the individual and to see and respond to this individual uniquely.

In school, 'good practice' means treating people equally and 'fairly' by not making one student exceptional in ways that may seem unfair to others. Understanding this is helping to create a map of this process that helps us to feel less personally invested in our professional ethics as a 'higher ground' and instead to navigate these experiences more sensitively.

Analysis of these repeating incidents from the data illuminates the differing 'primary discourses' in these two culture-sharing groups with intersecting philosophies of ethics. A utilitarian or consequentialist perspective perhaps predominates in education, with the training and everyday experience of the teaching staff and school leadership tending to position them closer to making decisions for the benefit of the class, year and whole school. Analysis of fieldnotes constructs this as the use of the 'the greater good' to justify the response to any one individual's need. For example, *'her behaviour (distress) is affecting the learning of the whole class'* justifies a student's removal from learning and peer opportunities.

By contrast, for counselling, certainly humanistic counselling, the approach is predicated on a more deontological, or dutiful, view of ethics in which certain types of actions (such as telling the truth and keeping promises) are intrinsically good or bad. The data from early experiences illuminates how a dogmatic embodiment of this perspective in holding the individual in mind led to criticisms that we were not properly accounting for their impact on

the broader context. Such moments of ethical intersectionality for the different communities of counselling and education need considerable goodwill and an openness to adaptation is required on both sides if these two 'cultures' are to co-exist for mutual benefit within a school setting. The data suggests that an understanding of this can help the counsellor to take on board a different perspective and try to broker a response that will enable the bridging of these perspectives in the interests of the students.

c) Different Relationship with Information Sharing and Confidentiality

The data also illuminates the different relationship between information sharing and confidentiality that predominated in these two 'cultures' and that could, if unacknowledged, lead to misunderstanding, conflict and judgement of conduct.

Journal Entry Peter
Mr P was keen to find me today to ask whether one of my clients had told me that his Dad had left home. I felt quite relieved to say that I hadn't seen the particular student so I didn't know. I noticed that I was feeling uncomfortable about being asked to let Mr P know what was being spoken about in sessions.

Journal Entry Ros
I was asked again by Miss X to talk about one of my students ('how is he doing?') I feel as though I am finding lots of ways to engage without really saying anything about the sessions and she seems to leave the encounter satisfied.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter
We discussed the fact that we both find ourselves having to keep explaining everything about the process of counselling. We tried to stay with what was different about our work in this environment, we are beginning to realise that maybe this is part of the work and if this is true, our frustration needs to change and we need to be able to accept that this is the work.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter
On our way to supervision today we were stopped by a staff member who suggested putting up all the names of students who have counselling on a list in the staff room so that all staff were aware of who we were seeing. We had to explain that for confidentiality reasons this

would not be a good idea. It took some explaining. We spent some time in supervision re-visiting how to deal with the ethics of issues like confidentiality, what do we mean by this? What happens if it is compromised? etc. We constantly feel that we have to keep talking about this issue as it comes up time and time again. We are beginning to understand that our definition of confidentiality and how we maintain it is different from that in the world of education. We realise that in order not to seem 'precious' we need to find ways to discuss and talk about what we can, without compromising confidentiality.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

We discussed the issue of confidentiality and about what it means to school staff and to us again at length. We have met other school counsellors who have told us that they found this issue so difficult that they have been avoiding going to the staff room. We feel that this is not the way through. We want to be more available and open about counselling, so finding a way to talk about these issues will be a topic that we will continuously need to re-visit.

Journal Entry Ros

I had a tough start to the session with M today. When I went to the classroom to collect her, the teacher called her name out and said in front of the whole class 'Perhaps you'd like to tell her that you were fighting in the dining hall yesterday.' I felt uncomfortable, and the student then didn't seem happy to leave with me, others were laughing and jeering in the classroom as we left together. It was an awkward start to the session. I broke the silence by saying that it had felt difficult for me to hear that and witness the laughter and mocking and as far as I was concerned she didn't need to talk about anything that she didn't want to in this session. She seemed relieved, and we went from there. The situation created such a difficult start to the session, and that is not unusual in this environment. I'm not sure that I can talk about it to the teacher or if I should at all, or if I should just note what helps in these situations.

This data further illuminates some of the tacit implications that can follow from incidents of cultural intersectionality between counselling and education. For counselling, safety is signalled predominantly by keeping the client's confidences and being scrupulous about what information is shared and how (i.e. on a need to know basis and wherever possible with the clients' specific knowledge, permission and involvement in the process). Within the school,

safety was created more often by sharing information across the teaching and pastoral care teams in order to work together with a 'fair' and consistent response as a team, capable of providing support and even a replacement if necessary, which is usually unthinkable within counselling culture.

d) The Adult Team

The data brings out these liminal aspects further through the related category of 'the adult team' within the school. Some incidents of sharing information were initially coded as 'backing each other up' as adults in the system. This could frequently be seen in the data, with one teacher in an interaction with a student drawing in another passing staff member to offer their opinion in support of the point being made.

For example:

Journal Entry Peter
As I was walking along the corridor today, I noticed a teacher struggling with a student, the incident had happened before another teacher and I arrived. The teacher saw Mr V there and said in a very loud voice 'and I'm sure that Mr V was shocked too'. Mr V immediately came to his aid 'Yes, I'm very shocked, I've never seen behaviour like that in my life'. Mr V smiled at the teacher as he went past. I felt amused and remembered similar incidents when I was a student at school. It started me thinking, what would I do if I was included in that as another adult? I need to talk about this in supervision, as this has implications for practice.

Journal Entry Ros
An incident happened today that will always remain with me. I was in a meeting with senior management, there was a knock on the door and a teacher entered with two boys. He said 'I want you to deal with these boys please.' He went on to explain that the boys had been standing around in the corridor, and he had asked them to go to class. They rudely began singing 'Who Let the Dogs Out' at him. The more senior teacher said crossly 'this is disgraceful boys. Thank you, Mr X, I will deal with it. Wait outside, boys. The boys and the teacher left. The senior teacher looked at me, and we both laughed. He said to me 'How do you start to deal with that!' I wished him luck and went. I heard him shouting 'Right boys get inside here now!' Apart from the humour of it, I began to realise how much support the staff need from each other and how

often they are almost playing a role in front of the students. I found this aspect difficult as I knew that it would be impossible for me to play a role and then try to form a therapeutic relationship based on being genuine.

Data from supervision notes identifies our discomfort with the possibility of our being brought into this backing-up as adults within the school.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

We have been exploring our feelings about tackling difficult behaviour problems around the school and considering the way this might affect the counselling relationship. We recently had to leave the café area when a teacher was being teased by a ball of paper being thrown at her from the balcony above – what was our responsibility here? What should we have done? Can we get involved? This session raised more questions than answers.

Looking for the appearance and relevance of such experiences across different settings and situations helped us to develop our understanding of this category. We recorded a number of occasions in which we were drawn in to underline adult to adolescent interactions, as another adult and staff member. On these occasions it had felt uncomfortable and inappropriate to ‘back’ the message being delivered as this felt like we were compromising the role we wanted to present to potential young users of the counselling service. In particular, we wanted to show impartiality, non-judgement and a willingness to suspend our perspective in order to strive to see the young person’s frame of reference.

An example from the data is:

Journal Entry Peter

I was asked to go down to the office today as a teacher had reported that she was trying to stop people making noise in the corridor and that I had walked down the hall and had not helped her with the students. I was a bit shocked. I didn't remember the incident. I tried to explain that in my role it would be difficult to join in with the discipline in the school unless anyone was in danger, at which point I would intervene. I didn't feel as though I had made myself very clear and I don't think that my point was understood. This feels like a complicated area that needs some thinking through.

Repeated incidents from the data such as this record the request from the staff member to provide such support and the fallout in terms of their surprise, disappointment, anger and dismissal when this support was not straightforwardly forthcoming and that we had not 'backed' the 'adult team'. We had both separately experienced such moments which, whether intended as such or not, required us to 'take sides' and throw our lot in with the adult 'reality/view'.

Fieldnotes and memos record our increasing recognition of this and track our development of different ways of responding. The following extract from reflexive conversations shows us constructing and understanding possible responses to this.

Reflexive Conversation

Maybe the key here is transparency - as the therapeutic group were leaving the room, the young people were stopped by a senior member of staff and told to tuck their shirts in, they all did, and we were 'told off' in front of the students and told that students must leave the room looking tidy. Having explored this and its implications at great length, we decided to bring it back to the group. At the start of the next group, we reminded them of what had happened at the end of the last group. They all remembered and had felt sad when they saw us getting into trouble. We explained why we hadn't told them about their shirts and they seemed to respond and to value what was being offered in the space. One of them said, we already know that we should have our shirts in, maybe we could remind each other. This became a joke at the end of the group between all of us and brought the group closer together. Lots of learning here for us about what and when to share.

We found that, with sensitivity to the importance of such moments, we could avoid such black and white, 'us or them' responses and validate both the teacher and the young person's realities. Thus striving to offer support to the staff member whilst not compromising the counsellor role. This is what O'Leary describes as, 'multi-directional partiality' (2012) or equal empathy for all.

1.2 Language and Grammar

a. Shifting the Grammar

Repeated themes in the data identify the importance of language and what we have termed the 'grammar' of interactions. From early on in our research, incidents from data identified

how, in a busy school environment with multiple, often competing priorities, it can be tempting for a staff member to foreclose on their experience of a student's behaviour, at least temporarily.

Certain examples from the data illustrate this:

Journal Entry Peter

I felt concerned today about how, on reporting a possible child protection issue to the relevant safeguarding lead, their first response was seemingly dismissive, that the girl was 'a bit of a drama queen.'

Journal Entry Ros

In conversation with a senior staff member to invite consideration of a counselling client, I was told today that she was 'attention seeking', which, for the staff member, seemed to be an end to the discussion and actually something to be actively resisted rather than 'pandered to'. I don't agree and think it's something worth thinking through in supervision.

Journal Entry Peter

I notice that when a staff member wants to talk about difficult behaviour in class that this is often conflated with mental health issues: 'she was shouting at me in class today, there's definitely mental health problems there!' Not sure how to respond without appearing to criticise the teacher – one for supervision.

Reflexive conversations in supervision revolved around how we might invite a shift in perspective for a staff member in this type of interaction in a way most likely to be heard. For example, by shifting the grammar and turning a full stop into a comma, the re-storying of the young person's narrative, with consequent, different actions and outcomes became possible. Some examples from the data illustrate the development of this practice:-

Journal Entry Peter

I met with the child protection officer again today to follow up on our earlier discussion. I felt pleased with the way that the conversation developed after having considered these issues within supervision. I was able to hear what the safeguarding officer was telling me, honour this experience of the young person and invite a shift in grammar from 'drama queen' to

someone who raises concern in the school. I noticed that when I did this, the teacher's position softened and he became more open to there being a problem that might need to be reported.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

In supervision, we again spent time processing the impact of changing the grammar, inviting a greater understanding of the problems that the student is experiencing. We decided that we will continue with this process and also noticed that neither of us felt frustrated or dismissive of this seemingly judgmental stance as we had done following previous similar experiences.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter
Another clear example today of the impact of a slight change of language inviting a staff member to retain or regain empathy for a student's situation. Peter reframed 'attention seeking' to 'attention needing' in the conversation with a Year Head, prompting an exploration of what the 'attention need' might be. This resulted in a distinct change in her manner. We discussed this and see it as a positive move forward. We will continue to monitor the effects this has on our interactions with the staff. We also discussed how such 'reframing' needing to be used respectfully and 'casually' rather than being highlighted, in order to avoid it being experienced as shaming or correcting people. Our understanding is that this had been an acceptable way of describing and relating to people in the school environment. We feel that we might be nearer to a common language. It feels like a significant step forward.

b. Language of Education

The data highlights how we, as counsellors in a school, found ourselves in need of a language that could enable us to connect at all levels for our work to be effective. Not only might both counselling and adult concepts and language need adapting to reach young people (this will be discussed later under the theme of contact), but a similar bridging/translation process was, at times, needed for us to communicate effectively with other stakeholders in a school setting such as teachers.

Reflexive Conversation

Today we discussed an encounter with members of the Leadership Team. We had been asked to show our counselling service policies that described our work with young people and used counselling language. At the meeting, one of the managers asked us, 'What use is empathy?' We discussed how, at the time, we had both been very thrown by this. As person-centred counsellors, working with empathy is central to our work. Peter managed to reply to say something about the latest neuroscience research, which helped to describe our work in terms that this manager could accept. This episode has been on our minds. How can we begin to talk in a language that is understood in this context, without jargon? We will need to re-visit this topic often because being understood is essential.

This and similar incidents from the data illuminated how vital it was to find a common language in this setting and it highlighted that much of our professional counselling terminology might not have a 'currency' for other staff members within school and might, in fact, alienate them (as in the example above) or make us look elitist and superior.

For example:

Journal Entry Peter

I had a very difficult interaction today with one of the teaching assistants in the staff room. She had been talking about the Peer Supporters and said that she wanted to get some of the older students to help the younger ones with their academic work. She was talking about it being a peer mentoring system. She asked me 'Is that right, is that what you would call it?' I explained that it could be a mentoring service rather than peer because older students wouldn't necessarily be called peers, as they are not equal within the relationship. I was shocked when she became angry.

'Who do you think you are, telling me what peer means! I am very good at English thank you… Just because you are a counsellor, you think you know more than me!'

I was devastated; I had never wanted to be superior. She had asked for my opinion, and I offered it. I need to think about what knowledge to share and how to share it in this setting. So pleased that Ros was there to witness it and help me process it.

Analysis of the data also alerted us to the need to be able to connect to the language of education if we were to explain our work, be clear about how it might fit within the school and

communicate an understanding of the requirements and preoccupations of the teaching staff. We found ourselves becoming familiar with discussion about the need for differentiation within the classroom, differing models of learning, styles of lesson planning, the broader meaning of the terms ‘gifted and talented’ and, more recently, the differences between deeper learning and machine learning.

We also regularly scoped educational literature and research to remain aware of what the growing edges within this sector were. As the journal note below illustrates:

Journal Entry Peter
Had a great experience talking with the Principal today about the Emotional Literacy course that we have been asked to provide. She said ‘I’d like to introduce you to SEAL, I don’t suppose you’ve heard of it, it’s quite a trend in education at the moment. Can you have a look at it and see if you can do something like this. If you don’t understand anything in the document you can ask me, I can always translate’ (laugh). Ros and I were pleased to be able to say that we had looked at it and had been discussing it. She smiled and said, ‘You two are ahead aren’t you?’ I felt such a connection between us all.

1.3 School-Based Counselling as a Publicly Performed and Evaluated Experience

This organisational category was a repeated motif that arose from the data and which had relational consequences that will be discussed in more detail later under the Core Concept of ‘Contact’. The data repeatedly highlighted issues around the ways that the delivery of counselling services are organised within schools, which is very different from the majority of traditional counselling settings.

a. Character in the Client’s Narrative

For example, young people were not just known to us in the counselling room at their appointed time each week, but it was likely that we would have a direct experience of them, and them of us, outside the room and around the school.

Journal entries identify this:

Journal Entry Peter

I felt uncomfortable today. As I was walking through the hall, I saw one of the students that I was working with pick up a chair and move to hit another boy over the head with it. When he saw me, he stopped for a moment to say brightly 'Hello, sir!' but seemed likely to carry on after I had left the hall. What is my role here? I would, of course, stop any dangerous behaviour. How will it affect the counselling relationship that I have seen something different for the person than what he chose to show me? It is so different working with young clients in this setting.

