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# A Cultural-Historical Interpretation of Resilience: the implications for practice

## Summary

Recent attempts at preventing the social exclusion of vulnerable children in England have been driven by notions of resilience which centre primarily on changing children so that they may be better able to cope with adversity. Drawing on the concepts of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), we suggest that the idea of resilience should be expanded to include developing a capacity to act on and reshape the social conditions of one's development. We use evidence from two studies of practices in recent re-configurations of children's services in England to examine whether practitioners are seeing resilience in these terms. We present examples of work which embody these views but suggest that they are not easily incorporated into practices where expertise is centred on care and clear communication. The care and communication model of practice reflects the emphases given to evolutionary notions of child development while a CHAT view of resilience reflects Vygotsky's concerns with a dialectic between individuals and the social situations of their development.

## Preventing Vulnerability to Social Exclusion

During the 1990s Europe, as elsewhere, witnessed a refocusing of work with children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Existing reasons for remedying disadvantage, i.e. concerns with equity and with

the disruption that alienated youngsters can cause, were augmented by the belief that there were soon to be too few skilled workers to support the rapid increase in the number of elderly. The idea of a child 'at risk' of not being able to contribute to society began to replace the notion of disadvantage. From the OECD perspective, children and young people who were 'at risk' were likely to fail in the school system and unlikely to enter work (OECD, 1995). The shift, from seeing problems in terms of being disadvantaged to being 'at risk' of being excluded from what society both offers and requires, was regarded as helpful. It was future-oriented and allowed the State to think about how it might prevent exclusion from what binds society together.

The 'prevention of social exclusion' therefore emerged as a new core concept in welfare services in England in the late 1990s (Bynner, 2001; France and Utting, 2005) and is usually associated with strategies for early intervention to put in place support arrangements which will protect against vulnerability. While early intervention includes working with older children and young people who become vulnerable as a result of changes in life circumstances (Home Office, 2000), much of the work so far has centred on children in the early years of life (Glass, 1999, 2005).

Of course vulnerability is often complex and may not be evident unless one looks across all aspects of a child's life: parenting, schooling, housing and so on. Consequently, it was immediately apparent that the welfare services which work with children should find ways of enabling collaboration between practitioners (Home Office, 2000; OECD, 1998). The need for practitioners to be able to understand the totality of a child's life circumstances has subsequently contributed to major reconfigurations of children's services in Local authorities in England. These changes are, in part, based on an expectation that professionals from different backgrounds will collaborate to disrupt children's trajectories of social exclusion. Consequently we have seen, for example, the merging of education and social care services under single directorates in Local Authorities. Plans for these reconfigured services are often ambitious, requiring practitioners to see themselves as elements in systems where specialist expertise is distributed across a locality.

These collaborations call for new professional competences and particularly a capacity to know how to contribute to and work with the range of professional expertise that is distributed across local welfare systems (Edwards, 2004, 2005, in press). They also, we suggest, call for a capacity to work with vulnerable children and their families so that they begin to take control of their own lives and negotiate them in ways that allow them to shape and benefit from what society has to offer. This suggestion is not based on a homogeneous view of society. Rather, it recognises that the dynamics that shape and reshape civic society are often not informed by those who are socially disadvantaged, leading to social conditions which may become increasingly alienating for more vulnerable citizens (Office for National Statistics, 2002). In brief therefore, routes towards social inclusion need to move beyond notions of care, in order to take seriously how more vulnerable children and

families are able to (a) operate as partners in adjusting and sustaining their trajectories of inclusion and (b) contribute to the shaping of the social conditions of their development.

## The Two Studies

We shall draw on two studies which were located within a government-led approach to tackling social exclusion in order to tease out what a more participatory and empowering notion of prevention might involve. The first study is the National Evaluation of the Children's Fund (NECF) (Edwards, Barnes, Plewis and Morris *et al*, 2006). Running from 2000 to 2008, the Children's Fund is one strand in those policies which see social exclusion as detachment from networks that bind children and young people into socially beneficial systems such as the take-up of education and health care. It aims at preventing exclusion through promoting partnership working between welfare agencies and participation, which is seen as enabling service users to engage in service development. It is quite firmly located in what France and Utting (2005) call the 'Risk and Protection Paradigm' of prevention. Here we draw on just one aspect of the evaluation: the examination, in sixteen case studies, of structures and processes of partnership working and service delivery and their impact on the life experiences of children and young people aged five to thirteen.

