Changing thoughts, feelings and narratives around ‘behaviours of concern’

Synergy overview

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November 2019
Oscar Wilde

“The best way to make children good is to make them happy.”
“Our job is to make that world less frightening”
Context

• How ‘successful’ are our ‘approaches’ to ‘challenging behaviour’?

• Why are we still talking about scandals and abuse?

• What difference personalisation - or training?

• Is enough attention paid to staff?
‘Personalisation’ – a double edged sword?

‘Behaviour management’ plans will describe in great detail the person whose behaviour is being ‘managed’ but seldom have much to say about those doing the ‘managing’. 
Background to Synergy

• Began 2013 with Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation, Piraeus, Greece
• Response to growth of exclusions from Greek schools related to ‘challenging behaviour’
• Austerity
Background to Synergy

- Generic - including refugees, intellectual disability, autism, ‘behavioural problems’
- Sensitive to local culture and resources
  - austerity
Model: Synergy Attica

- Teachers supported by local (school based) mentor
- School-based mentors supported by Synergy mentor
- Synergy mentors supported by AT-Autism network
Hypothesis

• Being in control of our feelings and behaviour (being virtuous) reduces stress

• We make bad decisions when stressed /through our biases

• We can learn to change our behaviour

• Recognition of what we can control and what we can’t improves practice and reduces stress

• Mentors important – support/challenge question

Ellis 1955; Kahneman & Tversky 1974; Davidson 1992; Rutter 1990; Lockwood 2017
Overview

Focus of Synergy

• Mindsets, stress, behaviours and **skills** of support adults (e.g. teachers, staff)
  - NOT ‘child behaviour’

• What we **can** control

• Narrative
Context

The Socratic tradition

1. Humans can know themselves
2. Humans can change themselves
3. Humans can consciously create new habits of thinking, feeling and acting

Evans J. 2013
Feelings
Good (feelings)
Bad (vindictive)

Acts
Good (virtuous)
Bad (vicious)

Character
Good (virtues)
Bad (vices)
Should we pay much more attention to staff virtues?

- Character?
- Feelings (Beliefs and mindsets) ?
- Acts (Behaviour) ?
Reframing
Mindsets, narratives and behaviour

"people are not disturbed by things but rather by their view of things."

Albert Ellis 1913-2007

“Men are disturbed not by things, but by their opinions about them”

Epictetus 55 – 135 AD
“While such training is generally well evaluated by care staff, there is limited evidence that training alone changes poor attitudes or improves staff performance. ..... Training has not been linked to quality of outcomes for service users.”

• Cullen 1992
“Staff can be taught to behave appropriately in our training sessions but they do not necessarily behave appropriately when they return to their work settings. In fact it would not be too strong to say that they rarely do so”

(Cullen 1992)
• Staff who work with service users with ID and challenging behaviours feel negative emotions such as anger, guilt, anxiety, self-blame and powerlessness

• Recognition of value of psychological support

• Is this enough?

Questions

• Winterbourne View Hospital, Bristol
• Are the people convicted ‘bad’ or ‘evil’ – or themselves victims?
• What is the narrative?

• https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-20092894
Questions

• Do we need to pay more attention to support adults?
  • and an approach that extends beyond the workplace?
  • that gives more than ‘values’ or instruction on how to behave?
  • encourage ‘virtuous acts’ that will endure? … tools for life?
• What might help to do this?
Society and culture
- Weber; Goffman; Wolfensberger

Stress
- Pfaff; McDonnell

Human behavior
- Kahneman; Bandura; Asch; Milgram; Rogers; Zimbardo; Ellis

Philosophy
- Socratic tradition; Epictetus

Psychological theory
- Kahneman; Bandura; Asch; Milgram; Rogers; Zimbardo; Ellis

Physiological theory
- Pfaff; McDonnell

Sociological theory
- Weber; Goffman; Wolfensberger

Theoretical base
Gaining control of our actions and beliefs

- Aim to do the ‘right’ thing
- ‘Examine our impressions’
- ‘Reflect on our thoughts and actions’
- Presence: Self-awareness and self-control
Kahneman

Brain system 1: the ‘emotional brain’

• Fight/flight - high stress - reactive
• Impulsivity - biases - ‘gut feelings’

Brain system 2: the ‘thinking brain’

• Planning- thoughtful, proactive, considered
• Logical - based on evidence
FIRST REACTIONS
System 1: fast, automatic, impulsive, associative, emotional and unconscious processing
System 1 and System 2 processing

**FIRST REACTIONS**
System 1: fast, automatic, impulsive, associative, emotional and unconscious processing

**THINKING**
System 2: slower, conscious, reflective, deliberative, analytical, rational, logical processing
System 1

- Useful - Easy - Instinctive

BUT

Can result in stress and bad choices e.g.