Fieldnotes record how, in this setting, we also, often had our own experiences of and relationships with many of the characters (such as other young people and school staff) who might populate the young people's narratives in the therapy room.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

We discussed in supervision today the way that Miss H's name keeps coming up in sessions as someone who is sarcastic, difficult to get on with and, at times, unpleasant. We have both struggled with hearing this because, socially, our impression of her has been of someone fun and we both enjoyed her company in the staff room. We explored the impact of this information on our sessions and our conversations with Miss H knowing that we would not have this perspective on her without working with our clients. We observed that this is another dynamic that is different in this setting. It is not usual and, in fact, should be avoided at all costs in counselling so as to avoid bias. The question for us is how well we are managing that very different dynamic and whether there has there been an impact on our counselling work that we haven't appreciated until now.

Going back and forth between participant observation and analysis emphasised the idea that, for young people, the way we interact with them around the school between sessions was important. The way we negotiated this, as well as what we showed our clients of us interacting with other adults and young people around the building, helped them evaluate whether we were adults that they might be able to talk to and trust.

On occasion, such evaluations appeared to be more deliberate tests of trustworthiness. These could include sharing a confidence and seeing what we did with it or asking a question about whether we spoke to such and such a teacher etc.

Journal Entry Peter

I was taken aback when B asked me 'Did you tell Mrs R that I was bored in her lessons? I saw you talking to her as you left the staffroom.' I explained what I could keep private. Maybe I need to include this in a first session.

In going back into the field to seek experiences that might advance, alter or negate this initial coding and comparing this new data with our emerging theories, we were struck by a parallel between our experiences of feeling 'tested' and the way that young people 'tested' and began to trust each other with personal things.

With the move to the Academy structure, the data began to identify a similar parallel process being performed within the staff team too. Individual staff members gradually confided in us a little, and if this 'confidence' was held, then they might feel able to drop the 'confident' façade of the business academy (see later section on emotional labour), and further 'confidences' would be shared with greater openness.

b. Counselling Evaluated by the Most Recent Client's Performance

Incidents in the data indicated how, for staff stakeholders at a variety of levels in the school, the value attributed to counselling input was evaluated by how well the most recently referred young person known to the staff member was doing, often in class, in educational terms of engagement and attainment.

Journal Entry Peter

I had another incident today of feeling like it was my fault that the student's class behaviour wasn't improving. When Miss H referred him to me, she had been desperate for me to see him. Today she chased after me down the corridor, 'Are you still seeing B?' When I said that I was, she looked crossly at me, and for a moment I felt as though I was B, 'Well let me tell you, he's no better in class!' It was an awkward moment, I felt defensive and didn't know what to say. I must take this to supervision.

Journal Entry Ros

A class teacher stopped me today to tell me that one of my students was making too much

noise in the corridors on their way back to class after my group – I felt a bit shocked, this was the student that she was so pleased was coming out of her class for this group. I didn't say anything because I didn't know what to say.

Journal Entry Ros
I'm feeling cross and irritated, there have been several emails flying around about our collecting students from class, with complaints about our not always letting teachers know beforehand and about student noise levels on the way back from groups. I notice that when anyone sends an email, they copy the leadership team in who always reply and, without knowing the situation, rebuke the counselling service!

c. Third Party Referral

As is the case in most UK school-based counselling contexts, referrals were most often initiated because of someone else's concern about the young person. The data records how, on occasion, it was only the referring staff member who construed the young person's behaviour as problematic, and the young person had other concerns or none at all.

Journal Entry Ros
A tough beginning today with M, she said she didn't know why she was there, she didn't want counselling and was sick of Mr W 'Getting up in my business'. She said he asked her after the class 'Have you seen the counsellor yet? I've put your name forward'. She was so angry: 'Well he can fuck off!' I nodded, she looked at me and said 'And so can you!' I've been having thoughts about how referrals happen, how complicated the process is and how it might be managed.

Journal Entry Ros
Saw Mr W today and he rushed over to me to ask if I had seen M. I felt so in the middle, I remembered how M felt about the situation, and I felt a bit the same. In supervision we have been discussing this and I have tried to accept the system and work with it. Luckily I managed to answer without saying 'Fuck off' ha ha ha!

Incidents like this record how often the referrer continued to be involved, often expecting ‘results’ quickly and how they were often keen to feed their view of the issues - and sometimes an agenda for solutions - back to us throughout the work.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

Supervision has been dominated by our struggle with the referral system. Often the students don’t want to have counselling because they don’t like the teacher who suggested to the House Head that they should have it. We estimate that when this happens the counsellor has about two minutes to make good contact or the student slams the door and walks out. Beginnings are so difficult in this setting.

Going to the literature as part of the analysis, De Shazer's typology of ‘customers’ and ‘visitors’ to the therapy room, from Solution Focused Therapy (de Shazer, 1988) was helpful. These were experience-near descriptions that instantly convey implications for how one might treat a ‘visitor’ differently (spending more time warmly welcoming and getting to know them, starting where they can begin and answering any questions they might have about the process etc.) from a ‘customer’ in the therapy room. We added a third category to De Shazer's typology, ‘conscripts’, in order to capture the setting specific, predominantly third-party referral route within the school.

d. Additional Stakeholders

Incidents in the data illuminated the number of ‘additional stakeholders’ who have a continuing influence over whether a young person can continue in therapy or any of the other counselling team initiatives. From the data this included their tutor, a particular subject teacher, Head of Year, the Principal and Senior management, parents, governors and social workers.

The following Journal entries typify this data.

Journal Entry Peter

So irritated today. I was approached in the staff room by Mr P who informs me that one of the students in the Peer Support group can no longer be in the group because Mr P is starting up his own mentoring group for Year 12 and he has chosen this particular student. I said that we really needed to talk to the student to find out what he wanted to do as he has self-selected to be a peer supporter and it had been approved by his Head of House – Mr P replied, 'No, I've sorted that out and the Principal thinks it's a good idea. I will tell the boy when I see him next, I was just letting you know.' It seems that lots of people are involved with the students we see and can influence whether I can work with them or not! Supervision issue.

Going back and forth between this coding and participant observation brought forth how such stakeholder involvement didn't always seem unhelpful or unwanted by the young person. Our responses did illuminate how these experiences were unfamiliar within counselling and required us to process and rethink our own boundaries.

Journal Entry Ros

A different experience today, T and I leaving the room together when Mrs K arrived.

Mrs K: Oh how lovely that you are seeing Ros T, is it helping?

T: Yes, Ros is really helping me. It's been so difficult with my Mum. I can't change it, but it's so lovely to talk about it.

Mrs K: Well we've talked lots haven't we? But I knew you would get on with Ros (smiling at me). She's so lovely.

I keep needing to think about this. The whole encounter contradicts everything I know about good practice in therapy, and yet, it was OK, in fact, T and Mrs K seemed to enjoy this chance meeting. My questions are about how to keep clients safe in this setting.

In its starkest form, the data record incidents in which the future place of the student within the school may depend upon the results of this work, even though we do not hold the same agenda of rapid and quantifiable results for our client.

e. Captive Client Base

Multiple incidents from the data were given the initial codes of young people variously, ‘resisting’, ‘rebelling’, ‘refusing’, ‘blaming’, ‘acquiescing’, ‘conforming’. As these codes were compared with each other and with each new experience arising from the data, these codes began to become grouped together as the implications and experience of our clients being virtually ‘captive’ as young people, required to be in school and often having very little power at home except through such behaviour. The data also began to illuminate the implications of this ‘captive’ quality for our school-based counselling experience and we began to construct the concept of a ‘captive client base’. As an immediately apparent example, it is unusual for most counsellors to see their clients in their work setting other than when the client attends counselling. An awareness of this simple difference of our practice setting had implications for our practice. The *BACP Ethical Framework* highlights the importance of client autonomy as a core principle (BACP 2018, p. 11). In this school setting, this was difficult to achieve.

Journal Entry Peter

Quite disturbed today by the way my session with D started. I had gone to collect him from class as usual but he was not there, and I assumed that he was absent from school. About 15 minutes into the session Mr L came shouting into my room. ‘I believe that this might be who you are looking for, found wandering around the school, Sir! – In you go, D!’ This was an awkward moment. D was quiet, withdrawn and apologetic, he was struggling to be in school generally and didn't want to come to counselling, so he had been hiding in the toilets. He looked at the floor initially, and I explained that he didn't need to come for counselling if he didn't want to and that would be fine by me. I felt that this had been such a shaming experience for D. I wanted to be as welcoming as possible and to try to respect his agency. There wasn't much of the session left. When he left, he said that he didn't know if he would come back. I felt so sad about the whole thing. How can I help to guard against this sort of incident happening?

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

We were both bringing cases about bullying in the school today. Both of us feel that our clients were somehow unable to share some very painful material. We explored our own process and response to the material but were struggling to make sense of it. We noticed that this seems to

reoccur within the work. We are becoming more aware of the young clients needing to hold back on some of the problematic and deeply felt material in order to be able to go back into the school environment.

Journal Entry Ros

I became so aware of the setting today in a session. O was finding it difficult to begin, and suddenly she said she hated being in the room because it had been used for detention and she couldn't stop thinking about it when she came into the room. I realised just how difficult it was for her. The issue she had come to talk about was always being in trouble and always getting detention, and there we were talking about detention in the detention room! I shared this with her, and we were able to move past it. In fact it became something that we joked about together.

Reflexive Conversation

Discussed yet another factor that makes working in this setting unique and challenging: most of the issues are about or in some way connected with school, and we are in the school. We need to look closer at this, what is the impact of it, how aware of it have we been until now and is there anything that we could be doing to help?

Later data shows us trying to confront this problem by consciously offering choices where we could, particularly about whether the students took up the offer of or attended counselling. This felt important given that young people have limited control over their lives so this ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’ could powerfully communicate respect and empathy, and be a potentially therapeutic intervention in itself.

Journal Entry Ros

M looked surprised today when she said that she would rather finish her exam coursework than have her counselling session and I said that was fine.

Journal Entry Peter

C is really clear that he doesn't want to have counselling, I told him that was fine and that if he changed his mind, he could come and find me. He asked me to speak to Mrs D as she really wanted him to have counselling. I feel that these are important conversations to be

having with staff if the students are to have as much agency as possible.

f. Issues with Familiarity

The data highlights that 'coming out' of the counselling room (alongside considerable benefits) contributed to some unanticipated ('negative') consequences that took us by surprise.

Accessible vs professional

As the counselling service became an increasingly accessible part of the school we also became 'familiar' and approachable: 'Peter and Ros' rather than 'the counsellors'. The data record incidents in which this familiarity seems to have translated for some into the idea that we were not legitimate or professional therapists. There were several occasions when staff spoke about needing to refer students to 'proper (i.e. external) counsellors', as in Peter's Journal entry below:

Journal Entry Peter

An uncomfortable feeling today as Mr X asked me to write a report for when Z is referred to, 'proper counselling'… I feel more than qualified to work in a school, and I am a 'PROPER COUNSELLOR!!!!'

And a later conversation recorded in comments and observations:

Peter: The House Heads have been asking for something more specific about working with students with mental distress. Would you like us to run some sessions for them separately?

Deputy Principal: Oh no, we are arranging for them to attend a mental health course, they need a professional course.

Organisational Context Summary Comments

The data illuminates that in this context, without awareness and careful attention to the systemic as well as the individual perspective, the benefits of school-based counselling

activity would be limited and our provision risked being perceived as not necessarily a good fit for an educational context.

We have found the concepts illuminated by this research helpful in supporting us to navigate the complex system of the school community and we have been heartened that our own professional community of school-based counselling colleagues have also found these concepts valuable for making meaning of their own contexts. We therefore believe that they have significant consequences for the training and practice of school-based counsellors.

The following section maps the second core theme, clustering around the importance of considering connections and relationships in our work with adolescents in this setting. It illuminates some of the problems we encountered, the meaning we made of our experiencing and theoretical concepts that we constructed from the data and that have been of value in our responses.

Some categories arising from the data have both contextual and relational elements and so they appear in each of these two domains. The two sections intersect and are inextricably linked.

2. Contact

Introduction

As we began to analyse early data and move back and forth between participant observation and analysis in order to make further sense of the data, we found that much of it recorded that we were both finding it difficult to connect with our clients. This repeating motif around contact, as it occurred frequently and appeared significant, became a central theme for us that we used to shape our ongoing participant observation and to check, challenge and further refine the categories being constructed. This process was supported by our reflexive conversations and memo-writing as co-researchers and by the feedback received as we began to 'go public' with the emerging constructs around 'contact' through presentations at conferences and discussion with 'expert' peers in the field.

The data brought out the difficulties with making connections that we experienced at all levels and that threatened to make operating as a counsellor impossible.

The following dramatized scene, based on frequent incidents in the data illustrates this challenge:

> *(The counsellor in the middle of a session with a student who doesn't want to be there. The session is difficult; the student is quiet and says little.)*
>
> *Counsellor: So how's your week been?*
>
> *Student: Normal really*
>
> *(A loud knocking on the door disturbs the session A teacher enters with a student who is looking down.)*
>
> *Teacher: Is M meant to be with you now?*
>
> *Counsellor: No, he doesn't have counselling with me*
>
> *Teacher: Sorry, Miss. (To the student) Right, come with me. You're in trouble!*
>
> *(They both leave.)*
>
> *Counsellor (to the client) - I'm sorry about that J*

Student – Can I go, Miss……?

(Later, in the staff room)

Teacher (angrily): I'm glad I've seen you. Look, I really need to have a list of students who have counselling!

The iterative data collection and analysis process records our identifying and coming to recognise and understand these repeated experiences. It tracks how we have responded to these problems relationally and captures the construction of conceptual categories for understanding these phenomena.

Sub-themes which became grouped under the Core Concept of Contact are as follows:

2.1 Tenuous Contact

2.2 Maintenance of Professional Integrity

2.3 Consequences of School-Based Counselling Being Publicly Performed and Evaluated

These themes will now be discussed below.

2.1 Tenuous Contact

Introduction

The data highlighted how, in this setting, our contact with many of our young clients repeatedly felt fleeting, and the young person seemed to be shifting in and out of contact with us.

Incidents in the data charted the efforts we made at making Contact and our recognition of the importance of meeting young people in a place where they could begin. The data records

how, as counsellors we often felt like we were starting from a completely new beginning in each session.

> Contact gained in previous sessions cannot be taken for granted. For a young person, contact from session to session can feel new, difficult and tenuous. It may not be possible to re-ignite a previous link, which can often be taken for granted at the beginning of a session with an adult. There is no "relational capital" - or at least none that is available in the moment' (Pearce & Sewell, 2014, p.28) on which to build. The term 'tenuous contact' hopes to capture some of this experience.

The beginnings of 'Tenuous Contact' can be traced back to the very start of us both working as counsellors in school. The data records how, from early on, our supervision discussions became pre-occupied with trying to understand our experiences in the setting and wondering how we could best be of use in our counselling sessions with young people. As we reviewed our notes and journals from that time, various themes began to arise that have become grouped under the category of Tenuous Contact:

a) Not Connecting
b) Fleeting Contact
c) Feeling De-skilled
d) Worlds Apart
e) No Relational Capital
f) Changing Practice

a) Not Connecting

The data records numerous conversations and journal entries related to not connecting. Incidents were brought to supervision where we felt that it seemed very difficult to make a connection with a student, particularly at the start of a session. We were identifying that work with young people was very different from what we had done previously, and we felt that we had to really work to connect with our young clients.