The second study, Learning in and for Inter-agency Working\* (LIW), runs from 2004 to 2007 and is examining how professionals learn to work collaboratively to prevent the social exclusion of children and young people. It focuses on how professionals interpret the demands of multi-professional collaborations and learn to work across professional boundaries. We are working in depth in five local authorities and looking at *inter alia* services clustered around a school; a new neighbourhood multi-professional team and an estab-

lished team of practitioners who are working with looked after children, that is, children in the care of the local authority.

Both studies draw on cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) frameworks which locate individual learning and development in environmental affordances for thinking and acting (Cole, 1996). Key concepts within a CHAT framework which are relevant to our discussions are the 'object of activity' and the 'social situation of development'. We shall outline each in turn.

We start with AN Leont'ev who was a colleague of Vygotsky's in Moscow in the late 1920s. Obligated to leave Moscow in 1930, he and his group turned their attention to the nature of the object, i.e. that at which the energy of an activity is directed. He explains what he means by object and its importance as follows.

The main thing which distinguishes one activity from another, however, is the difference of their objects. It is exactly the object of an activity that gives it a determined direction. According to the terminology I have proposed, the object of the activity is its true motive.

(Leont'ev, 1978, p. 62)

For example, it is easy to distinguish between a childcare setting where children's poor nutrition is the object of activity and is being worked on and transformed by careful feeding and by help for parents; and a setting where children's academic development is the primary object, with pedagogic practices being more important than careful feeding.

The idea of object motive is a useful one because it asks us to recognise that the way we interpret a task or problem will shape the way we respond to it; and that our interpretations are shaped by the social practices of the situations in which objects of activity are located. In the first example of a childcare setting just given, we might interpret poor nutrition as primarily a problem of poverty and campaign for

higher taxes, collect money for families and so on; or we might see it as an outcome of family break down, teenage parenting and so on and focus mainly on working with the carers of the children. When several people collaborate in working on an object the usual outcome is an enriched understanding of the problem or task and a greater range of probable responses to it.

The second relevant concept is the 'social situation of development' (Vygotsky, 1998), which captures Vygotsky's focus on the processes of internalisation and externalisation in learning. For Vygotsky, internalisation occurred when what is valued in the social situation of development is incorporated into how people think; and externalisation of their understandings is evidenced their actions in and on that situation. Put simply, minds are shaped by the ways of thinking and concepts that are available in particular social worlds and once incorporated these ways of thinking are externalised and revealed in actions in and on those worlds. The social situation of development is therefore crucial: mediating the ideas that are valued in it and allowing certain kinds of action. Importantly, both Vygotsky and Leont'ev were interested in how we might transform our worlds through our increasingly informed actions on them.

The CHAT view, therefore, is that people are not passive recipients of a culture, they are shaped by their culture, but through the processes of externalisation they also act on and in turn shape it. Flear (2006) has nicely outlined Vygotsky's distinction between development as relatively standard evolution and development as revolution, which highlights the dialectic between individual and as the social situation of development. Arguing that in most western heritage communities, practices which support development have followed a evolutionary line, Flear suggests that early years practitioners should take a revolutionary line by foregrounding 'the cultural

context, the institutional context and the specific child's lived experience'. In other words, they should foreground the social situation of development in order to understand how to enable that dialectic.

While agreeing wholeheartedly with Fleer we want to take those ideas a little further and relate them to resilience in order to outline a CHAT informed version of resilience which emphasises that part of the dialectic of development involves being able to shape those social conditions. A CHAT account of development requires us to look at the impact of learners on their worlds as well as what is happening to their development as a result of being in the world. There are two consequences for a study of resilience. One, as we shall see, points us towards seeing resilience as a capacity to contribute as well as to use resources in settings (Edwards, 2007). The second is that CHAT requires us to think about the development of resilience simultaneously at the individual and systemic levels. As we change our interpretations and responses, the systems we inhabit also change.

