

Community or Colony: The principles underlying family centred practice and whether it works

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When King Lear did disinherit and cast out his beloved daughter because she awkwardly expressed her love with the words „*I love your Majesty according to my bond, no more nor less*“ we wonder why King Lear was not able to see what has not been said in an empirical (objective) way.

It shocks our ideal of family that Lear could not use his “social wisdom”, his experience, his feelings, his family ties but just relayed on “empirical – we could also say scientific facts” The logic of science has also quite a bit of power in our modern SW profession and it does often overpower family logic.

Jürgen Habermas (Theory of Communicative Action. Vol 2: A Critique of Functionalist Reason 1981), a quite well known scholar has developed a theory trying to explain why this happens although Social Work professionals do not intend.

Habermas pointed out that we have 2 options to explain society. First we can conceptualize society as what Habermas calls “Lifeworld”. Doing this we see society mainly as community, we see society as a network of relationships between parents, children, grandparents, aunties, uncles, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, buddies, school mates, lovers, cliques and so on. Let’s examine how support is generated in the lifeworld.

For illustration I will use one of Pablo Picasso’s earliest paintings, furnished at a time when science started to become a helping business. The title indicates the 2 different -sometimes even competing- paradigms of help which became clearly visible at that time. (Pablo Picasso (1881 - 1973): Science and charity, 1897, Museo Picasso, Barcelona, Spain)



Why do we help a friend when he is in trouble?
Because we care. Because we are affected.
In the lifeworld we help because we feel close to a person. Words like bosom friend, the Turkish Abla (big sister), or the Chinese “Meimei” (little sister), the Tamil: amma (mother) or Malay: ibu (mother) carry the affection and this natural closeness of lifeworld relationships.

The type of support is mainly quite concrete and tangible:

- I’ll take care of your kids while you need to see the doctor,
- I can pick up your kids from the child care and they can eat with us while you can do the extra shifts your boss is demanding you to do

The help we provide is usually within the horizon of experience of the helped person. We provide the same sort of support we would expect if we were in need of help. In other words: Our support follows the logic of the everyday life of our friend.

However there is no legal right to get this support. Neither do we have a legal entitlement to it nor a contract. If our best friend is on holiday there is no reliever filling in for her.

This sort of help reinforces the closeness from which it originates. It creates a sense of belonging. In scientific terms: The function of lifeworld support is integration. Having obtained a new job we do not yet feel integrated in the new company by being put on the pay roll. However we start feeling part of the company once we made our first friend there with whom we can ventilate all the shit happening everyday.

Habermas said the most important function of this help is that it reinforces the very values which stimulate it. The lifeworld has a sort of build in self-energizing cycle. Important to note is, That SW is not part of this cycle because SW does belong to what Habermas calls “the System”

The System:



We can explain society also as a system consisting of organizations, hierarchy, contracts, laws, economy, politics and politicians, in general: experts. Important is that the logic of the system does differ from the logic of the lifeworld significantly.

Max Weber - another scholar -called the logic of the system “Instrumental Rationality”: That means we do something because we expect to gain from this action.

The market economy – for example - is driven by this logic: People work because they are promised a salary. Restaurants provide food because we pay for it. Achievements are the driving force.

We may be deeply disappointed if our spouse said to us: “I married you because you are earning lots of money and provide me with excellent living conditions.” However our boss would be pleased to hear from us that his

excellent salary motivates us as well as the superior working conditions he provides.

People act on “Instrumental rationality” when they expect advantages from their actions or when they want to avoid disadvantages



The Fund Raising slogan of the Springfield Volunteer Fire Brigade plays with the difference between lifeworld and system motivation. Of course the fire fighters would come anyway. Whether someone has donated at the breakfast or not must not be relevant for their motivation to help since they are not doing it for money. However they point out that money is a relevant factor in the helping business.

Let's check what “help” means in a “system logic”. The system - let's say in form of a government children & family service - does not help because the professionals feel affected. The service does help because it is legally responsible to do so and because people (parents or children) have an entitlement for support.

The trigger is a professional diagnosis and the helpers are paid experts earning a salary for their service. Picassos painting shows quite clearly that this kind of help does not need natural ties, sometimes not even communication.

The form of support generated are science-based and therefore standardized services. The effects of this support system are : Specialized services, of a predictable quality, which often replace resources of the lifeworld, guided by a professional logic.



The medical profession has thought us: Wherever specialists work there are risks of side effects. These side effect were called by Habermas the co-lon-ialization of the lifeworld.

I have added a cover of an old French magazine showing that colonialization does not just mean another system holds now the legal power. It does in fact mean much more: The other system is from now on also in charge of defining values, reputation of people as well as the correct ways to think, to see the world, the others and oneself. And you see how these proud tribal leaders have to bow to acknowledge this tremendous shift of power over everything.