Journal Entry Ros

We sat there for a while. I introduced myself, and he said hello. He looked at me and then looked down. The silence felt awkward. I noticed that I needed to break it. I started

explaining about what counselling was. I'm not sure what that was supposed to do – somehow magically enable him to talk? Well, it didn't, and I just found myself asking lots of questions. To sort of try to get the session going. He suddenly said that he didn't want counselling and he went back to class.

What was happening here? Why couldn't I start the session? Did he really not want counselling or was it that he didn't like the session?

Need to take this to supervision.

Journal Entry Peter

The beginning of that session was so difficult. I just didn't seem to be able to make any connection. I'm hoping that supervision will help.

Ros: Example from Practice

> *R: So how has your week been?*
>
> *J: Alright.*
>
> *R: And has school been OK…? What's been happening here?*
>
> *J: Yeah alright.*

Supervision Notes Ros

I felt really in need of supervision. I've had a difficult morning and I wasn't really in connection with my clients. Most of them were beginning sessions, and I know that I am currently finding beginnings difficult. We discussed beginnings and how to really get the relationship. I stayed in the feeling place and struggled with feeling inadequate. I wanted solutions but realised that Peter was feeling the same way and that we had no answers between us. I value having the space in supervision to bring up these difficulties and feel ok about it and not judged.

Supervision Notes Peter

It was valuable to share my struggle to begin sessions with my young clients. I was both relieved and sad that Ros is having the same problems. I think I had assumed that she was able to make connections more easily and I hoped that she might be able to help me by giving me some 'magical' ideas.

Journal Entry Ros

We are both in there together – neither of us knows, we are finding our way together – this feels exciting and risky. I'm so glad that I have worked with Peter before and I trust in his ability as a counsellor.

Journal Entry Ros

M - So different each session, last session unable to connect and quiet and this week, so easy to connect. We've noticed that it doesn't always seem to be connected to what has happened to him in the week – still trying to understand this one.

Journal Entry Peter

Struggled with W this morning, didn't seem to want to be there. Not too sure what is happening at home. Finding sessions with W difficult generally – it seems difficult to make contact with W but not always. Last session engaged talking about Dad, and today so distant.

Journal Entry Ros

T hard to connect with again – seems to be in his own world.

Analysing incidents in the data illuminates how trying to connect with clients seemed to be a concern that was continually occurring in our early work. We were recording data relating to this in ways that also identified how anxious we both were about failing to connect.

b) Fleeting Contact

Another aspect of connection that became prominent in the data and was raised to a sub-theme was that connection seemed fleeting and frequently came and went within sessions.

Journal Entry Peter

Had an interesting morning where I felt like I was in and out of connection with every student – must bring this to supervision – maybe I *am moving in and out of the session.*

Supervision Notes Ros

Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) today. I wanted to look at those moments in which I seem - on and off - to lose contact in the session. I was curious to understand what I was feeling just before one of those moments and wondered if I was somewhere else at the time. It was interesting to discover through IPR that I was staying in touch with my clients' material and then feeling thrown when we seemed to lose contact and then pick it up again. I'm not sure what to make of this discovery – I had assumed it was about my waning presence in the session and that I was somehow not following or able to maintain contact.

Supervision Notes Peter

A - very polite and at times disconnected from himself. We have noticed that he will start up a topic and we follow him and there are moments of meeting but if one of us misses him or brings in anything from our own frame of reference then contact is lost. It all goes quiet, and we have to wait for him to begin again. There seems to be a problem around his dad not wanting him to have counselling and yet according to his Head of House it was his dad who requested it. After several attempts to find out from him, we have decided to abandon this issue as it seems to shut him down and take him out of contact.

We seemed to be discovering that it was more challenging to connect with young people and that even when there was contact it was gained and lost throughout the session.

c) Feeling De-Skilled

The data often records how we each found ourselves feeling de-skilled in this setting, despite both being highly experienced therapists with many years practice in other challenging settings.

Example from Practice

> *T: Hi J*
>
> *J: Mmm.*
>
> *T: It's a couple of weeks since we met, and I said I'd check in with you to see how you are doing.*

J: Mmm.

T: So how's it going?

J: It's OK.

T: It's OK.

J: Yeah I'm doing OK now.

T: J if I've got this right, things are looking a bit better for you now.

J: Yeah.

T: So what's that like that things are looking a bit better.

J: Yeah alright – I don't have any problems – can I go now?

T: Yes, of course, J I just want to say that I'm here if you need me.

J: Thanks, Miss.

T: Shall I check in with you again in a couple of weeks?

J: (Flatly) If you want…

Journal Entry Ros

Sometimes I feel really in the relationship, and at other times I'm on the outside looking in. I have never felt like this before, and I feel a bit lost – sometimes I feel like I'm no good and can't really manage to counsel in this setting. This feeling is particularly heightened when I introduce a session to a new client, and they don't want to engage in therapy and choose not to have therapy, I feel that this is somehow to do with me and I feel a failure as a therapist.

Journal Entry Peter

I felt very ineffective as a counsellor today, and this is becoming a familiar feeling in my work – sometimes I find myself struggling to connect. I thought this would change as I became more experienced with young people.

What was becoming clear was that the feeling of being de-skilled wasn't about our lack of experience. It continued throughout our work as a necessary part of what had to be tolerated as a counsellor in this setting in order for counselling to be consistently offered to a young people. The data records how this experience lessened, or perhaps it simply became more possible to tolerate, as we developed ways of working with the phenomena and themes that the data brought forward.

d) Worlds Apart

From early on the data records us experiencing and discussing the feeling that we were worlds apart from our clients in the school setting: "We are both middle-aged, white, and middle class by virtue of education. There is a very considerable divide in terms of age, class, race and culture between us and the young people coming to us for counselling" (Pearce & Sewell, 2014, p.28). The data thus illuminate our early recognition that, "we were not going to get far if we stayed in our counsellor's "cultural enclave" expecting others to come to us to understand and trust what counselling was and what its benefits could be" (Pearce & Sewell, 2014, p.28). Supervision was an essential part of trying to understand what was happening at all levels. From the data streams, the following themes arise: **age, language and culture.**

i) Age

This is a noticeable difference that was always in the room and often came up in sessions. Data illuminates how it could have a very different meaning depending on the client or where the issue touched us.

Journal Entry Ros

I was sitting with uncomfortable feelings today in my session with L, which did surface but were definitely not OK to bring. She was talking about her mother and her auntie and then her grandmother. I noticed I lost the session momentarily when she was talking about her mum's age and then her grandmother. She was saying how her grandmother controlled her mother and almost ran the house and then she said that the problem is 'she's too old to understand! After all, she is nearly 50! – I mean she shouldn't be at home – she should be put in an old people's home or something!!' I am older than L's Grandmother. I suddenly felt old in relation to L – could I really understand her?

Reflexive Conversation in Supervision Ros and Peter

Interesting session in supervision today: what happens to us when we both suddenly feel 'old' in a session? This feeling seems to be taking us out of the session for a while and making us both question whether we can really meet and understand our clients. Are they thinking the

same thing about us? Are we too old to understand them? Who do they see us as? Can they be real in the room? These questions have made us think about the benefits of setting up peer support. Students listening to each other. Understanding each other – able to connect more fully.

ii) Language

In the location of the school in which we were working, we recognised that language was an issue. Reading early supervision notes and journals seem to indicate that a lot of time was initially spent in supervision trying to make sense of the street language that was prevalent amongst the client group. There were 100 different languages and dialects spoken in the school and yet 'street' was spoken by everyone, regardless of heritage. Even when a student who had recently arrived in the country began to speak English, they learned 'street language' and swearing first. One of the main problems that we encountered with language was that it is difficult to connect with a client when the counsellor struggles to understand the meaning of the language or to make sense of the nuancing of expression. As an example from practice:

> *Student (speaking very quickly, almost without a pause for breath): I'm not 'av'n nuffin' to do wiv 'er no more - she fuckin speak'n to me like tha' – I don't cotch wiv 'er no more- I saw 'er out she's shit right – she fuck'n blanked me – this is me right don't blank me – this is 'er right I weren't - boy, she's a liar – I know if someone fuck'n blanks me – know what I mean? – I'm pissed man - and then in school today right - she says she's bringing 'eads down – I'll tell ya – she don't get me shook – if she's bringing 'eads down - I'm bringing 'eads down – I'm bringing bare 'eads down an' we got borers right - d'you get me? (*Pearce & Sewell, 2014, p.28)

Journal Entry Peter

Working with the boys' group was difficult today. I found it so hard to follow the conversation – it felt as though they were having a conversation between themselves and I was an observer – need to check vocabulary out with Ros.

Journal Entry Ros

I was a bit confused today by language – as usual. N kept saying that she was 'pissed' all day yesterday and I kept thinking that she meant that she was drunk in school – then I began to realise as N was talking that 'pissed' now mean 'pissed off' and not drunk and what she was saying suddenly made sense to me. How much of that session did I miss with the wrong meaning of the word? I feel that I am worlds apart from my clients!

Reflexive Conversation in Supervision

So much of our supervision time seems to be taken up with discussing vocabulary and its meaning and that raises lots of questions for us. If empathy is about trying to show someone that you are trying to understand their world, how can you do that if you actually don't understand the content or the words used to describe that world?

Exploring the data identifies that, from the beginning of our work in the school, we were highlighting the difficulties of connecting and a significant part of our work together has been about trying to make sense of this difficulty and trying to find ways to deepen our connection with our clients.

iii) Culture

In that particular setting, we found ourselves working across several different cultures and were aware that being young is in itself a (sub) culture that contains understanding and experiences that are unique to youth and the demographic setting. In our particular school, there was also gang culture, which we regularly discussed in sessions and references were often made to other gangs or gang members outside of the school who we did not know about.

Example from Practice

M: They always bully me – they think they can treat me like shit – but what they don't know – what they don't know right – is (Said slowly and looking at us as if we would know who this is and said in a way that lets another person into a secret) – my brother is. . . 'Honesty'.

R + P (together): Oh. . . right.

M: An' 'is mate, 'is mate is. . . 'Shadow'

Example from Practice

R: Steven, what was the best and worst bit of your week

P: Best bit… jacking a 'ped

Worst bit… falling off and hurting my leg

In that setting, we were always working with difference and diversity within both the student body and the staff and the students' parents in family work.

Example from Practice

We were asked to see A. His dad had been sent for as A had been fighting and had injured another boy. He was distressed and seemed scared of his dad being informed. We were asked if we could offer some family work to A and his dad. While we were waiting for his dad to arrive A said that his dad is strict and 'he lives in the old times!'. He said that his dad doesn't understand that he wants to have fun like anyone else. 'He's always on about in our own country. . . this and that . . . this is my country . . . he's still in the old country.' When Dad arrived, there was a meeting with the Year Head, which we declined to attend. After the meeting with the Year Head, we all went into a room and Dad was silent and seemed angry, A was crying. It was a challenging session. The school were worried that this might be a Child Protection issue as A seemed so afraid of his dad. Dad spoke very little English but understood very well. What was apparent was his warmth towards and care for A. As the session developed they began to talk to each other and seemed to connect, they spoke in their home language and A translated between his dad and us. We were deeply moved when Dad shared with A for the first time that the reason he was cross when A was in trouble at school was because he wanted the best for him. He told A that the reason he wanted him to do well was because he was so grateful to this country for giving him asylum. There was a tentative tender moment where A's dad spoke about being tortured in his own country and they shared their history in the room. A did not know this about his dad. They cried together as they connected with the pain and we were tearful as we witnessed the impact of the disclosure on A and the warm, loving connection that was palpable in the room.

This story illustrates the many layers involved in working with difference and diversity. The story begins with a young person who is straddling two cultures. He lives in one and doesn't understand the other, but it is still very much a part of his life through his parents. The school becomes alerted to the seemingly strict parenting regime. Nobody really understands Dad's

concerns, and in a moment of tenderness facilitated by two white counsellors who don't understand the culture or the language, he chooses to share with A the personal information that will help them both to make sense of their material. We felt privileged and humbled to have been part of their process.

e) No Relational Capital

Incidents in the data repeatedly highlighted how

> contact gained in previous sessions could not be taken for granted and instead for a young person, contact from session to session can feel new, difficult and tenuous. It may not be possible to re-ignite a previous link, which can often be taken for granted at the beginning of a session with an adult. (Pearce & Sewell, 2014, p.28)

We coded this repeating theme as our being unable to rely on any '"relational capital" – or at least none that is available in the moment– on which to build" (2014, p.28).

Example from Practice

R: How did it go in Maths with Mr X?

B: What…?

R: Mr X …? you were having a problem with Mr X, and you were going to speak to him about getting some help.

B: Oh him, yeah well he's just a bastard.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

We have been discussing today how different it is working with young people, particularly in the way that sessions begin. We have noticed that bringing up something from the last meeting often doesn't help. We were both stunned when G, who had spent the whole group session telling us how desperate she was to go to the coast at the weekend because it is part of her home, simply responded 'Oh yeah that was ok' to Peter's inquiry about how her

weekend and her trip to Brighton went. What is this about? We aren't sure yet, but we are very thrown by it.

The data illuminated how young people in this setting were often very in the moment and in order to establish contact we thus needed to ensure we were sensitive and attentive to how they were feeling and demonstrate a consistent willingness to 'meet' at the level that they were able to meet us at in that moment.

f) Changing Practice

Conversations

We noticed that we were often finding ourselves having what felt more like 'conversations' with our clients and we struggled with this. It raised questions for us about whether what we were doing was therapy. Exploring our journals and supervision notes it is interesting to see that we were both having such conversational experiences as a way of trying to connect with the young person and we both felt that we were working in ways that weren't 'therapeutic'. 'Conversations' came up frequently in the data.

Journal Entry Peter

Feel a bit concerned that I seem to be having conversations, which isn't my usual way of working, particularly as a way into therapy. I notice that talking about football does take me in with G, but I am concerned about how much I need to do this – must check this out with Ros.

Journal Entry Ros

I was a bit lost with the 'EastEnders' catch up today with the girl's group – I must watch 'EastEnders' so I can at least follow and be part of what is going on – Is this therapy preparation?!!!!!! Is this therapy?!!!!!!!

Reflexive Conversation in Supervision *Ros and Peter*

What is the purpose of conversation – it certainly seems like a way in, but is this ok? We are both concerned by it. Both of us are doing it but neither of us has been very conversational in our practice before. Maybe this is part of the work with young people, perhaps it helps us to connect. It seems to make the clients feel at ease – but we are not at ease with it. Why do we both feel like we are doing something wrong? Do we both feel more concerned about this because we are trainers – how can we explain this? Maybe we should go with what is happening rather than judging it as poor therapy or not 'real' therapy in order to take the anxiety out of it, as there is a danger that holding back may stop us from entering into the relationship. We shall try to hold curiosity about what is going on and to monitor it – this should help us to move to a place of understanding practice rather than discounting it.

It seemed to us that we were working with young people differently from how we worked with adults and in ways that we didn't understand. What was apparent was that the pair of us, both very experienced therapists, had been having these conversations independently and then sharing our thoughts and process about it in supervision. Supervision produced more questions than answers. What was becoming very clear about this process was that it was our trust in each other's ability to provide safe practice and listen to each other non-judgementally in supervision that allowed this concept of conversations to emerge. We were able to risk sharing with each other what might be seen as poor practice along with all our concerns about it, and this enabled us to enter into an inquiry as research practitioners.