Another and later CHAT-related concept which is relevant to work on prevention is the idea of 'relational agency' (Edwards 2005, 2007, in press). As we have already indicated, inter-professional collaborations for the prevention of social exclusion require new ways of thinking about practice in the welfare professions. The first stage of that rethinking is to see that the professional expertise involved in preventing social exclusion is distributed across different specialist practitioners. The idea of distributed expertise, in turn, highlights the importance of an ability to recognise, draw on and contribute to that expertise. This ability is a capacity for relational agency. At the level of practice, relational agency involves first being able to align one's own interpretations of a problem of practice with those of others, and in so doing expand the object of professional activity. It then involves aligning one's

own professional responses to those interpretations with the specialist responses of other practitioners. The argument is that professional action in relatively high risk preventative work can be enhanced through working relationally with others.

A capacity for relational agency is seen as an enhanced form of professional practice in part because working with others on complex problems is likely to prevent an over-simplification of the problems; and in part because it involves being explicit about one's own expertise as one aligns and realigns one's actions in response to the strengths and needs of others. So far, discussions of relational agency have centred on collaborations between practitioners whose actions may be strengthened through responsive forms of collaboration. In the discussions that follow we shall begin to look at developing relational agency among those who are usually seen as users of welfare services and connect it to a CHAT informed view of resilience which places an emphasis on building a capacity to act on and transform the social conditions of development.

## Current Ways of Thinking about Prevention

In England, the new policy focus on the prevention of social exclusion has connected with a raft of research on the resilience of vulnerable children, which originated in developmental psychology in the US and elsewhere, and which emphasises care and education. The research and its implementation have tended to centred on developing individual strengths to prevent a vulnerability to adversity (Garmezy, 1991; Masten and Garmezy, 1985). The argument is that resilience is a capacity for adaptation to appropriate developmental pathways despite disruptions such as family crises; and the best predictors of resilience are relationships with 'caring prosocial adults' and 'good intellectual functioning' (Masten and

Coatsworth, 1998). The origins of resilience in children 'at risk', is therefore similar to the development of competence in children in more stable and nurturing situations.

Resilience is the concept that is driving most social inclusion interventions in England. Its major advantage for policy makers is that intervention programmes, such as Sure Start and the Children's Fund, can be designed to develop it (Evans and Pinnock, 2007). These programmes put in place protective factors such as consistent day care, after school provision or mentoring programmes which offer places of safety and help to build a child's sense of responsible self-efficacy. A second advantage is that resilience sustains a long-standing pattern of professional support for individuals or groups who are deemed to be in some way 'in need'.

Attention to environment and the protective factors to be found in it is therefore also a strand in work on resilience. Luthar (1993), for example, suggested that resilience lay more in the contexts and relationships in which development occurred than in individuals' personal attributes. Resilience is now recognised as a dynamic process of interaction between socio-cultural contexts and developing individuals (Howard, Dryden and Johnson, 1999).

Work on contexts to build resilience has included work on and with families, where it meshes particularly with strength-based approaches to family therapy (Walsh, 2002), and aims at enabling families to 'bounce-back from adversity' (Hawley and DeHaan, 1996). It has also included attention to integrated service delivery which operates with families and communities as well as with vulnerable individuals (Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000; Warren, Apostolov and Broughton et al, 2006). Here there are some links to work on the social capital generated in social networks (Field, 2002; Mitchell and Trickett, 1980; Portes, 1998). However, despite a growing understanding of the importance of interactions

between individual and context and the need therefore to strengthen environmental support, interventions that aim at prevention continue to take a relatively narrow focus on the child or family (Peters, Petrunka and Arnold, 2003). Moreover, they don't look at how children and families learn to shape their worlds as they negotiate pathways of broader social inclusion within them.

The idea of resilience is also contested (Little, Ashford and Morpeth, 2004). Criticisms include those made by NECF, that concentrating on strengthening children so that they can deal with adversity or recognise the value of what mainstream society has to offer is at times misguided (Edwards *et al*, 2006; Evans, Pinnock, Beirens and Edwards, 2005). Following the CHAT line that we need to think about development at the level of the system, we suggested that alongside, or at times instead of, a focus on changing children, attention should be paid to changing the conditions of their development. There we discussed, for example, the need for service providers to consider whether some of the problems lay in the excluding practices of some services rather than in personal weaknesses in those they were hoping to attract to their provision.

