Daring to Make a Difference

Understanding the experiences of exclusion of Looked-After Young People
Looked-After Children

• Specific legal definition based on the Children’s Act 1989

• Local Authority / Health and Social Care Trust has the obligation to provide accommodation for a child when their parent / guardian are prevented from providing them with suitable accommodation or care

• Approximately 9,000 looked-after children in care currently in the UK
Exclusion, Instability & Low Achievement of Looked-After Children

- 9 x more likely than all children to be excluded from School (DfES)
- Only 12% achieve 5 GCSEs (grade A-C) compared to 59% of all children (DfES)
- Of the 60,300 children in care in 2007:
  - 12% had three or more placements in one financial year
  - Only 51% met the Govt target for stability of remaining in the same setting for 2 years.

*Rostill-Brookes, Larkin, Toms & Churchman*
“It is no surprise that youngsters who have received insufficient care & concern from their earliest years relate to others in a different way from those whose earliest years were satisfactory”

John Evans
Trauma is always a matter of failed dependency on other people and situations for containment. Failed dependency provokes a primary fear of annihilation

Earl Hopper
Freud identified Repetition Compulsion “He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it of course, knowing that he is repeating...he cannot escape from this compulsion to repeat; and in the end we understand that this is his way of remembering”
“When traumatized people are unable to tell their stories ..or when they have no one to listen to them, they attempt unconsciously to communicate through re-enactment”

Earl Hopper
‘every time history repeats itself the price goes up’.

The traumatised within groups and the traumatised group

Re-enactment as a response to helplessness – an unconscious attempt to master the situation and change the outcome

Sandra Bloom
Methodology

• Semi-structured interviews with student volunteers at an East London 6th Form College

• Targeting marginalised sub-groups: ESOL and SEN
If we understand the family to be where the child prepares for life – learning about how to relate to others (including figures of authority) as well as learning about the self, how will the experiences of the looked-after child impact on their capacity to relate to others in groups?
Why are groups important?

- Families, organizations, committees, cities, societies
- Social cohesion
- Integration as opposed to disintegration
- Coherence as opposed to incoherence

*Earl Hopper*
Bion’s Work Group

• Meet for a specific, agreed purpose or task
• Has an organisation that is appropriate to the task
• Members are valued for their contribution not their status
• Recognise their interdependence
• Has mechanisms for managing disagreements
• Tolerate the turnover of members without fear of losing identity
• Can recognise and face the need for change

Eric Miller
Preoccupation with horizontal relationships (Keyworkers, teachers)

Lack of interest in peer relationships
When there has been a catastrophic failure of dependency the child exhibits a pathological turning away from external reality fuelled by the fear of dependency

*Ronald Fairburn*
Basic Assumption Me-ness / Massification and One-ness / aggregation as a defence against vulnerability

Crustacean and Amoeboid Functioning

Earl Hopper
Aggregation

Neither a group nor a collection, members hardly relate to each other

“If subgrouping does occur it takes the form of contragrouping rather than differentiation, specialization and co-operation”

Turquet
Massification

- Avoidance of difference
- Defensive denial of separateness
- Eradication of sub-groups
- Boundaries rigid and impermeable

Earl Hopper
Inward-looking, contact avoiding impaired capacity for making judgements about good friendships
Separation and reunion experience,

Unresolved grief of the loss of the primary caregiver
Requirements for learning and group belonging

• Negative capability – tolerance of uncertainty

• Sufficient robustness to tolerate vulnerability, loss, alienation & boredom

• Foulkes: hope, concern for others and mutual acceptance
BaM

Education can work when there is an agreement to be a non-group

Cost is the vitality of groupishness and the possibility of learning from others
Managing the tension between retaining individual identity and group belonging

People are “a group animal at war, not simply with the group, but with himself for being a group animal and with those aspects of his personality that constitute his groupishness”

Wilfred Bion
From Margot Sunderland’s ‘Drawing on your Emotions’
Negative capability – essential for learning – to be able to tolerate the discomfort of not knowing

“Research is what I’m doing when I don’t know what I’m doing.”

Wernher von Braun