Example from Practice

> *Student: It's so fucking boring in here. I'd rather be in double Maths! I mean what is this group?*
>
> *Counsellor: Yeah I've got that, It's so fucking boring that you would rather be in maths… and that would be OK.*
>
> *Student: What would?*
>
> *Counsellor: Maths, it would be OK if you wanted to go to maths.*
>
> *Student: Well, I dunno - a bit of me wants to go, and a bit of me wants to stay here… find out if I like it.*
>
> *Counsellor: You're not sure, Donna. You want to go and you want to stay and find out if you like this group... You know… both parts [are] very welcome here, Donna.*

(Pearce & Sewell, 2014, p.29)

Example from Practice

Student: Nothing really… normal.

Counsellor: It seems really difficult for you to stay with this part of the session each week, the best bit and the worst bit of your week… is that right?

Student: (Angrily) (silence then angrily) My week's been shit alright?

Counsellor: (gently) Your week's been shit.

Student: Yeah…

Counsellor: (hesitantly) Any part of your shit week that's been any more shit than the rest?

Student: (long silence) Yeah last night, my Dad come in drunk and hit my Mum.

(Pearce & Sewell, 2014, p.41)

Journal Entry Peter

A - Always pleased to see us and then struggles to make contact in the session, often makes more contact on the way to the session. Having noticed this I have started to go the long way round to the room and have suggested walking around the playground or sitting in the café. This feels particularly appropriate given the context: school refuser. I find myself feeling great empathy for A as she is so unhappy about being in school. I find it difficult to stay in the counsellor role and would like to sort things out for her so that she never has to come into school again.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

A very different experience with H today. Last week she was unable to be part of the group, dissing everybody. Today she was gentle and engaged – interested in others. Interested in

how the session started for her today. Often not in class, found wandering about and brought to the session by someone else, she arrives resentful and it sometimes takes her the whole time to settle and to somehow arrive. After discussions about this in supervision – we'll try a new system– one of us will collect her from the end of her last lesson as she is often not in the classroom when we arrive. This seemed to work today – we will try this next week and monitor it. It seemed to have an impact that she was there at the start of the group and not arriving having been brought to the session in what feels like a shaming way, and then we feel part of that experience. Today we actively changed that experience for all of us.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

J - Still not sure what is going on here – J is quiet, she responds well to any input from us but not really engaging with other students. I noticed some connectedness with H when she offered empathy.

> *'I saw you coming in with your Dad. I didn't know why but I felt sad for you. I knew you were in trouble.' J looked up and smiled 'It was bare shit man, it's fucking shit'.*

There's something so clear here about empathy having the ability to touch another, and about how the impact of feeling understood helps us to say more. This was quite a moment in the group. Both of us as facilitators were able to share our feelings of being moved, by H's empathic refection and its impact. This encouraged both H and J to share deeply about their own current problems – others in the group were visibly moved. This had a significant effect on A who stayed calm enough to bring himself into the room and share his own story of when he was in trouble for hitting his four-year-old brother. Recognise the need to record some of this amazing stuff.

The data shows us beginning to understand how 'conversations' within counselling sessions were not a distraction from the therapy but more a way of trying to meet the young people where they are, and where they were able to begin. They were thus a way of connecting with our clients, which is so foundational for an effective therapeutic relationship.

Journal Entry Ros

I noticed that the girls' group session today moved seamlessly from talking about last night's TV to L sharing with the group that she had watched TV at her aunt's house because she

didn't want to go home. I notice that I'm feeling more comfortable with the level of conversation in the session, I'm trying to be present in the session and not watching myself and wondering if this is OK.

Journal Entry Peter

Football again today, I'm not sure how we began talking about D's Dad being very strict, but chatting about football may be a good way in with D.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

Today we discussed how we've shifted in our thinking about conversations and 'ways in' to therapy. We have both been experiencing sessions where we think that there has been a greater connection after 'meeting' in conversation. Peter used it as a 'way in' at a session in which a boy had been referred who didn't want to speak. Staff had noticed that he was unusually quiet in class and didn't know why. Peter noticed that he had a football sticker on the back of his school lanyard that he was quietly playing with. Peter asked, 'Is this your team?' He looked up and made the first real contact. He didn't support a football team, but his dad did and had given the sticker to him when he took him to a football match. That was the last time he had seen his dad, who had been taken to prison. He had not told anyone in the school. He felt ashamed and sad. We are both beginning to recognise the importance of just trying to connect and meet the young people where they can meet us.

Flexible Working

Our data shows us striving to enact a willingness to respect young people's wishes and to accommodate frequent needs to change arrangements and work flexibly, in recognition of the constraints of control that young people have over managing their own time and school timetables. We began to think of the willingness to, routinely go the extra mile in this way in our work with young people, as an essential aspect of the therapeutic work in itself. which held the invitation provided by counselling open to more young people for longer.

Journal Entry Peter

V didn't want to come for counselling today. She wanted to stay in art. We are thinking together about changing her time so that she doesn't miss art. She has spoken about this to

her tutor who told her that counselling was important and not to miss it. On reflection, it would be better to change the sessions around.

Journal Entry Ros

I agreed to come in early to see a Year 12 student who doesn't feel that she can miss any lessons. Need to discuss this in supervision – is it about the pressure she puts on herself? Is it a problem being flexible? What's going on?

Journal Entry Peter

J's session was in the playground today. We moved from the swings to the seesaw – in and out of the session. We ended up playing football. This feels so right with J as he feels unable to stay in the room. I do feel a bit worried about explaining this to staff if I am asked.

The data thus records how this more 'collaborative' work with young people necessitated ongoing consideration and attention to holding boundaries and working ethically. Regular and open supervision support was essential for checking that we adhered to ethical practice.

Journal Entry Ros

I am concerned about a session I had this morning. I had to use one of the music practice rooms for counselling. This was a room that we had not been in before. I started to become nervous almost immediately when T began to switch on the electric piano then bash it rather than playing it. Then he was picking up the guitars and smashing on the strings. I became worried that he would break the instruments and that I would be responsible. I said to him that they were not our instruments and maybe we had to be careful with things in that room. He told me he didn't care. I panicked and became a disciplinarian. I told him that he would have to stop because he would break the instruments. 'Fucking shit school' he said before leaving. I am left feeling like I really got it wrong. I'm also not sure what else I could have done. Need to take this to supervision.

Supervision Notes Ros

I took T's session to supervision and felt better just for sharing it. The supervisor helped me to process what was going on for me and why I had felt the need to stop T. Peter's comments were also valuable. I realised that I had needed to stop him and that it could have been dangerous for him if I had allowed that to continue. We talked about keeping clients safe and

what this meant in practice. What emerged for me was that it was a discipline and therapy clash and that it was my panic in that setting that influenced my action. We looked at other ways that I could have related to him. But it was certainly clear that I did have to lay down some boundaries and be transparent about whose boundaries they were. We talked about whether I should talk about it if he returns. I felt sure that he would not.

Journal Entry Ros

T came to therapy today. I was surprised! I began by saying that I wanted to talk about last week if he did and that I was sad that we hadn't found a way to work together in the room (we were in the same room as before). He said he couldn't work in that room because he wouldn't be able to resist touching all the instruments, and could we go outside. We walked into the playground together, and he told me that he hates being in small rooms and that little room made him cross. He said he hates music. I tried to explore this with him, he had wanted piano lessons when they were offered in the school, but his dad said he needed to concentrate on his studies. I had the chance to share how I felt about telling him to stop and why I did it. I feel that we have found a way to work together. It's not conventional, and I will monitor this in supervision.

Attention to Transparency

The data highlights the role of transparency in our work with young people. Incidents began to bring forward how clear explanations could help redress the significant power imbalance and that they were often in stark contrast to some of the young people's other experiences.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

We discussed introductions today. We began to share how we are introducing counselling to new clients. We noted how different it is from introducing adult sessions. We have both worked to make our descriptions clear, succinct and jargon-free. We both noted that we are beginning by saying that we are not teachers, which is particularly useful for students who have been referred for counselling and don't really want to be there.

Journal Entry Ros

I seemed to make a connection with S when I said 'Miss B thought you might like a time to talk, do you have any thoughts about what this may be about?' She said she had no idea and I just stayed with that, and we seemed to be able to talk.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

We discussed the contact made with G last week. Peter said that he was not a teacher 'so you don't have to call me Sir or Mr Pearce, it's OK to call me Peter, so what would you like me to call you?' G looked up and said 'right, you can call me Mr M then!' We all laughed. There's something very real here about re-addressing the power imbalance. When we see him around the school, he always comes up and shakes our hands, and we call him Mr M.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

We feel that transparency is very important with this client group. It has something to do with being honest about the process. We recognise how often young people do not receive explanations in school, they are just told to follow instructions. Being transparent invites an adult response. 'Sorry we aren't in our usual room, there're exams in there. I'll try to keep this room as private as possible.'

The data shows that transparency can invite relating in a more equal person-to-person way. The data records how this can help enable a young person to shift from conformity to autonomy.

Knowing the Client Group

The data highlights the importance of understanding the client group in this setting. It is not about knowing everything about young people or being 'down with the kids' but more about finding sufficient 'common reference points' to enable connection to begin. The data illuminates how this can shorten the 'relational distance' that we have to bridge to connect and that going 'above and beyond,' in this way can help to narrow the gap between adult and young people's 'worlds apart'.

Journal Entry Ros

I felt pleased to be able to say that I knew who Sean Paul was when the girls were trying to describe a dance to me today. I just felt like I was able to stay more connected and they didn't have to explain to me. I am seeing the value in just knowing a few up-to-date words, songs etc.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

Ros has made some adjustments to her dress after discovering what 'haram' means. She has decided that she will no longer wear a short skirt and will tie her hair back. We discussed the importance of trying to connect and the advantages of having some knowledge in this school.

Journal Entry Peter

The boys' group told me I was 'safe' today. I notice how much I liked hearing it. I asked them what 'safe' means to them. They said someone they trust and respect. One of them said 'you go above and beyond.'

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

Discussed 'going above and beyond' and being 'safe'. Our current thoughts are about this being about us 'knowing the client group'. So don't you always have to know your client group? Yes, you do. But our client group is so often hard to reach so we feel it's even more critical.

Ros discussed her boys' group where they have to play a football game. She has been checking out all the names of football players. When it was her turn – a player beginning with R- she said 'Ronaldo'. They all cheered. One of them said 'You're safe, Miss' One student said 'Have you been looking up names all weekend?' Ros said 'I have actually!' Important learning and processing here.

More Present/Congruent

The data shows that in our quest to meet our young clients, who are sometimes difficult to reach, attention to person-centred theory in practice enabled us to invite greater relational contact.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

The discussion today was about presence and congruence in relation to our work with young people. We notice that we have turned to our counselling model for the answers about forging greater connections and found that when we pay attention to our model in sessions greater connections can be made with clients. We need to use our understanding of our model to be even more present in the counselling room.

When working with a group of boys who were being very quiet, one of them shared that his parents had recently divorced and that he felt in the middle, torn between them. No one in the group responded. Ros shared that she felt moved to hear that he felt somehow in the middle. He said he was sad and others joined in. Ros' sharing of feelings modelled that it was OK to go to a feeling place.

Journal Entry Ros

A remarkable moment in the group today. I felt challenged and needed to stay right in my process. The boys' group were all talking about being very violent to another boy in the playground. I was finding the very graphic descriptions disturbing. I noticed that I hadn't really joined in. One of the group members said 'You haven't joined in, Ros because you don't like violence.' All eyes turned to look at me – I felt frozen. I hadn't realised what was going on for me. I shared that it was true that I didn't like violence but I didn't think that was why I hadn't spoken. I asked the group to give me a minute to see what was going on for me. They all sat in silence as I struggled for clarity. I shared that I thought that I hadn't spoken because I didn't know what to say as an adult in the group that would stop the conversation. I didn't want to sound like a disapproving adult and that I thought that this was a meaningful conversation that needed to happen. Peter, who had also been sitting quietly in the group, said that he thought that the same thing was going on for him too. This congruent response seemed to connect us up with the group again, and the conversation continued and moved on to the group exploring the relationship between violence and the violence that they experienced in their homes. I think that because Peter and I were congruent and shared our difficult process the group was able to continue and move to a new level of understanding. The questions for me are about what to do when the adult in me finds the material difficult but doesn't want to shut down the process.

Journal Entry Peter

A touching moment in the group today. The boys began teasing Y and laughing at his trainers because they were not an acceptable make. I shared that I was feeling sad and wondered whether Y had any choice about the make of trainers that were bought. This response allowed Y to have a voice and he shared that his family were poor and that he didn't like the trainers either but he had to wear them. Other group members began to share stories of poverty and showed empathy for Y. It was a moving session. I think that sharing my feelings was a pivotal moment in the session.

The following anonymised example from practice is an illustration of moments of meeting and tenuous contact throughout the relationship.

Example from Practice

Jason was referred to the counselling service because he was disengaged from school, had few friends and was underachieving academically. I was told that his Mum was 'lovely' and that she had thought that counselling might be a good idea when the possibility had been suggested at a parents' evening. I was also informed that Jason had reluctantly agreed to see me, and his teachers found him aggressive and argumentative.

When I met Jason our first moments together were awkward. He sat quietly and didn't want to engage with me. I said that I realised that he hadn't really wanted to have counselling but had agreed, which I didn't think were the same thing. From looking down at the floor, this comment seemed to make him look up at me but straight back down again. I struggled to make a connection with him and he clearly showed me that he didn't really want to be there. When he spoke he used few words and seemed quiet and aggressive in his manner. I said that I wasn't a teacher and that he didn't have to call me 'Miss' and that other people had thought he might benefit from some time to talk. He looked straight at me.

J: What would I wanna talk to you for? Why would I wanna talk to anyone in this fucking school? I hate it here.. I hate school. I don't wanna fucking talk to no-one… You can report me if you like.

Th: Report you, Jason?

J: I was swearing Miss.

Th: Oh that… that's OK in here. I think I was listening to the fact that you hate school more than the swearing… I was thinking… you know it must be a long day if you hate it.

J: Yeah it is. (Laughs)

Th: And every day, Jason… you have to spend a lot of time at school.

J: That's it innit… that's just it! Your whole life in a place you hate.

Th: Your *whole life in a place you hate.*

J: It's a thing you say innit 'I hate school'. But me, I really do *hate school. It's so boring…*

M... I was gonna call you Miss then… what's your name?

Th: You're bored, Jason.

J: Yeah, and all the teachers… I hate them as well… They hate me too…I'm always in trouble.

It was hard to engage Jason, and there were moments where I really felt that I managed to feel connected to him, but these moments did not stay. (Pearce, Sewell & Cromarty, 2018, pp.435-436).

Working with Jason, I never felt that I had established a solid relationship. When I met with him from one session to another we would always have to begin again. I felt as though I had to earn my right to connect with him, it wasn't a given. Sometimes, in an attempt to connect, I would bring in something important that had been in our last session as a way of connecting and showing that I had remembered him, held him in mind as it were. Often he would look at me as if I was from another planet, perhaps not remembering what we had spoken about before. These moments puzzled me, had Jason not remembered or was it not important any more. I began to notice that bringing up these moments as an attempt to connect was having the opposite effect, as I often found myself needing to explain the story.