We, of course, recognised that the main source of social exclusion in England is poverty and the conditions of social disadvantage that so many children and families experience. Moran and Ghate, for example, in their review of parenting support schemes concluded that their impact is mediated by poverty and that funding is needed to investigate the 'causes of problems experienced by parents and children' (their emphasis) (Moran and Ghate, 2005). Jack (2006) comes at the problem from a slightly different angle and one that quite clearly is compatible with a CHAT analysis. He argues that interventions aimed at prevention need to focus centrally on what he describes as 'the area and community components of children's well-being' because

vulnerability can arise from combinations of individual and area factors. Indeed when we asked parents during NECF what they felt to be the sources of their children's difficulties, area factors such as lack of local safety loomed large (Evans et al, 2006). As Jack observes, a focus on context and how it meshes with individual development is dreadfully underplayed in current strategies for reconfiguring the workforce to work on prevention. This is, he argues, illustrated most clearly in the *Common Core of Skills and Knowledge* introduced by the English Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to support multi-agency working in children's services (DfES, 2005). He observes that of the 150 areas of specific skills and knowledge identified as needed by workers 'only one makes even passing reference to the influence of the 'wider social context' in the development of children and young people'.

If we summarise the overview of the current state of work on prevention in England we find a set of practices which is oriented towards changing children and families to enable them to work with adversity. At the same time there is relatively little emphasis on working together, or with service users, to change the broader conditions of children's development. One might argue that a focus on individual change plays to the strengths of practitioners who have been trained in various forms of support and care and who remain in the front line of preventative work. Indeed, it seems that the recent attempt to reconfigure children's services and identify new forms of joined-up multi-agency practices mentioned by Jack has simply reinforced practices based on care offered by experts. A quick word search of the DfES *Common Core* document revealed the following emphasises on care and the communication of professional understandings. Care or caring were mentioned 59 times and communicate or communication 28.

Another search of the same document

looked for an emphasis on working relationally with service users to help them to take control over their worlds in order to reshape their lives. It revealed that consult, consultation and consulting were mentioned in total eight times and that participation was not mentioned at all. This count again was telling. The Children's Fund had been set up in 2000 as a catalyst for the reconfiguring of children's services which was about to take place and it quite clearly made the participation of children and their families in shaping service provision a key strategy for addressing social exclusion. Yet five years later government guidance to practitioners shied away from reshaping professional practice so that it might encourage people at risk of exclusion to learn how to negotiate their own routes out of risk. There is therefore very little evidence that practitioners are being asked to think about (a) children's development in terms of actions that might be taken at the level of the social systems they inhabit or (b) how people who are seen to be at risk of exclusion may be enabled to work on and transform those systems.

## Co-configuring Provision for Children and Families

In the LIW study we have been analysing and developing the capacity of children's services to learn to work flexibly for social inclusion and have drawn on recent developments in learning and the transformation of work emanating from the Harvard Business School to map and label the work practices we have seen (Daniels, Leadbetter and Warmington, in press). Victor and Boynton (1998) have identified five types of work in the history of industrial production: craft, mass production, process enhancement, mass customization, and co-configuration (Figure 1). Each type of work generates and requires a certain type of knowledge which is produced in different kinds of relationships. They suggest that progress oc-

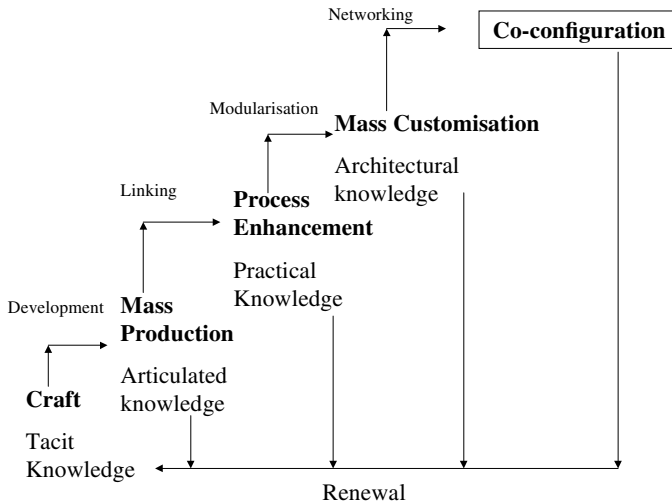


Figure 1. Historical forms of work (adapted from Victor and Boynton, 1998)

curs through learning and the leveraging of the knowledge produced into new, and arguably more effective, types of work.