In modern Social Work colonialization means for example 3 things:

1. Devaluation

When Social Workers impress their little clients in children's homes by their polite and democratic way to deal with them. And when these kids start to appreciate the Social Work upbringing more than their kinship upbringing, The failure of their own parents are highlighted and shame results. The efforts of the parents are devaluated. And Social Work has done a disservice to their clients.

2. Weakening

Another side effect of professional help is that it may dry up self help. When clients learn that they can rely on the help of Social Workers and when this help is even more reliable than the help they get from their relatives, friends or neighbours, they start to replace relatives, friends and neighbours with Social Workers.

3. The third side effect is exclusion. It happens when disadvantaged or disabled people get special treatment in specialized schools, homes or sheltered workshops.

This support is meant to shelter and to nurture them however it cuts the fabric of the lifeworld by excluding these people from the mainstream.

I used to work in a home for mental health consumers which was like a protective bubble around its residents. They had everything there: food, friends, work, sex, drugs and Rock'n Roll. Why would they want to leave Hotel California again?

In Habermas' words is the colonialization of the lifeworld sounds like this:



Colonialization of the lifeworld happens when...

... lawyers fight in court a custody battle. For lawyers it is the winning what counts. This is instrumental rationality. Whether the bridges between the parents are burnt by the victory is for the legal system secondary. It is not responsible for the relationship of the family but for a legal decision and the legal system does only allow the binary code of right or wrong. From our everyday life (life world) we know that this black and white thinking is most of the time too incomplex. Often things are right as well as wrong and grey is the more relevant color. However the legal system does not understand this life world code.

Colonialization of the lifeworld happens when...

... child protection legislation demands from professionals to distrust the lifeworld systematically as soon as they have the feeling that something may not be right in this family. To protect the children says the law. To be legally on the safe side may be another driving force. Professional "support" which is based on professional fear tends to be 100% court-proofed. court-proofed solutions are more often than not professional solutions since they have some guaranteed standards and thereby transfer the responsibility to another professional

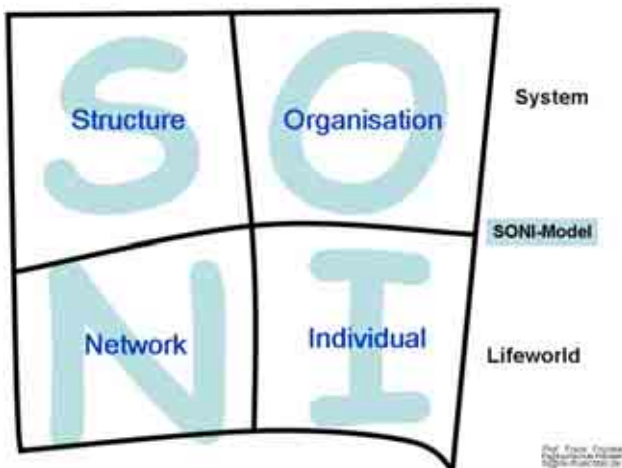
These were some of the accusations of New Zealand's Maori population regarding the existing Family services. The Maori parents felt that the professional Family services did "care" and "protect" by using a professional

logic which did neither see nor acknowledge their strengths, their culture and their ways to resolve problems

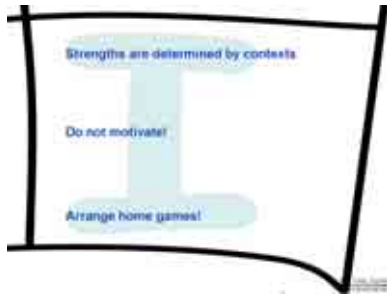
In NZ this discourse led to the development of FGC as an administrative procedure which tries to minimize side effects of the system by maximizing the influence of the lifeworld. The Germans are not so practical like the Kiwis, and influenced by Habermas' works the Social Work profession developed in the 80s a theory called Lifeworld approach (Hans Thiersch: Lebensweltorientierte Soziale Arbeit, 1982) This Social Work approach attempts to break up a paradox: To protect children without putting the family under supervision of the state but leaving the family in the driver's seat?

It is an approach which takes in its intervention both into consideration: Interventions should be adapted to life worlds Interventions should aim to adapt systems to life worlds

I will be trying to explain a few principles of this Social Work model by using this Chinese character meaning "field" (tian) Good case work has to perform well in all of these 4 fields:



The lower half deals with the lifeworld. The upper half for the system. The whole thing we call SONI-Model



Social Work which tries to avoid colonizing clients avoids motivating them but tries to find their motivation.

We had a boy who had a problem with his personal hygiene. We tried a lot: counselling, peer group involvement, behaviour therapy with positive and negative reinforcements, etc. Nothing worked. Suddenly his outfit and hygiene changed tremendously. He had fallen in love.