Th: How did it go in maths with Mr X?

J: What…?

Th: Mr X… you were having a problem with Mr X, and you were going to speak to him about getting some help.

J: Oh him yeah well he's just a bastard.

I began to realise that this was not useful and that I needed to be able to meet Jason just where he was, these moments in which I missed him were continuous, even during the session. In the sessions, we moved in and out of connection, and I often had the feeling in sessions that Jason and I were permanently in a first session.

J: Gardening's OK… it's better than when I was in that Oxfam shop... boy that was long.

Th: Yes I remember when you were at the Oxfam shop… but the gardening's OK.

J: Yeah well it's a laugh innit cos my mates are there, and it's jokes... I like Fridays now.

Th: Yeah, you're with your mates Fridays, and it sounds like you're having some fun together.

J: Yeah but Friday's only one day, right.

Th: Yeah it's only one day.'

J: Every day should be like Friday… The rest of the week is fucking shit!

Although we had shared that moment of recognition of a highlight in his week, I knew that it would not be possible to recapture this moment or even refer to it again. Moments of contact felt so fleeting with Jason. As the sessions went on I discovered that Jason probably "had learning difficulties and" that "he was bored and hated all the teachers because he could not keep up in class" (2018, p.437). He managed to speak to his Head of House about this and lots of things were put in place to help him to manage school. "A shorter timetable and some special help for dyslexia" (2018, p.437) were some of the changes that came out of Jason's counselling. As he came to trust the counselling relationship, Jason shared deeper material and made some discoveries. However, I felt that he always remained on the edge of deciding not to come for counselling and that I couldn't take psychological contact for granted. Working with Jason, I was reminded of Gary Prouty's work on pre-therapy (Prouty, 1998) and felt as though his work relates directly to work counselling young people who sit on the edge of engagement in therapy.

As with the example of Jason, the data seemed to highlight how it was more difficult to connect with young people. It recorded how we, as counsellors needed to actively invite connection continually. It seemed that "the level of the contact may vary from session to session and may fluctuate during the session itself" (Pearce & Sewell, 2014, p. 42) .

In the person-centred approach it is considered important to offer unconditional positive regard and to stay in the client's frame of reference in order to develop and maintain secure psychological contact. When working with young people, it feels like much more than this is necessary in order to establish psychological contact. As the data illuminates, it can feel like we have to be sensitive and tune into the unspoken world of a young client and hold the fragments of feelings and meanings until they are able to either make sense of them or manage those thoughts/feelings.

> Tenuous contact might, therefore, be thought of as akin to Van Werde's description of 'grey zone functioning' (Prouty et al., 2002) developed in adult mental health settings. This might be thought of as rapidly changing functioning; sometimes being in good, mutual contact with the person, and, at other times, having little sense of what is going on in them. With young people this experience can be of both being anchored in the shared reality and sometimes also the 'pre-expressive' and sometimes where the two realities are blended together. In Van Werde's terms then, tenuous contact might be situated in the upper half of this grey zone functioning very close to 'normal' expressive functioning, but partially remaining in a private world. For some this might predominantly be a 'not choosing' to connect with an adult, and for others it may be less of a choice where this 'locked-in' feature has become a way of being.
>
> In either case, as a counsellor working with young people you often haves to endure the frustration of not yet receiving full contact. Contact has to be 'earned' and may have to be tested - the relationship has to be safe enough for a young person to permit themselves to be in contact with another. (Pearce & Sewell, 2014, pp.42-43)

2.2 Maintenance of Professional Integrity

Incidents in the data bring forward how often we felt professionally compromised by failing to offer the consistency that usually signals safety and professionalism in 'good' counselling practice. In the school setting it often proved impossible to hold the usual 'givens' of counselling practice, despite our best efforts.

Constructing this category has involved our striving to be genuinely 'open' to the data without imposing our pre-understandings onto what data was collected or what meaning we made of it. We have found that this has necessitated not merely doing 'more of the same' in holding to our professional position and 'trying to educate' all members of this setting in the requirements of a counselling service. While this educative aspect is important, repeating incidents in the data highlighted that it alone seemed insufficient and perhaps might even be counter-therapeutic. Instead, remaining open to an awareness of our own responses and to the 'tacit assumptions' about ethical and professional counselling practice that drove them enabled us, over time, to make explicit some of the implicit aspects of 'good' counselling practice and consider whether safe and ethical practice could be held more relationally than materially or concretely.

Two issues emerged from this:

1) We came to understand that these experiences didn't apply solely to us. Instead, it was an everyday experience in the setting, and it seemed that most members of staff had accepted and acclimatised to this 'fact'. This realisation has helped us to stop experiencing such occasions as personal attacks.

2) We are beginning to explore the relevance of the counselling custom and practice 'givens' that we have both been working to and teaching for many years. We are re-considering what makes our practice 'safe' in this setting and how this impacts professional integrity.

The sub-themes that feed into this theme are as follows:-

a. Rooming

b. Confidentiality

c. Talking in Corridors

d. Staff Room

e. Supporting but not Colluding

a) Rooming

The data highlighted the chaotic nature of establishing and retaining suitable rooms for counselling within the school. The data shows that we struggled with this and that, certainly in the initial years of working in the school, we were not able to communicate to staff that we needed a room in an effective way without making our needs seem precious.

Journal Entry Ros

I went into the counselling room today to find school interviews going on. The teacher was new; I introduced myself and said that I was usually in that room. She was very dismissive and told me that I would have to find another space. As I left, a more senior member of staff saw me and said I was to have the room, and she told the teacher to move. The teacher looked very put out and said that she thought that school interviews were more important than counselling sessions. I felt concerned that I had not got off to a good start with this new member of staff. I had not instigated the room change but felt as though I had!

Journal Entry Peter

My room was being used for French orals today, and I was left wandering around the school with my client trying to find a space to work. This was very challenging, and I tried to hold space and privacy for the client when there was none.

As the data shows, we began to pre-empt this, looking ahead to when we might need rooms and sorting them ahead of time and in a way in which we could make ourselves understood. There was a delicate balance between keeping a space private for a client, brokering this with staff and not appearing to be making unreasonable demands. We came to understand that the school did not need to consider privacy when arranging rooms for teaching staff in the same way that a counsellor might have to, in order to do their job. Understanding this stopped the irritation that we both felt and allowed us to channel our energy into finding ways to solve the problem through effective contact with staff.

Journal Entry Peter

In the middle of the session today, Miss E came into the room again and said 'I need to set up for the next lesson, you can carry on'. I said 'We'll just wait for you to finish' the student looked at me and just stopped talking. Miss E got a few books out and left. This has happened several times now. I decided to speak to Miss E today. I was a little anxious as earlier in the year she had snapped at me when I asked to speak about the room. Today, I began differently and asked her when she needed the room and asked if we could negotiate different timing. I entered the conversation trying to see her perspective. It was like magic. Something different happened and she said that she could change her timetable so that she didn't need to set up at that time. We were then able to have a conversation about the difficulty of keeping things private in a school.

Journal Entry Ros

So pleased that I went down to the office to see if the French orals were being held over the next two weeks in the counselling rooms. I found out that they were and I asked whether another room could be put on the timetable for the counselling session. The receptionist said that she would find out. Later, the French teacher came to find me in the staff room to find out what days I was in. She said that Peter and I could have the room on the days when we were in and that she had found another small room in the music department where she could hold the orals.

Journal Entry Ros

Working in the dining hall today was very difficult. Every student commented on the heat and the smell of horrible dinners! It was so difficult to keep things private with people regularly walking through the room. I had to keep stopping the student and indicating for them to continue when the person had left. One teacher saw us and made a point of coming over to the student and me to engage us both in a conversation about how wonderful it was to have counsellors in the school, how lovely it was that the students had someone to talk to and how pleased she was to see x engaging in it. I noticed that we both stopped the session, engaged with and agreed with the teacher and then carried on with the session when she had gone, and it felt safe again. I am fascinated by how this just happened organically. There was no discussion. It was as if we both knew what to do!

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter

The theme for supervision today was the frustration at the rooming difficulties and what this means for our counselling sessions. Having shared our disappointment, we began to talk about the solutions that we had found and about the impact they had on our practice. As we started to share some of these experiences, we realised the extent to which it is the counsellor and not the room who holds the place of safety. These experiences have challenged our thinking and moved us beyond our initial training to help us function effectively in this challenging setting. This discussion has raised the possibility that many other ideas about working safely may be challenged by our work in this setting.

The data for this sub-theme has identified how, as counsellors in this school setting, we have necessarily had to adapt to function, whilst holding onto principles of good practice at all times but often without some of the 'taken for granted' counselling rituals and customs that usually help maintain safe practice and professional integrity.

b) Confidentiality

We have already considered issues arising from differing approaches to confidentiality under the organisational sub-theme of intersecting ethics and cultures. The data also illuminated relational aspects of confidentiality within the setting, in which referrers, stakeholders and some characters in the client's drama may have been aware that they were coming for counselling. Ways thus had to be found to meet the frequent requests to talk to staff about a counselling referral that had been initiated and that could be sabotaged by these referrers and stakeholders if they were not kept on board, while maintaining the young client's confidentiality about the content of their sessions.

Reflexive Conversation Ros and Peter

Discussion about being in the staff room - when teachers often want to talk about their students with us - and confidentiality. We have both realised that we have developed a way of talking with staff members that doesn't compromise confidentiality but that shares certain information, such as the level of engagement or attendance. We think that simultaneously

being able to engage with the staff member and hold the student's confidence, is essential when working in a setting like this where the referrer stays interested in the counselling sessions. This feels like something unique to this setting and which is necessary to help keep all parties onside, without the counselling team seeming aloof or 'precious'.

Journal Entry Peter

I am getting quite irritated by having to explain to Mr B why he can't stay in his room in his free period if there is counselling going on. He always needs to get something from his room, and it takes longer and longer. Must take this to supervision!

c. Talking in Corridors

Incidents in the data have brought forth the valuable relational work that can take place around the school outside of the counselling room, most often through 'talking in corridors'. The early data shows that this phenomenon initially threw us and we gradually developed an understanding that meeting staff and students in corridors was unavoidable in this setting.

Journal Entry Peter

I saw K in the corridor today. He rushed up and said 'Hello, Peter' then turning to the students he was with announced,' this is my counsellor' and everyone he was with said 'Hello, Sir.' I smiled and said hello but I noticed that this made me feel really uncomfortable. Should I be talking to him outside a session, how am I going to avoid this in the future? It was particularly worrying that he was introducing me to his friends.

Journal Entry Ros

J came up to me today as I was crossing the playground. She had two friends with her. She said 'Can my friends come to counselling as well?' I didn't know what to say, how can I keep anything private? I asked them to talk to their tutor about a referral. I don't know if this is the right thing to do. I feel pleased that when I talk about this in supervision, I won't feel too embarrassed as Peter must be having this too.

The data shows that we began to accept this and, as we became more visible around the school, the chances of meeting became more frequent and we began to understand what we termed ‘corridor conversations’ and use them as a way of connecting.

Journal Entry Ros

I realise that there has been great learning for me about the connection that can take place in a chance meeting in the corridors. M walked past me today and smiled, and in that moment there was a connection. This can be difficult as I think I used to feel awkward if I saw a client walking around the school. How should I react etc.? This is becoming easier, and I realise that it is another chance to connect. Y laughed as we passed on the stairs and gave his Mr Spock signal, I responded with the same. This is all new for me really!

Journal Entry Peter

I notice that every time I see L around the school he smiles and makes a gesture touching his chest over his heart and says ‘Respect’. I find it very moving, he has been through a tough time, he talks about being in prison in our sessions and about how talking with me helps. His greeting is like an affirmation of the therapeutic relationship that we have between us.

Journal Entry Peter

A student approached me in the corridor today and said that Miss W had referred him for counselling and that he just wanted to say hello. It was an excellent opportunity to begin the work by connecting with each other without ever discussing any material or problems. The work is different in this setting, being seen around the school is sometimes difficult, but I'm beginning to realise that if this is skilfully handled, it can almost be advantageous to develop ‘corridor work’. I must bring this to supervision, this is feeling like something which needs its own ethics.

Journal Entry Ros

It was a lovely moment when P, who has sat on the edge of counselling for so long came up to me in a corridor and said, ‘Can I still come for counselling?’ Some months ago she was referred and refused to come for sessions. As we passed in the corridors she has always acknowledged me, and I have reciprocated, first a nod, then later a smile, then a hello and hello, Ros and so on and today she took an enormous step. I notice that I felt moved and a little choked when she approached and asked for counselling.

d)The Staff Room

The data highlighted the need to carefully consider ways to respond to staff about personal / professional issues in ways that maintain both our and their own professional integrity and appropriate ongoing working relationships. We have discussed the possible ethical issues arising from this at length in peer and outside supervision and we are clear that we do not offer counselling to the staff. But we recognise that staff members often approach us to talk about personal and professional issues. We will be clear about what we can offer in that setting and know to where we should refer staff if necessary. Further development of a school service would be to introduce a separate staff counsellor who could become involved as required.

Journal Entry Peter

I was approached by a staff member today, and she asked me to help her. She has a son who is becoming addicted to games online. I could hear her distress, it felt like quite a dilemma, she was offloading and wanting help for her son at the same time. I provided a listening ear but not counselling and suggested speaking to the GP to initiate support for her son. I have talked to Ros about it, and we agreed to put some time aside in supervision to consider these kinds of situations.

Journal Entry Ros

Miss H spoke to me today in the staff room and said that she just needed to talk to me about something personal. I notice that I began to feel nervous. I explained that I couldn't be her counsellor but wanted to be able to support her. She told me that she had been mugged and couldn't tell anyone. Having listened to her I thought that she would benefit from some counselling. She said that she hadn't thought that she could go for counselling but having talked to me she realised that she needed to talk to someone – I was relieved when she said this. I suggested either the GP or a private referral. I gave her the details – I will not inquire about whether she takes it up. Must speak about this in supervision.

Supervision Notes Ros and Peter
Discussed today how being approachable in the staff room can also encourage staff to talk and confide in us about personal issues. We spent the session defining what support means and how to be clear about this – will monitor.

As the above supervision quote illustrates, the data indicates how being mental health workers within a school setting and becoming a more visible and integrated service has inevitably led to staff wanting to confide in us personal issues. This required us to pay careful ongoing attention to maintaining our professional integrity in order to ensure we can continue to offer consistently sensitive and empathic responses, which gently acknowledge the issues and boundaries of what is possible and signpost on to appropriate services.

e) Supporting Not Colluding

This sub-theme brought together incidents from the data that related to our attempts to find ways to support staff in discussions about students, while resisting our inadvertent collusion with their assumptions or judgements. Similarly, it also included our attempts to find ways to listen to young people that would enhance our relationships but not collude with their perspective.

Reflexive Conversation Ros and Peter
A very difficult moment in the group last week that we keep discussing as we are trying to get some perspective on what happened. It was difficult running the group with Miss D and the teaching assistant Miss N in the room. We recognise that this is a new experience for us and we had to keep adjusting for the comments that Miss D continually makes and that we, as counsellors, wouldn't make. Trying to value Miss D's comments at the same time as almost deflecting them proved a challenging task.