Looking at each stage in turn, they explain that what craft workers know about products and processes rests in their personal intuition and experience of the customer, the product, the process and the use of their tools. When these practitioners invent solutions they create tacit knowledge that is tightly coupled with experience, technique and tools. This kind of work is often regarded as intuitive and is easily recognisable in early years' settings. The articulation of tacit knowledge may lead to the next stage where it can become reified as 'good practice' with the expectation that it is mass produced to become the norm for all.

Learning is an important driver for movement through each stage. Mass production workers follow instructions yet also learn about work through observation, sensing, and feeling the operations. They learn where the instructions are effective and where they are not. This learning leads to a new type of knowledge, which Victor and Boynton call practical knowledge. Practical knowledge is in turn enhanced through linking processes. For example, these processes may involve set-

ting up a team system in which members focus on process improvement, which promotes the sharing of ideas within the team and which fosters collaboration across teams and functions. As we can see, progression through the stages involves increasing transparency and clear articulation of the knowledge being brought into play.

The move to mass customization brings greater precision. To take an example from children's services, it would involve the careful shaping of a specific service, through creating modules or tailored forms of provision which can be specifically targeted at particular groups. In early education this would involve looking more carefully at the social situation of a child's development and offering a pedagogy that worked appropriately with it. In the Children's Fund we saw this occurring in the provision of services which were targeted at particular groups of children, perhaps from one ethnic background or with a specific disability.

One difference between this work and what happens in work we would label co-configuration is that with mass customization there is little opportunity for on-going reshaping of services; whereas the emphasis of co-configu-

ration work is on the continual development of the product or service. Another difference is that the networks of co-configuration involve the users of the service or product alongside practitioners in the development work and everyone is involved in learning. As Victor and Boynton explain:

The work of co-configuration involves building and sustaining a fully integrated system that can sense, respond, and adapt to the individual experience of the customer. When a firm does co-configuration work, it creates a product that can learn and adapt, but it also builds an ongoing relationship between each customer-product pair and the company. Doing mass customization requires designing a product at least once for each customer. This design process requires the company to sense and respond to the individual customer's needs. But co-configuration work takes this relationship up one level – it brings the value of an intelligent and 'adapting' product. The company then continues to work with this customer-product pair to make the product more responsive to each user. In this way, the customization work becomes continuous. (...) Unlike previous work, co-configuration work never results in a 'finished' product. Instead, a living, growing network develops between customer, product, and company.

(Victor and Boynton, 1998, p.195)

Although this model of changing practices originated in the Harvard Business School and does not discuss the provision of welfare services, it resonated strongly with the senior staff responsible for reconfiguring children's services in local authorities in England when the team discussed it with them at the start of LIW. As we have argued in our work on multi-professional working in the LIW project (Daniels et al, in press), co-configuration is the kind of work which is currently emerging in some complex multi-professional settings. In addition, it allows us to recognise the point made by Furlong and Cartmel (1997), that young people currently find themselves negotiating risks which were largely unknown to their parents and that those negotiations take place at an

individual level even though they are shaped by wider structural changes. Finally, for us, as CHAT researchers, an added attraction of the Victor and Boynton model is its focus on how changes in conceptual tools, i.e. knowledge in use, are intertwined with changes in individual practices and in the services and systems in which they are produced.

The implications of co-configuration work for practice in children's services are considerable. Co-configuration in responsive and collaborating services requires flexible working in which no single actor has the sole, fixed responsibility and control. It requires participants to have a disposition to recognise and engage relationally with the expertise distributed across rapidly changing work places (Edwards, 2005, 2007, in press) and to work in new ways with those who hitherto had been seen mainly as clients. It has the potential to involve children and families in repositioning themselves in and thereby reshaping the social conditions of their development as they work on them and change them. It also echoes the Children's Fund emphasis on participation as a route to the prevention of social exclusion.