Social Work talks too often about what clients “need” and talks to seldom about what clients “want”. In fact we want clients to want what we want. Support plans are full of “need-sentences” and never document the “will” of clients.

What can be seen as a weakness can also be seen as strength if Social Workers are smart enough to invent the right context.

In another case a young single parent father was accused of child neglect because he brought not seldom his 3 year old girl to the hospital in the middle of the night and disappeared thereupon. You can treat this case as neglect and start to protect the kid. However our child protection service figured out, that the father behaved very responsible in doing what he did. Whenever he had the feeling that he could not cope anymore he brought the Kid to a safe place. The safest place for him was the hospital.

Any behaviour of people is problem solving behaviour. People try to achieve something and more often than not what they want to achieve is completely in line with any state care and protection policy. However they use sometimes means which produce undesirable side effects or they use organisations like hospitals which are not good in child care services.

People in an Away Games come across needy. People in a Home Game context appear strong. Soccer Teams win about 70% of their games on home ground. In ancient Greak mythology there was a giant called Antaeus (Antaios) who was incredibly strong. However when lifted from the ground he became as weak as a mouse. I guess the same happens often to clients of Social Work. They loose confidence and strengths because the treatment often becomes an away game for them: Rules apply which differ from their rules at home, language of the professional is an alien jargon and their professional logic of resolving problems moves people out of their comfort zone.

A good FGC is a home game for a family – which may be an away game for SW. This is a question of venue, incorporated cultural values and rituals, number of life world supporters present and Private family time which makes quite clear that the professionals are the audience and the lifeworld people are the owners of the process.



“N” stands for Network. If SW tries to be inclusive it does in fact exclude people from the mainstream. If professionals include a man with a disability in a sheltered workshop he may get a good deal professional support however he pays for it with being excluded from the regular work force.

A service provider for people with intellectual disabilities I am cooperating with has started to do something quite different. In a FGC for Kuno, one of their workers in a sheltered workshop, was found, that Kuno was not happy working there. He did his job but he did not like doing it. Further was found that Kuno was a keen and gifted singer. Based on this knowledge a plan was made in the FGC to create a job for Kuno as mobile entertainer in 3 old folks homes. Kuno was very happy in his new employment and said the elderly were a mavelous

audience. However this job could only be created with the support of 3 people: Kuno's uncle who was on the board of 1 home, the mayor of the village were Kuno was born convinced the government home there, and the priest who had baptized Kuno convinced the church home.

This service provider for people with disabilities has meanwhile learned the lesson: If you want to include people in the mainstream you need to nurture social capital and make it work. You need to do a good deal of your work outside your SW organization and within the community and you need not only to know your cases you also need to know their neighbours.

We have findings from our FGC in Berlin and some other cities in Germany that those Co-ordinators were more effective who are better connected with the community. Their resource mobilizing work in the community made them more resourceful in establishing networks around families to make a FGC a success.

O stands for Organization



The evaluation FGC in Berlin showed, that often goals developed in FGCs could often not be achieved because the service providers which had a role in the plan were not flexible enough. Usually organizations provide ready made solutions – often “one fits all solutions” Lifeworld solutions must be Tailor-made solutions Such plans demand from SW Organizations quite a bit organisational development. That means a good FGC practice creates for an individual a plan to improve their life AND a plan the system to improve their service delivery. If we want to use FGCs as means of decreasing colonializing effects, FGCs have to highlight and plan how the professional system concerned in this case can

become more flexible in order to allow solutions tailor made for lifeworld logic, rather than just imposing ready made professional programmes / interventions.

The S in the 4th quadrant of my scheme representing the lifeworld approach



stands for Structure

FGC is part of Case work and often Case work seems to exhaust itself in helping individuals. “Social workers have a commitment to principles of social justice” states the 4th ethical principle of International Federation of Social Workers. All codes of ethics for Social workers refer to this structural responsibility for social justice besides the responsibility to help individuals. A good FGC practice however manages to combine empowering case work with structural empowerment. Structural empowerment would mean: FGC is not used as a smart method for mobilizing resources and for getting easier consent by clients. FGC can also not be considered evidence based practice. The underlying philosophy of evidence based practice is that the system knows what should be achieved/ changed and has a set of scientific tested methods to make the change happen. In a way this is the complete opposite of FGC philosophy as it assumes that the system does neither know what is best for clients nor how to achieve it. FGC is a tool of “lifeworld protection”. Our fundamental rights are rights of liberty against the intrusion of the state. FGC is such a sort of right for both parents AND children. They both have fundamental rights of care and “protection”. FGC is therefore not a method but a government policy using administrative, legal and professional means to build professional boundaries for professional systems in order to create space for service users (lifeworld). Therefore FGC is a professional development against the current of professionalism. It is not a Social Work method but a

democratic tool, a citizens right to limit the imperialism of professional and administrative systems.

Family Group Conferencing...