It was a non-uniform day, and J wouldn't take his coat off. We sat quietly while Miss D and Miss N insisted that we couldn't start the group until he took his coat off. An uncomfortable struggle struck up between them, with Miss N getting up and trying to take his coat off physically. Miss D suddenly said 'Well, Peter and Ros won't start the group until you take your coat off" This put us in a very difficult position. Peter explained that as a group member, J

didn't need to take his coat off but that the school rules did require it and Miss D and Miss N were trying to uphold those rules. That seemed to calm things down. Peter went on to say that he wondered what was going on for J to make him want to keep his coat on, it seemed very important to him to keep it on. This exploration led to him leading a discussion about rules and unfairness and control, and underneath it all was the fact that he loved his new coat because his family didn't have any money and he hadn't had a new jacket for three years. When he felt understood, he took his coat off. For us this example proved the worth of meeting all the values and opinions in the room and trying to value them all.

Our experience highlights that, as counsellors in the school, we were in the unique position of holding the middle ground between staff and students. The data records how frequently we would hear multiple perspectives of a story at different times; once from the young person and again, separately, from a member of staff. This category of data identifies an area in which it would be easy to be perceived as taking sides. Diligent ongoing awareness of this is thus necessary for the maintenance of integrity.

The Scene 'Perspectives'

We recognise that we are in the privileged position of relating closely with both the students and the teachers that have concerns about them. It often became clear that they had very different views of each other and their situations; sometimes students and staff came from very different worlds. The challenge for us was to be able to value both of these perspectives and to facilitate a greater understanding of each other.

This aspect of working in a school is sometimes difficult to manage and that area of data has therefore been of interest for us. We want to understand how to invite awareness of another's perspective, support enhanced empathy and dispel judgement. To illustrate this we wrote the following two-part scene to be performed as part of teaching material. We have adapted it to be performed to counsellors, teaching staff and students. The example below is in the form of an Alan Bennett 'Talking Heads'-type production in which characters talk to the audience but not to each other. This is a high-impact style of theatre, which challenges the audience to think about what they are watching. It invites the viewer to experience the whole picture, and it is expected that their attitudes to, and empathy levels for, the characters will fluctuate throughout

the piece, leaving the audience in a different place from where they were at the start of the performance.

To preserve anonymity and confidentiality, we have only used research material as a basis for the scripts. The characters are not real people, and no actual sentences from our research were used in the writing.

Perspectives

Teacher: She's a very strange girl. I remember her older sister – exactly the same. It's a very difficult family – a bit of a clueless mother – you know the sort of thing. Her main problem is her anger – she really needs anger management.

Student: He's always shouting at me, he's just too rude. He's always picking on me. He's like my dad – he's always shouting, he just doesn't listen.

Teacher: She never listens. She has no insight into her disruptive behaviour. When I point this out to her, it's always someone else's fault. I've tried very hard, but she really is very difficult.

Student: I always get blamed at home – everything's always my fault, I just keep out the way 'cos my dad goes mad. He hit me once with the fire flex – don't know what I was supposed to have done. My brother had a fight with him the other night. They were shouting and swearing at each other – then the police came.

Teacher: The parents never seem to take an interest. She doesn't wear the correct uniform. They don't monitor the homework. She never does any homework. It's a terrible waste because she is a bright girl. Take this morning for instance – I ended up giving her a Saturday detention, I asked her where her homework was, she became angry and abusive – well I wasn't going to be spoken to like that!

Student: I ran away from home last night. My dad come in drunk from the pub, and he started – he grabbed hold of my mum and started screaming in her face and then he was hitting her. I told him to stop, but he turned on me. I ran out the house, and I spent the night

in the park. When I come into school, Mr. B starts on me – this is him: 'Where's your homework?' This is me: 'I haven't done it!' This is him: 'Don't be rude to me!' This is me: 'Fuck off!' This is him: 'Right you've got Saturday detention!' Detention, does he think I care about fucking detention?

Teacher: I really think that some sort of intervention is needed, it may even be a mental health problem.

2.3 Consequences of School-Based Counselling Being Publicly Performed and Evaluated

Introduction

The data for this section shows us experiencing repeated incidents connected with counselling in a school setting that we have previously discussed in the organisational findings section. However, this category had significant relational consequences too, which we grouped together under this heading. These incidents highlight the researchers' emotional responses to the identified issues and, in some sections, describe the conceptual understanding of how we began to meet these challenges.

The following sub-themes come together under this category:

a. **Watched / Judged**

b. **Visible / Always On**

c. **Misunderstanding**

d. **Accessible**

e. **Timely Responses**

f. **Turning Chaos into Benefit / Flexible Working**

a) Watched / Judged

Our early data shows how frequently we felt 'watched / judged'. Reflecting on this data reveals that some of this feeling may have been about our lack of confidence in ourselves and our role in this setting. Certainly, later data from the Community School period shows this category lessening or disappearing from the data altogether. It is interesting to note that when we became part of the Academy, which was in a building with a very open glass-based design, the category appears again. This was partly due to our feeling unsure of ourselves and our role in the new Academy but also the space itself, which made everyone very visible. The data shows that this also led to us feeling that staff might be wondering what we were doing or thinking 'I can do that'.

Journal Entry Ros (Early data)
Sometimes I feel like I am being watched. Today Mr G said to me today I saw you talking with Y outside the dining room, I didn't know she was having counselling. Maybe I'm imagining it, but I felt like my work was being commented on – supervision issue.

Journal Entry Peter (Early data)
Not sure what makes me feel uneasy but there have been a few incidences of – 'so what sort of things do you say to X' or 'how are you working with Y's bereavement, I have a few ideas and I have said to her, discuss this with Peter.'

Supervision (Academy data) Peter and Ros
The central theme today is the recurring feeling of being checked up on and asked about what we are doing. We were both relieved to discover that we were both feeling scrutinised and that people were asking us - what exactly are you doing? We have had several requests to sit in on the groups e.g. 'I would find that very interesting and then I could follow up on some of the themes.' Or: 'I've done some psychology and could run my own groups.' We recognise that we are both struggling with this sort of semi-expert position. We both tend to meet it by reaching out and encouraging further conversation.

Supervision (Academy data) Peter and Ros

We have both become worried about the number of small groups being set up by staff who don't seem to have any training in this area, just the energy to run one. We were disturbed when a teacher told us that she had used our 'warm-up exercise', and it had gone wrong. We weren't sure what she meant as we don't use any 'warm-up exercises'. She had asked her group to tell her the best and the worst bit of their week. She had seen us use this in the Essential Counselling Skills for Teaching Staff course. One of the students disclosed for the first time that his dad had died two days ago. The group were distressed, and we were now being asked to work with them. We recognise that we are in a difficult situation. There is a difference between running support groups and therapeutic groups, and maybe we have to tackle this tactfully – not sure but disturbed by it.

This feeling of being watched had the effect of making us fastidious about timetabling our work and sending emails to class teachers who needed to know who was coming out of lessons. On reflection, we met this by 'going public' ourselves, and the data shows that we felt under considerable pressure to be accountable for every minute of our day.

Journal Entry Peter

I'm finding it very time consuming to create a timetable for next week's counselling sessions before we leave on Fridays. I know it's important because the experience of timetabling and who should be where and I thought you were seeing x now has been awful!

Journal Entry Ros

It was a lovely moment when Mr T told me today in a very off-hand manner that I hadn't come to collect D today for her session, I was able to take out my timetable and show that he had got the days mixed up!

It is noticeable from the data that we were less able to meet staff encounters from a place of understanding when we felt that we were being so heavily scrutinised and criticised.

b) Visible / Always On

The data in this section relates to the last category in that it comes out of our feeling that we were being watched / judged. The data shows us beginning to understand how to work relationally in a setting in which all staff were feeling watched. It is about us developing an understanding that, because of the very visible setting, we needed to be more visible around the school and thus, as counsellors moving around the school, we needed to be 'always on'. This was the term we used to capture the realisation that we were always working as counsellors in the school setting, not only when we were in a formal counselling session.

Journal Entry Peter

I notice that I'm finding it difficult in this very visible setting – glass everywhere! It's a challenge to keep things private in the school. A feeling that everyone can see everything.

Journal Entry Ros

A teacher told me today that she didn't like being so visible in her classroom in case things got out of control and everyone would be able to see her. I realised that I was feeling the same.

Journal Entry Ros

I went to class to pick someone up for a session today, I hadn't met her before, but she knew who I was. She said she'd seen me around and recognised my voice from the radio. I realise that we are visible in this setting and it's up to us to adapt to this and to consider its significance for our counselling roles.

Journal Entry Ros

A difficult morning, I had to collect a student from a class in which the entire room was in disarray. Everyone was shouting, some students were throwing chairs at each other, and the teacher was also shouting to no effect. When she saw that I was in the room, she seemed embarrassed and asked me what I wanted. She sent me the student that I was looking for. Later, she saw me in the corridor, and she shouted down the hall at me 'You can't just come into my room and cause havoc in a lesson!' I was a bit shocked and managed to gather myself before I engaged with her. I stayed in my counselling role and tried to offer acceptance and empathy: 'It's hard working with these challenging students isn't it? I'm

sorry that I added to your work this morning, what would you like me to do in future?' I was shocked when she became tearful and said 'Thank you for saying that, I think I'm just having a bad day!' I really need to take this to supervision. There's something about being able to offer the counselling conditions to everyone we meet, we're always working. It's difficult because I wanted to say: well its nothing to do with me, your classroom was in chaos when I arrived. Using empathy and acceptance, I experienced her prickly self-concept melt before my eyes.

Supervision Notes Peter and Ros

We have been discussing moments when we have stayed in our professional roles when meeting people and problems around the school. We each brought several incidents of when we had been able to do this and it caused a positive impact, helping the person involved to feel understood. We have decided to try to monitor what happens when we respond rather than react.

The data shows that we identified that this was very helpful in our interactions around the school but that it was, at times, challenging to carry out.

Journal Entry Ros

I didn't manage it today when Miss A told me she needed a report so she could refer my client onto the 'proper counsellors'. I was prickly and became defensive about my position. Note to self: this is not very helpful. It didn't end well! I must take this to supervision as it keeps happening with this member of staff.

Journal Entry Ros

Yes, managed today. I kept quite calm when challenged by Mr B, and tried to see things from his perspective. The barriers seemed to melt away!

Journal Entry Peter

I felt tested today when I was asked why I couldn't make an outpatient appointment in my own time. I kept calm and explained myself clearly and managed to apologise for any inconvenience that my brain scan was going to cause. If I had given the angry response that I felt, it might have evoked shame, whereas a calm response seemed to evoke empathy.

Supervision Notes Peter and Ros
An interesting supervision session today, sharing stories of both meeting and failing to meet. We have decided that it is effective in this setting and is also very difficult to do!

c) Misinterpretation and Misunderstanding

A particular problem highlighted repeatedly in the data was the communication problems we seemed to be having when talking face-to-face and, especially, over email. We began to realise through reflection in supervision that this was a critical aspect of working as a counsellor in our school. The problem was amplified when the school adopted email communication, staff began walking about with laptops and there were fewer opportunities to be relational. We were somewhat caught up in this too.

Journal Entry Peter
I seem to be having lots of problems with clarity and understanding, particularly with emails. Emails are sent back and forth with me offering further clarification that doesn't seem to go anywhere. I don't like it that these emails seem to be copied in to everyone who doesn't need to know and doesn't understand the problem, and yet they often reply too. I have to be so precise and careful in these email interactions.

Journal Entry Ros
Lots of misunderstandings lately, I was asked to see a student who didn't want to be seen. When I relayed this back, I said that maybe he might reconsider if I could check in with him at a later date. The referrer was cross and said: he needs to be seen, and his mother has requested counselling, I will have to tell her that you don't think he's ready for counselling. This wasn't what I said and, though I said it in several different ways, she ended by saying 'OK Ros let's just leave it that you don't think he needs counselling.' I left feeling frustrated and unable to make myself understood.

Supervision Notes Peter and Ros
We spent some time discussing emails today. We are both finding them very difficult and accusatory, with everyone copied in. People get involved when they had nothing to do with the situation. We are working in a culture of blame, and the method of communication in the

Academy is email. We began to realise that what had previously been uncontained shouting had now switched to a new channel and was being carried on more insidiously by email. We both became aware that we felt even more impacted by this new medium. It was good to discuss the emails as we had both been getting very irritated. We have decided that we may need to answer emails fully and copy in the relevant parties as necessary and keep replying and clarifying the situation until we make ourselves understood. This will make good teaching material, so we will write our own email chains based on situations we come across.

Journal Entry Peter

I was summoned to the office today and told that I had been very rude to a teacher while explaining that I needed to see a student in her lesson. I was being shouted at in the office, and I was not asked my version of the story, I was just accused. I decided to respond with empathy, apologised for upsetting the teacher and offered to meet with her to discuss what had gone wrong. I note that when I took this stance, everything instantly calmed down and we were able to talk about the problem. I need to bring this to supervision. So important not to have responded from my initial angry feelings!

Journal Entry Peter

Difficult not to laugh today when I was asked if I was involved with peer support. When I replied that I was, the teacher said 'Well it's not working… they're not listening to their teachers!' I did try to explain the meaning of peer support, but I'm not sure that I was successful!

Journal Entry Ros

I seem to spend my time explaining everything and not getting through. I was asked to speak in assembly as 'we' needed to raise the profile of school counselling. I said I would, and then the teacher said it was difficult to find me. I said I was busy and my list was full. He said that's what he meant - we needed to raise the profile of the school counsellor. I was left feeling that I just hadn't been heard or understood. Surely if my spaces are full, the counselling profile must already be pretty high?

The data shows that, through reflection, we began to realise that we needed to pay attention to making sure our explanations were clear. This was part of the work and not merely an administrative task.

Supervision Notes Peter and Ros

We were sharing stories of a different nature today, ones where we had taken the time to offer clear explanations and tried to meet with a staff member who didn't seem to understand what we were doing. This had an impact on us and, hopefully, the staff member. We have decided to seek clear explanations and actively monitor the effects.

Reflexive Conversation Peter and Ros

Several points emerged from our frustration today, with miscommunication being discussed a lot. We processed our feelings about this and identified what material this miscommunication was touching in each of us. This felt important because it is becoming a genuine problem in the school and we are both feeling that we were wasting time with this 'getting in the way' of the work. There was something here about people not understanding. We focused on what communicating understanding meant for us and realised that, as trainers, we had a great interest in explaining and being clear, but in this setting, we were more focused on being good practitioners. We were almost sectioning parts of ourselves off. This was a turning point for us. Could we bring the part of ourselves that loved to teach and saw explaining as a key part of the work to bear in the school and join up the two previously separate aspects of practitioner and trainer?

It is interesting to note that we have highlighted this as an essential part of the counselling work in a school. We question whether this would have been our conclusion or solution to the problem if we had not both been trainers. We recognise that our background has undoubtedly been an influencing factor in this finding.

d) Accessible

The data traces our journey of 'coming out' of the counselling room to being more present, available and accessible in the school. There was a brief period when we enjoyed the accessibility that we had been working towards. We had set up different initiatives that made us known in the school, and we had been approachable. However, being accessible also had its problems, which will be discussed in later findings.

Journal Entry Ros

I seem to be so busy, a full list and there seems to be quite a demand for the service. It's starting to feel very difficult to be so pressurised. I keep being asked – can you see x… or have you seen y? I feel so guilty to keep saying that they are on my list, but I haven't seen them yet.