We have found when talking with practitioners that there are two ways of interpreting co-configuration work in children's services. Much depends on what is seen as the object of activity i.e. the problem space that is being worked on and transformed in the process of co-configuration. When the problem space is service provision and the intention is to produce a more appropriate service, the problem is seen as improving existing provision. Co-configuration consequently runs the risk of being diluted to being responsive to user evaluation or feedback in a rather service-led way, which seems close to the processes of mass customization. However, when the object of activity is a child's developmental trajectory with the intention of disrupting a trajectory that is driving towards social exclusion, co-configuration becomes far more profession-



ally challenging, requiring the practitioner to follow that trajectory with the child and family and work on it relationally and flexibly to turn it around. Here relational agency extends beyond working with other professionals and begins to include working with the strengths and intentions of families and other support networks around vulnerable children as they co-configure children's trajectories towards social inclusion.

A child's trajectory out of being at risk of social exclusion will change constantly as practitioners, the child and her family reshape it. It will come to resemble what Engeström (2005) describes as a 'runaway object' racing ahead of those who are working on it. As we shall see, this more client-centred version of co-configuration work is more likely to engage children and families as partners in configuring and negotiating their own pathways away from social exclusion. These two readings of a process, that is seen as central to new working relationships in services for children, become useful benchmarks for examining how practitioners are working with children and families in conditions which encourage their participation.

Both readings of co-configuration allow a focus simultaneously on individual and the social situation of their development; but the service-led version works with one transitory aspect of children's worlds, a service which is provided for them; while the focus on a developing trajectory offers a longer term investment in enabling children to learn how to act on their worlds. Both of these readings of co-configuration were evident in Children's Fund approaches to prevention through participation, so let's look at them in a little more detail.

## Participation as a Route to Prevention

Here we draw primarily on evidence gathered during NECF in interviews with 185 children and young people, 184 carers and from another 170 children in focus groups and other group activities. These children had experienced, between them, 72 different services provided by the Children's Fund. Workers from these services were also interviewed, some on two occasions, providing a data base of c. 250 interviews with practitioners. The initiative aimed at preventing social exclusion through partnership working and participation which was described by the DfES as engaging children and families in the 'design, delivery and evaluation of services'. (Edwards et al, 2006; Evans et al, 2006). The government therefore took a service-led perspective, seeing the object of activity as service provision and focusing on shaping services for specific groups.

In many cases this approach to changing provision became diluted in the ways we had anticipated. For example, local partnerships did consult children about what they wanted services to do when they commissioned provision and children were involved in evaluating what was provided. However, these processes seemed far closer to the shaping of targeted provision which is a feature of mass customization than to the ongoing negotiations of co-configuration work. Interestingly, when we moved our research focus from looking at how consultation informed provision and instead looked at the detail of practices within some services, we found examples of sensitive co-configuration and that this seemed to make a difference to children. In these cases participation seemed to be contributing directly to resilience.

These practices involved working with children relationally on the social conditions of their development by being responsive to children's ideas so that they could see quickly

that their suggestions had been taken seriously and that they were having an impact on what happened. For example, ‘the coffee morning was my idea and the Halloween party was sort of my idea and my friend’s idea.’ And ‘I don’t want to be big-headed but I came up with the idea of the conference! They responded to that, just the little things we all said we wanted, we got it.’ Children told us about how they were co-configuring the provision that was provided for them in an on-going and responsive way and reported experiencing thoughtful, respectful, responsive practices which were often very different from the interactions they experienced with their teachers during school time.

However, it seemed to us that, in a number of the services which worked in this relational way, the growing sense of self-efficacy which shone through these comments was almost a by-product of a focus on attempts to shape provision to meet the needs of children. In our report (Edwards *et al*, 2006) we highlighted this by-product and suggested that it should become a focus, or object of activity in CHAT terms, particularly as attention to self-efficacy through responsive practice of this kind was way of sharpening what practitioners meant by building self-esteem. We argued that a sense of self-efficacy links to a growing capacity to act on one’s world and change it. This link lies at the core of a CHAT version of resilience which, as we have already suggested, is not simply a matter of changing the child. Rather it is about enabling the child to shape their world (Edwards, 2007).

The link between self-efficacy through participation and CHAT version of resilience was of course recognised by some practitioners. As one worker who specialised in encouraging children’s participation explained.

...it’s about building them up, about having a voice, having confidence, building self-esteem, being part of a democracy and buying into things and having ownership of where they live and what they do.

When we turn to the experiences of parents and carers a rather different picture emerges. As well as expecting to engage parents and carers with children in the design, delivery and evaluation of services, the Children’s Fund also aimed at involving ‘families in building the community’s capacity to sustain the (CF) programme and thereby create pathways out of poverty’. This was an ambitious objective. It resonates with Jack’s concern with area factors (Jack, 2006) and a CHAT view of resilience which includes a capacity to act responsibly on one’s own environment in order to change it (Edwards, 2007). Nonetheless, the experience of the Children’s Fund suggests that engaging parents and carers in either evaluation or sustaining services is difficult to achieve (Edwards *et al*, 2006; Evans *et al*, 2006).

In the few services which were aimed at parents or carers, rather than at children, there was evidence that they were involved in small decisions about how the service might be improved or what activities they would like, and this was appreciated. However, involving parents or carers in shaping the services attended by their children was a low priority for parents and for some practitioners, as one practitioner explained.

They (the parents) are not involved directly in the running of the project, to be honest with you, most of our families are not really interested in that, the hierarchy of the project. They are interested in the worker who works with them and that’s it really and they see me a couple of times. And because they are families that are struggling they have enough on and don’t want to get involved.

While parents and carers did not say that they were struggling and were not interested, they did observe that, because services gave them the opportunity to work, study or spend time with their other children, it was not easy to engage with project development. A typical response was: ‘It is hard for me to get more involved because I work split shifts and things, it is difficult’. In those circumstances giving

up time to help shape a local service could not be a priority. It was therefore hardly surprising that involving them in developing community capacity to sustain the programme was the objective that was not achieved anywhere.

In our feedback sessions with Children's Fund workers across England there was general agreement that this objective was a low priority for them. Building community capacity by working with parents and carers would take time, something not available in a time-limited initiative with often uncertain funding, and many practitioners were not sure how to achieve it. The problems were immense. Firstly some local communities lacked experience of mutual responsibility as this extract from a carer about a local crime prevention group illustrates.

Through my links with (service name) I decided to set up a group for people to come along and tell us what was wrong and to do something....but unfortunately there wasn't enough people attending the groups for me to carry it on and also I was confronted by someone for doing it, so I decided I lived too local to be involved in something like that.

Secondly practitioners, with their background in care and being the expert who could communicate clearly, were often not trained to do this kind of work as this extract from an interview with a project worker demonstrates. The practitioner was describing how she worked with a community group which was not funded by the Children's Fund.

And we work quite well with a community group. It's a local community group that is running a number of initiatives and seems to have a lot of funding going into it. Some of the characters are really quite strong characters, quite difficult characters at times that dig in over certain things...I communicate directly... if I don't think it is working I will say it in this tone of voice you know. But sometimes what you get back is anger and resentment. But I just have to say, OK, well that's just indicative of the level of need in the community at times.

Nonetheless, when community groups were directly funded by the initiative, to offer their own services for their own children, the strengths within these groups were clear. One example was a community-based project which developed from meetings of Somali refugee families who were worried about the low educational attainment of their children and their general alienation from school. The children asked for more support with their school work and an after-school homework club was established and organised, though not staffed, by parents. Another was a set of classes on their African heritage run by a West Indian community group which had considerable impact on the identity and confidence of children who took part. In these and other cases, although the projects were part of the Children's Fund and enabled by the Fund's systems, they did not involve workers trained in the care and communication versions of welfare work.

When we examined professional practices which involved working with parents and carers on disrupting their own children's trajectories towards exclusion we could begin to see some glimmerings of co-configuration work. In part this was because a focus on the well-being of individual children was a core professional value for most of the workers. Some practices, however, fell short of engaging families in negotiating their ways out of exclusion. The Children's Fund family worker's description of her practice that follows echoes the priorities of the DfES 2005 *Common Core* framework and an emphasis on care and communication.