Journal Entry Peter

Having worked for years for community multi-disciplinary teams outside of school, I can see the benefits of having an accessible service based in the school itself. A teacher told me today that H had been to CAMHS and didn't want to go there but would come and see me because I was 'normal'. I think that this is about familiarity and my being seen as OK because I am part of the school.

Journal Entry Ros

A teacher told me today that she was dreading offering counselling for T at parent's night because she thought it would be met with rejection. Although the family have struggled to engage with Social Services, they have been engaging with the school, and any help for the family needs to be brokered through the school. Counselling has been agreed to by the family because it was part of the school and not from 'outside'. I noticed that I felt pleased as this story was being relayed to me. I felt part of something that the school offered, and I thought that the idea of having counselling was becoming acceptable.

Journal Entry Ros

A very quiet student came up to me in the coffee bar and asked me if she could come and see me. She said that she had some things that were difficult to talk about, but she felt as if she could tell me and asked 'How do I get to see you?' This felt great, it is what we have wanted to happen for the service, to be seen as accessible and it is happening!

Journal Entry Peter

A new Teaching Assistant approached me today to ask about referring a student. She said she didn't know the procedure but just thought she'd talk to me and hoped that was OK. This feels so good. It feels right to be out there and approachable.

e) A Timely Response

The data highlights a unique advantage of being an on-site school counsellor: we could provide a timely response. As a service that was part of the school, we were available when needed. Several incidents appear in the data in which an immediate response was required and we were able to provide it because we were on the premises. We feel that this is an essential argument for on-site school counsellors. The downside of offering immediate counselling after an incident is that there needs to be a distinction, a definition of what type of event or student problem needs to be 'seen immediately'. There also needs to be time for this kind of intervention or there will be an impact on the regular sessions, as demonstrated in the following section.

Journal Entry Ros

Our return back into school after visiting the Pupil Referral Unit was met with high drama. Some boys had been fighting at the bus stop outside the school and the police had been called. They were waiting for their parents to come to a meeting with the Principal. The boys were all upset, and we were asked to see them. We saw them in a group, and this was an excellent opportunity for them to share everything that was going on for them. They were afraid, and some felt very ashamed and as if they had brought shame on their family. In supervision we both discussed how, if there was a counselling service on the premises, we could offer a 'timely response' to these sorts of incidents, which would be useful for both the staff and students.

Journal Entry Peter

I've been thinking about the importance of being able to process something almost as it happens in this work. This seems so right with young people who live in the moment and who find it difficult and often undesirable to think about events after they have happened. I was walking down the corridor when J was being put outside the class for rudeness. I asked Mr F if it was ok to speak to him. J and I have talked about this type of incident many times before, and he usually is reluctant to process it afterwards and unable to see any perspective other than his own. Today was different, and he suggested apologising to Mr F at the end of the session. I feel that this session was different because he was in the moment and I was available. The time was right.

Reflexive Conversation *Peter and Ros*

Explored the fact that we are often asked to get involved with incidents that are happening in the school. There is definitely an advantage to having a responsive counselling service within the school. We note the importance and effectiveness of being able to respond to the school's needs.

f) Turning Chaos into Benefit

Our supervisor termed one of the problems that we encountered at the time 'the problem of success.' As we became more visible, accessible and available, the demand for the service grew. The data records that we began to struggle to fit all the students in for counselling and that some staff were cross when we couldn't see students immediately. The data shows that we needed to actively devise different ways of working. The creation of a system, new to this school, of an 'active waiting list' figures highly in the data. It was plainly an important problem that needed a solution. Both of us have NHS backgrounds, and this is probably why this system was our first choice. However, in this setting it was new and for this reason, it has been highlighted in the this section. Yes this section is about more than just the importance of setting up this particular system. It worked for us in this school but in another school, other ways of working may need to be devised. The clear finding here is that it is essential to think about turning the chaos into a benefit if we are to operate effectively. The data demonstrates that we did not merely solve the problem with a new system but that we tried to explore the chaos and understand what it was about, in order for us to know how to best respond. It shows us shifting from frustration to empathy for the staff and beginning to understand what we termed 'the anxiety of the referrer.' It was through our use of the data to gain an understanding about what was happening that we were able to devise an appropriate system in this school.

Reflexive conversation Peter and Ros

We are beginning to notice in this setting that we need a much more flexible approach to offering sessions. It is difficult to have regular sessions, and we are required to move our sessions around lessons and the school day. We need the flexible waiting list. We recognise that we are developing a different way of working for this setting.

Reflexive conversations over time about the active waiting list

The waiting list is a problem, and the list is getting longer and longer, Ros feels that she keeps saying this and that we don't seem to be able to solve it.

> *P: I'm not sure what we can do about it, the need is greater than the provision.*
> *R: We already work three days (P) and four ® each, it's worse for me when you are not here. Everyone keeps asking me about the waiting list.*
> *P: Let's think about what can be done.*

Ros is describing what feels like being bombarded by staff who seem dissatisfied that their students are still on a waiting list. Peter is starting to feel the pressure much more now as well. What is happening here? Is it that the need is greater? Is it that staff want an instant response from us that we cannot give? The pressure is certainly mounting for us, the need to respond is significant. We both feel under pressure – we must give this some more thought – time to process what is going on.

Still trying to work out what is going on in the Academy, it feels different from the old school. We have identified pressure as the main problem. Staff feel pressurised to get results. It feels like the counselling is under the same pressure. We have to achieve, to see as many people as possible. That's why all the themed groups have been suggested. What's happening is that the staff are stressed and we need to help them. We need to come up with a system that manages the 'anxiety of the referrer' – a new term, a new way of thinking.

Processing the problem in this way has helped us both to see it differently. It now feels more like a problem with the system than about our service not meeting needs or demands – we need to engage with staff, to find a way to respond to their anxiety with empathy and to see the referrals more quickly. A new system has to be devised.

Leave one or two sessions free per week as 'floating sessions', in which we could carry out short assessments and follow-up sessions on a need-to-be-seen basis. We would manage these so that more students could be seen. They would have contact with us and know where to find us. Let's see how this works and develop it as we go – it's called the 'active waiting list.'

The list is working well, and we realise that it's useful for lots of things, not just managing the waiting list or assessments. It seems useful for follow-up work as well and maybe for people who sit on the edge of counselling as they have been happy to 'check in' – one of the students used this term – we like it – we're changing the name to the 'check-in list'. What impact has this had? Both of us are relieved to notice that we have stopped being continually bombarded by staff asking whether we have seen a particular student or not – this makes a real difference for us. It has lessened the pressure, and it seems beneficial for the students as well.

Journal Entries Check in List

Pre-Initiative

Ros

I just had an awful day. It seemed that every teacher was asking me: What about my student? Have you seen X? Have you seen Y? No, I haven't! The waiting list is too long, and I'm finding it difficult not to want to push them away. The teachers seem angry, and I know that I can help to dissipate that when I meet them with empathy but sometimes I can't do it!! I am STRESSED!!!!!

Peter

Again I am met with angry staff members trying to find out about the students on the waiting list, and I am trying to explain as clearly as possible that the waiting list is very long etc. They still seem angry. Ros seems to be very stressed about it.

Ros

It's getting worse for me. Peter seems to be OK with it. It must be me! Have you seen x? – No I bloody haven't! – Not much processing here – I feel like I'm losing my way a bit!

Peter

Three more names on the waiting list today, I feel concerned now that it looks as if the service isn't working well enough. I don't know when I will be able to get to see them.

Post-Initiative

Peter

This feels so much better so far. It feels good to be able to say – yes I can see him/her at the next check-in.

Ros

It was wonderful when I was able to say to Mr. D this morning, yes that's OK I can see Loday – feels like such a relief!

Connection and Relationship Summary Comments

This section has mapped out the second core theme, clustering around the importance of considering connection and relationship in our work with adolescents in this setting. It has illuminated some of the problems we encountered, the meaning we made of our experiencing and detailed theoretical concepts that we constructed from the data that have been of value in our responses. We have found the concepts illuminated by this research helpful in supporting us in our therapeutic work in schools and with young people and we have been heartened that our own professional community of school-based counselling colleagues have also found these concepts valuable for making meaning of their own experience. We therefore believe that these constructs have significant consequences for the training and practice of school-based counsellors.

9. DOCTORAL PRODUCTS

This chapter will detail the products that have come directly out of this research study and are in the public domain. These consist of three main components: Tenuous Contact, an Adult-to-Adolescent and School Counselling Conversion Diploma Course and our Conference Presentations.

1. Tenuous Contact

We coined this new term to describe the sometimes fleeting nature of the adult-to-adolescent contact we were experiencing. We developed this construct as a new theory about the therapeutic process with adolescents that was grounded in the data. In beginning to go public with this term that made meaning of our experience, we were surprised to find that it had relevance and currency for other professionals in the field, as well as for the parents of teenagers.

As part of this doctoral study, we have been engaged in acquiring and disseminating professional knowledge. This concept has therefore been presented and workshopped at a range of conferences and published in a journal and as a book chapter.

Conference Presentations about Tenuous Contact

Conference participant feedback and discussion with expert peers was used to shape further participant observation and to bring forth this construct further.

1. 2012 British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Research Conference.
   ‘Tenuous Contact’: person-centred work at the difficult edge with young people. New theoretical concepts emerging from qualitative research in counselling in an inner-city secondary school. (Paper)

   Concept / Ideas Explored: Tenuous Contact, its origins in the data.

   Discussion: General recognition from counsellors who worked with young people and parents of teenage children that this was a familiar concept to them. A lot of

discussion about why this happened, feedback that suggested that the extremity of the setting might have played a part in why this emerged for us in this setting.

2. 2012 Keynote Presentation Number 22 Youth Counselling Conference.
   'Tenuous Contact' New Theory in Adult to Adolescent Process

   Concept / Ideas Explored: Tenuous Contact, its origins in the data.

   Discussion: The presentation was to an audience of youth workers working with a very different demographic who initially felt this was not a familiar concept. Our example interactions did not feel familiar to them. Participants reported becoming aware as the presentation progressed that it was difficult to make contact with their clients. This feedback seemed to reinforce input from the previous workshop about the part played by the extremity of our research setting.

3. 2013 The University of Keele Counselling Conference.
   Tenuous Contact: person-centred work with adolescents and teenagers
   https://www.keele.ac.uk/psychology/counselling/conferences/7thconference2013/

   Concept / Ideas Explored: Tenuous Contact, its origins in the data.

   Discussion: As we had also presented other research on counselling for depression as the keynote for this conference, the focus of the debate was, interestingly, about research. The discussion raised ideas about the collecting of data, ethnographic methodology and the role of honest reporting in supervision.

4. 2013 University of Warwick Counselling Conference Keynote Presentation,
   Tenuous Contact: person-centred work with adolescents and teenagers

   Concept / Ideas Explored: Tenuous Contact, its origins in the data.

   Discussion: Here there was a real recognition of this as a concept that was meaningful in people's work. Several students began to identify with the complexity of a counselling relationship with a young person, and a discussion ensued about who should work with young people and whether it should be only qualified counsellors. A

debate developed about the use of reflexivity that accurately captures the researcher's process.

Publications about Tenuous Contact

Journal Article (Appendix 2)

Pearce, P., & Sewell, R. 2014. Tenuous Contact. *Therapy Today,* 25(6)**,** pp. 28-30

Book Chapter (Appendix 3)

Pearce, P., & Sewell, R. 2014. 'Tenuous contact': New theory about adolescent process. In: Pearce, P., & Sommerbeck, L., (eds.) *Person-centred practice at the difficult edge.* Ross-on-Wye, England: PCCS Books.

Training Course

Metanoia Practitioner Certificate in Person-Centred Counselling at the Difficult Edge (Appendix 4)

Tenuous contact forms part of this successful career development course for counsellors that has been developed and run at Metanoia Institute. It is now in its 4th iteration.

Book Offer

We have been offered a contract for a book from McGraw Hill / Open University on some of the new theory emerging from our research within a school setting.

2. Metanoia Adult-to-Adolescent and School Counselling Conversion Diploma (Appendix 5)

The development and successful running of Post-Qualification Conversion Diploma Training at Metanoia Institute on Adult-to-Adolescent and School Counselling. This Diploma Training has been derived directly from the research study findings, with an emphasis on each aspect of the study: context and contact, with units specifically on tenuous contact and the

implications for practice. This training has successfully recruited each year and is now interviewing for its fifth intake in October 2018. Participant feedback has been consistently very positive about the training's usefulness in equipping people for specialism in this sector, and many participants have been offered continuing work in the school that had offered them a placement.
http://www.metanoia.ac.uk/training-programmes/special-interest/dip-in-adolescent-and-schools-counselling/

3. Conference Presentations on the Wider Research Study

We have delivered a number of conference presentations throughout this research study. These were given with two purposes in mind. The first was to disseminate the emerging professional knowledge from the study. The second was to make use of the reception and feedback from informed peers to check, challenge and clarify our thinking and shape ongoing data collection in the field.

International Peer-Reviewed Research Conferences

a) 6-10th July 2008 The World Association for Person-Centred & Experiential Psychotherapy & Counselling Conferences (WAPCEPC) UEA, UK.
'Coming Out of the Counselling Room; exploring the impact of holding a person-centred posture in an institutional setting.'

Concepts / ideas explored: The difficult context of working in a school and the possibility of holding a person-centred stance both in and out of the counselling room.

Discussion: What is the meaning of a way of being, beyond the fifty-minute hour and the cost to the counsellor.

b) 30th June – 4th July 2010 The World Association for Person Centred & Experiential Psychotherapy & Counselling Conferences (WAPCEPC) Rome, Italy.
'"We don't do that in Education": Contributing to school reform through the person-centred approach.'

Concepts / ideas explored: The clash of cultures in educational counselling.

Discussion:- How do we reframe clash to difference and meeting?

National Peer-Reviewed Research Conference

6th-7th May 2011 British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Research Conference.
Collaboration: 'Working together in an intellectual endeavour toward a common goal' or 'treasonous co-operation with the enemy?' (Workshop)

Concepts / Ideas explored: Working and researching collaboratively. Why it takes two.

Discussion: Challenges to our thinking requiring us to become much more articulate.

National Conference

2nd November 2010 The Counselling Children and Young People Divisional Conference BACP.
'Out of the Counselling Room and into the fire.'

Concepts / Ideas explored: The dangers of becoming more visible as counsellors within a school setting.

Discussion: How does a counselling service survive within a school and become a better fit. Is there some adaptation the counsellors need to make?

10. LIMITATIONS

Insider research

This study has been undertaken with us as insider researchers and various data streams have flowed from this ‘reality’. We believe that this position creates fertile possibilities because we are known and trusted by the ‘people’ and ‘culture’ and because we share some ‘history’ with participants (Dearnley, 2005). Jones (quoted in Tedlock, 2000) for example, has argued that insiders can possess knowledge that an outsider doesn’t have and Tierney (1994) identifies how participants, may feel more comfortable talking openly if the researcher is known to them, so in these ways insider research may encourage rich and dependable data.