I think that the only strategy I have got is empathy...when I go out to see a family I try very hard not to be judgmental in anyway and to put parents at ease in the hope that they will engage on a one to one basis with me...(in) most of the self-referral families...parents do engage, but overall it is recognised that it is quite difficult to get the parents involved.

But there were some services which tried to get beyond seeing practitioners as expert carers. They created possibilities for a more co-configured relational approach which more clearly brought the families into the negotiations and enabled them to achieve a greater sense of responsibility and efficacy. A practitioner outlined one such project.

...the main participation is in the individual packages we do with families, which are very much family-led really. It's around their description of the understanding of their needs- the targets that we all agree to work towards, and their evaluations of the things at the end really.

The involvement of families in both setting targets and evaluating whether they had been achieved is clearly very powerful. It echoes Taylor's definition of individual agency (Taylor, 1977) which proposes that we are only truly agentic when we not only set our own goals but are able to evaluate that we have achieved them.

Parents responded with enthusiasm to being treated as partners in working on their own children's trajectories. Talking of how she and her thirteen year old son worked with a family support worker one mother explained, 'All three of us have worked together. I'm not told you do this, try that. It's "what do you think we should do?"'. Another described how she worked with project workers for excluded children attended by her sons 'they talk to you, involve you, so you feel you as though you're involved, they will ring your phone, actually talk to you, tell you what's going on, ask advice'.

In examples like these we are reminded of Dreier's work on the trajectories of patients in psychotherapy as they move across everyday settings. He argues that clients, not therapists, are the primary agents of therapy (Dreier, 2000) and reminds us, as researchers, to attend to the micro-level actions or ongoing negotiations which in turn sustain everyday

practices as one moves across settings. His research focuses on the way that patients order and configure their everyday practices so that they can manage to function well in different contexts.

Involving parents and children in disrupting their own pathways towards social exclusion has the potential to help them to develop expertise in these everyday negotiations as they move across settings and take control of their own lives. A CHAT understanding of these negotiations highlights the extent to which they are evidence of an externalisation of understandings and have the potential to contribute to and shape the systems in which they occur. In summary, co-configuration which includes working relationally with children and their carers can provide an opportunity for the kind of dialectic between individual and the social situation of development that was at the core of Vygotsky's developmental psychology.

We were also aware how much some practitioners learnt from listening to and working with families. However, relational forms of co-configuration with parents and carers was not widespread. It may be premature to criticise the practitioners whose practice remained shaped by care and communication. They were often relatively low-status workers, operating in a relatively high risk field and were only just getting to grips with working collaboratively with other professionals and were not always finding that easy to achieve. Giving greater control to parents and carers might have been one step too far, both for them and their organisations. The *Common Core* document (DfES, 2005), with its emphasis on care rather than collaboration, would certainly suggest that it was.

## The Implications for Practice of a CHAT View of Resilience

In the present paper we have attempted to place the focus more clearly on including parents,

carers and children in local systems of distributed expertise. We have also suggested that the analytic framework offered by a CHAT view of development can usefully encourage practitioners to welcome the involvement of children and families in shaping the social conditions of their own development. This involvement is not likely to happen easily. Children and families, like the practitioners we are working with in LIW who are learning how to do collaborative work, will need to find themselves in systems that enable collaboration which are made up of social practices which expect their involvement. It won't be enough for practitioners to decide to work in that way: the organisations in which they are located will also need to encourage and enable these practices.

Such practices cannot be based solely on care and communication, though there may be times when both are necessary. They cannot be based on parent-blaming and, for example, calls for better funding for parent education programmes. To repeat some of what the participation specialist told us 'it's ...about having a voice ... being part of a democracy and buying into things and having ownership of where they live and what they do'. Shifts in practice to include parents, carers and children as partners who can negotiate pathways and can act on their worlds to shape not only their trajectories but also the 'social situation of development' have long term implications for society.

We do not underestimate what is involved in these shifts (Daniels et al, in press). But as Lenin once observed, 'the consciousness of man not only reflects the objective world but also creates it' (Lenin, 1941-1967). Resilience is quite clearly a concept that is creating a discourse and sets of practice which foreground care and communication in work with children and families. We are suggesting that the concept of resilience is extended so that it includes a capacity to work with others to shape and reshape the conditions of development.

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