However, with our chosen methodology, we have tried to remain mindful of the possibility that colleagues and young people might feel compelled to be involved in our research. Griffiths (1998) identifies:

> To the extent that researchers are insiders, you are drawing on the normal ground rules of reciprocity and trust that pertain for social interactions in the community. To the extent that being a researcher means using these ground rules for research purposes, there is the risk of exploitation and betrayal. (pp.40-41)

We are also very aware of the problems of credibility that being an insider researcher can give rise to, both within our own organisation and when reporting research findings to an outside audience. Internally we could potentially be dismissed as ‘just the school counsellors’ and externally as ‘biased’. Costley, Elliott and Gibbs describe how “the criticisms and general critique of insider research are balanced against the value of work-based projects” (2010, p.6). We have sought to give a careful account of both our own bias and our pre-existing relationships with some of the respondents / participants. Our aim throughout has been to be reflexive, to remain mindful of our investment in this work and to interrogate our own bias throughout the data recording, analysis and write-up process. However, we also acknowledge that there will always be elements of bias that have remained unrecognised and so our recording and reporting of this experience will inevitably remain ‘partial’.

N = 1

The ‘data’ gathered for this study arises from just one school setting, so the ‘sample’ is a necessarily limited one. Further, we make no claims that this setting is a representative one that typifies UK Secondary Schools. In fact, as we have identified, this school was quite atypical, and in many ways ‘extreme’ in that, it was in a deprived, inner-city setting with a highly diverse student group. We have argued that it was this extremity of need and challenge that motivated our need to adopt the reflexive and adaptive practice that this study has followed and that therefore opened up the opportunity for (necessary) innovation and the development of new theoretical constructs to describe the experience of trying to connect and relate from adult to adolescent. This setting has most certainly been an atypical ‘difficult edge’ one and yet, we would argue that defining and understanding such ‘edges’ can also perhaps help to give shape and perspective to the more typical school-based counselling experience. The ‘findings’ of this study might perhaps have been strengthened if it had been possible to undertake similar ethnographic studies in a number of different settings. The researchers have, however, been encouraged about the possible application and benefit this study might have for others. There has been recognition, appreciation and interest in this work from those to whom we have presented it at conferences, workshops and through our published work. This positive feedback has come from our primary audience of members of the school-based counselling community and from other youth service professionals and the parents of teenagers. At each presentation the affirming feedback and recognition of the concepts described by the study has encouraged us and helped to develop this thinking further.

The Data is the Data

Although this study represents an accumulation of many years of practice and reflection for us both, individually and together, our research in this setting did have an abrupt and premature ending with our having to go to Employment Tribunal following unfair dismissal. And so as a result the available data is the available data. We now believe that this imposed end was perhaps a benefit as well as a limiting factor in that, although it was traumatic for us both and derailed this study for some considerable time, it ultimately acted to ‘cap off’ the fieldwork in this practice setting that we each found so fascinating and without it we may have continued to gather and analyse data unendingly.

Our Limitations as Researchers

The material available to this study has, inevitably, been limited by our knowledge, reflexivity and understanding as both individuals and as researchers. We were both new to ethnographic research methodology and, though we have both found the journey of discovery and education in this ethnographic approach fascinating and stimulating, it has also been a steep learning curve with many unexpected obstacles and setbacks. Ultimately, we recognise that we are each limited by our own ‘vision’ in this process.

Limitations of the Method

Our chosen ethnographic methodology can be criticised for being too subjective as it is ‘produced’ by the person(s) of the researchers and therefore difficult or impossible to replicate and hard to validate. What ‘findings’ there may be must be considered with reference to this setting and time i.e. they are inevitably ‘occasioned’ and ‘contexted’. Our roles in co-creation must be acknowledged, though we have sought to offer detail about ourselves and the setting with the hope that this provides the reader with the opportunity to evaluate the creditability, resonance and usefulness of the themes we have illuminated and the meaning we have made of them.

11. FURTHER RESEARCH

We have identified some areas of the study that would merit further research.

Tenuous Contact

The data indicates that the concept of tenuous contact is understandable to others within the school-based counselling community and that it has value as a means of making sense of interactions with young people. This feels like a significant finding that, given the positive feedback that we have received when presenting to others, is worthy of further research and development. It has been humbling to have been contacted recently by a doctoral student from another university who intended to base their doctoral study on a comparison between 'Relational Depth' (Mearns & Cooper, 2005) and Tenuous Contact. Our interests in this construct consist of three areas: Firstly, to inquire further about the range of settings in which this term has a useful currency. Secondly, to further examine some of the 'attributes' of tenuous contact and how it is experienced. Thirdly, to continue to further explore what helps counsellors connect in moments when connection is difficult. We have begun this process at an experiential level in each of these areas but we recognise the need to formalise this work through research.

Difference and Diversity

Although themes of difference and diversity run through all of our work in this setting, we would like to develop these ideas further as a research theme in and of itself. As a result of our participant observation within the school the study illuminated some 'taken-for-granted' aspects of counselling 'culture'. The study illustrated how counselling is positioned by people, it demonstrated the possible stigma of receiving counselling and showed that counselling was considered 'counter-cultural' within this educational setting. We thus feel there is further productive exploration to be done in the following areas:

- How have we been able to 'meet' and connect with people from other cultures?
- What has been the impact of working with trans-cultural material, with translators and across value systems?

- The phenomenon of young people's bi-cultural literacy in this setting and the tensions they experienced between their family culture/ culture of origin and their experienced culture.
- How are educators and counsellors addressing trauma in the context of diversity in this setting, given that the majority of students who are referred to us are those who are having difficulties with 'unacceptable behaviour' in school? For many of these referred young people, their background and heritage are steeped in trauma that they either witnessed, experienced directly, or experienced as part of a parent's history. To what extent are counsellors and educators exploring a student's context as a means to understand their behaviour? How have we helped with understanding this and what more could we do in this area?

Working with Students who are Experiencing, or Living with Parents Experiencing, Mental Health Problems

We have envisaged a research project that could take place across several different schools to examine the impact for on a young person of living with a parent with mental health issues. It would also examine what support school-based counsellors and schools could provide in this context. Again this would need to be explored contextually.

Many concepts have been brought out in the data that, given longer in the field, we would like to have developed through further ethnographic research. These concepts are briefly described below.

Emotional Labour in Schools

We have found the concept of 'emotional labour' (coined by the sociologist, Hochschild (1983/2012)) to have a valuable currency in illuminating meaning within this educational context. Hochschild uses this concept to indicate "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and body display" (1983/2012, p.7) to fit into the expectations of the organization / work context. She went on to broaden this concept to similar regulation of feelings and responses in a private context in interactions with friends and family, naming this 'emotion work.' We first identified this occurring for young people at school from a position of subordination to the rules and expectations of the school setting in our fieldnotes

(before having an awareness of Hochschild’s term). Participant observation illuminated how young people were required to embody themselves in their interactions with adults in this setting within expected parameters of mood, facial expression and physical posture.

Our fieldnotes then also began to record experiences of similar performances by teaching staff both in relation to the young people and, often more noticeably, at each level of the organisational hierarchy, particularly when they were subordinated to the next level up. In reflecting on this experience and referring to the literature we quickly came across this term. We also observed and reflected on our own ‘emotional labour’ in performing the role of counsellors / professionals within this ‘captive audience’, ‘always on’ setting, in which counselling was, as described above, publicly performed and evaluated. We began to record experiences of the emotional work needed for us to represent the expected openness to experience and positive mental health of a professional in this role. In this we recognise both our expectations of ourselves in this role and those of staff and students. We discovered that Brennan suggests that teachers provide “a compelling example of institutionalized emotion. Not only is emotional labour expected of teachers, but teachers are a significant force in the reproduction of emotional institutionalization” (2006, p. 55).

The importance of this for a school-based counsellor is preparing for this level of exposure. Understanding this concept has helped us to consider how to meet a range of interactions that may feel personal or threatening.

Example from Practice

Teacher: (shouting angrily) Do you teach Peer Support?

Ros: Yes.

Teacher: Then I’ve got a problem with you!

Ros: I don’t think you can possibly have a problem with me because you don’t know me. Is there a problem with the peer support?

Teacher: Yes, sorry. It’s the timetabling.

This concept appears to be a fertile area for further ethnographic research.

The Performance and Uses of Inclusion and Exclusion

Our fieldnotes depict episodes of students presenting the ‘reality’ of school in different ways to different audiences and in different ways to the same audience at different times and in different settings. They depict examples of what we might term a ‘shared cultural code’ within students’ affinity groups and the presentation of a united front within these groups, perhaps to preclude being seen as weak and vulnerable to being picked on. Our notes also describe the performance and uses of inclusion and exclusion by young people, staff and the institution. A personally challenging example of this was the Principal addressing the staff group about the results of the recent Ofsted inspection in the run up to our employment dispute ‘Could I ask all those who are not permanent members of staff to leave before…’

‘Guilt by Association’

Miller and Tewksbury (2001, p. 206) discuss the concept of ‘guilt by association’, and something of this experience is described throughout the data. We have often found ourselves positioned by other staff members alongside some of the ‘disruptive’ students with whom we were trying to build a relationship. Sometimes the tone moved swiftly from them making an emergency referral to us and seeing us as ‘the only hope’ to, within a matter of days, acting as if we had caused the disruptive behaviour: ‘Are you still seeing A Well, he's no better!’

Gender

The data identify aspects of our gendered experience and social location both as researchers and therapists. Within this school setting our collaborative work as a man and a woman allowed the young people to exercise some choice about which of us they approached and whether they preferred to relate to a male or female. Our gendered experience was also something that we tried to consider reflexively and that on occasion we used strategically in our work within this system, carefully considering which of us might be best placed to approach a particular staff member or manager. Further, being a male and female ‘couple’ within this setting supported work of a particular type with some of the young people, for whom we could embody a benign, accepting parental couple and model interactions both with them and between ourselves that could be ‘reparative’.

12. WHAT WE WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY

Given the opportunity to begin the study again with the knowledge we gained from the experience, we would do some things differently.

Narrow the Field Sooner

On reflection, we appreciate that the study would have benefited from us narrowing the field much earlier. We amassed a lot of data over a very long time so the iterative data collection and analysis process was time-consuming, and there was lots of noise and chaos in the data. Not narrowing the field early enough resulted in our spending a lot of time writing and thinking about areas of interest that the study had illuminated that we did not eventually use. This left us less time to concentrate on the two major areas of focus for the study, understanding the context and the development of effective practice in this setting.

Ask for Further Help from Our Academic Advisor

Paradoxically, while we were struggling to find a methodology that was a good fit for this project, we sought less help from our advisor and consultant. Having reflected on what was happening at this point, we have come to understand that each of us felt that we could only ask for help only once we had produced some ‘writing’ that could be assessed. The unfortunate result of this was that for the most stressful part of our doctoral research journey we were trying to work alone and not asking for help because we had not ‘produced enough work’.

Academic Consultant

Our Academic Consultant, who was an anthropologist with expert knowledge in the ethnographic methodology we had begun to use for the study, became unable to continue because of other commitments. We realise that this has played a part in our losing direction with the initial submission and, with hindsight, would have sought a replacement expert in the study methodology much sooner.

13. Conclusions

This study began with one original question:

How could we make sense of the difficulties we were experiencing in this setting?

The data began to illuminate some of the intersections between our counselling 'rituals,' 'customs' and 'culture' and our experience of those operating within the school. Therefore a further question emerged:

How might any of the understanding we gained, be used as a bridge to connection?

The study has constructed responses to these questions and grouped them into two domains: organisational or contextual considerations and relational or contact issues, both of which relate to the practical application of counselling in this setting. These two categories interact to make school-based counselling a very complicated and challenging 'difficult edge' setting. Young people represent a hard to reach group, and the school environment is a highly complex system. We feel these interacting challenges bring forth many implications for the training, support and competence of counsellors intending to work within this setting and as a result this sector is most appropriate as a post-qualification specialism for counsellors.

We were insider researchers and were working in the school when the study was carried out. Research into our work and its context helped us greatly with delivering counselling in that school setting. We chose ethnography as the methodology for this study, which helped us to gain a personal understanding about ourselves and the school community in an appropriate and non-intrusive way through journaling, recording observations and reflexive conversations. Being two researchers collaboratively involved in this study, writing separate journals and observations and coming together to process them has worked well as a means of enhancing our understanding of what was going on. Working together also provided a forum in which we could support and challenge each other in our work. The more we engaged in this reflexive process, the richer the data that was generated. Our chosen method was acceptable to the safeguarding gatekeepers in this school context because most of the data streams were coming from us, identifying and processing our own experiencing.

Working in an ethnographic way enabled us to look beyond the personal impact of problems and see different perspectives within the setting.

The data was collated and coded using grounded theory, and the findings detail our conceptual understanding of which aspects of working in this environment require attention if school-based counselling is to be possible and effective. Being part of a doctorate programme led us to take our ideas outside of our environment in order to test and refine concepts being developed and to disseminate the professional knowledge arising from this research. It was in this arena that others began to resonate with our ideas and in this way the products from the study, which comprised our doctoral claim, emerged and continued to be developed, culminating in these three contributions:

- Tenuous Contact, a new concept in adolescent processing.
- A Metanoia awarded Post-Qualification Conversion Diploma course from Adult-to-Adolescent and School Counselling - for those already engaged in or wishing to begin work as a school-based counsellor.
- Conference presentations, a vehicle for disseminating the professional knowledge acquired from the project.

The study illuminated much of the implicit ‘taken for granted’ custom and ritual of everyday counselling ‘good practice’ that is taken to signal ‘safety’ and ‘professionalism’. These include: time boundaries, both of session length and regularity of session time; use of the same, unchanging room; no contact between counsellor and client outside of the appointment times agreed or once the work has come to an end; no knowledge or contact with ‘characters’ from the client's narrative; no potential conflicts of interest in seeing other people that the client might know or speak about; no discussion with third parties about how the work is going or about things that might have been happening for the client this week that the client themselves might not choose to tell the therapist; and no third-party agendas for the work being expressed to the therapist. We have termed all of these assumptions for counselling ‘good practice’ the ‘sanctuary model’ of counselling. By making some of the more implicit aspects of ‘good’ counselling practice more explicit, the study also invites consideration of whether each of these aspects is as ‘necessary’ as might often be assumed. The research has explored whether, and how, some of the principles of safe and ethical counselling practice can be held more relationally than materially, as in the received custom and practice of the ‘sanctuary model’. As the research charts ‘coming out’ of the counselling room and becoming more ‘visible’ and ‘involved’ across the school could risk promoting,

unboundaried, unsafe or compromised counselling practice. The data records how, as researchers, we have had to hold the boundaries and professional practice aspects of the role in a different, more relational way in ‘performing’ counselling in this setting. This aspect of the study has taken up a great deal of space in reflexive conversations, peer supervision and outside supervision. We have been grateful for the broader view and different perspectives that collaborative research has given us as holding the boundaries and maintaining ethical good practice more relationally has required considerable levels of phenomenological responsiveness and reflexivity.

As person-centred counsellors, the data shows us returning to the theory of our model for help with the practice issues that we experienced in our work with young people in this environment. We found that we were able to make greater connections with people when we concentrated on the principles of our model and that there had to be an amplification of praxis, which functioned like an anchor for us. We recognise that our model has influenced us. We have had discussions about other models and feel that, when difficulties in the work arise, it is essential for counsellors to continually work for clarity and understanding in their chosen model.

We have aimed to communicate the story of this research with clarity and through vivid description. We hope we have allowed the data to speak for itself, with all the interpretations and conclusions we have made remaining situated and contexted in the data. In this way, we hope to have provided sufficient illustration for the reader to determine the validity and resonance of the study for themselves, along with any potential usefulness these findings might have in other settings.

We hope that this study will be of value to other school-based counsellors and, as trainers, we aim to continue to expand our knowledge about this area and share these ideas with others.

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