- Panic – Impulsivity - Biases
I've heard the rhetoric from both sides... time to do my own research on the real truth.

Googie

hotly debated topic

Found 80,000 results.

Literally the first link that agrees with what you already believe

Completely supports your viewpoint without challenging it in any way

Another link

Don't worry about this one.

...jackpot
"Since learning about confirmation bias, I keep seeing it everywhere!"
System 1 - Biases

- Perception
- Narrative
- Experience
- Culture
- Beliefs and feelings
- Judgements

Stigma
‘Othering’

Goffman 1961; Kahneman and Tversky 1974; Wolfensberger 1999
System 2

- In control of self - Planned

But

- Can take time and effort - skills might be difficult

- Self-awareness critical

- Rehearsal improves application
Switching from System 1 to system 2

- Being calm and ‘in control’ and aware of which system you are in (system 1 or system 2)
- Focus on what we can control
- Making a plan
- Value of mentoring
In a crisis

• Gain control of OUR emotions

• Reduce OUR stress

• Have a PLAN

“If the oxygen mask drops put on your own mask before helping others”
Othering

Words we use: Examples

Stop "othering" me!

What's "othering"?

Your kind could never understand.
Switching from System 1 to system 2

- Flipping narratives
- Reframing
- Power of narrative and language
- How we describe people behaviour and events
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System 1 descriptions</th>
<th>System 2 descriptions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complex</td>
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<td>Aggressive</td>
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Deep understanding

Sociology

‘Verstehen’

• Deep understanding of the lived experience of the other—‘seeing around the corner’

• Narrative and Culture

Psychology

Weber

Therapeutic relationship

• Unconditional positive regard

• Active listening

Rogers
Learning theory

- Relevance of role models
- Understanding individual v group behaviour e.g. compliance, conformity, coercion and obedience

Bandura; Zimbardo; Asch; Milgram
Understanding stress

Physiology

- Cortisol and stress response
  - Arousal
  - Brain development
  - Behaviour

Pfaff et al
McDonnell et al
Making a plan

System 1 to system 2

• Reducing stress through planning AND rehearsal

• Preparation, reflection and TIME to (examine impressions) understand self and others (Verstehen)

• Rehearse
Evaluation

• Synergy is undergoing evaluation by University of Athens and University of Peloponnese
Attica

- Attica schools
- 34 in programme - all age
- To date no child excluded from a participating school
“There is greater activation in our strategic thought processes. We now rely more on planning and less on spontaneous and impulsive action. Through Synergy we have gained a deep understanding of the “other” and the “self”, and how we can empower others (teachers) through showing respect and cultivating abilities and skill sets.”

Tzonaka Josephina, Synergy Mentor
Synergy status

- CPD accredited
- Undergoing evaluation (ongoing)
- Rolled out internationally – UK, Singapore, Australia, Malta, Greece
- Context for further in-depth work – e.g. Crisis management, sexuality, homelessness, forensic settings, Elderly persons
- University of Bath: University of New England NSW: Australia
Structure of Synergy

Seminar
- Introduction: 2 hours
- Principles and description

Practice workshop 6 hours (CPD)
- Principles and application
- Impact of mind-set and narrative – change strategies

Mentor workshop 6 hours (CPD)
- Principles and techniques of mentoring and application
“Three things in life are important, the first is to be kind, the second is to be kind and the third is to be kind”
Take home points

• if WE change the way WE think
• If WE change the story
• If WE change our behaviour
• WE might change the outcome
• WE need help to do this
With thanks to
Katerina Laskaridou
Michael McCreadie
Linda Woodcock

Synergy mentors at
AIKATERINI LASKARIDIS FOUNDATION
Piraeus, Greece

THANK YOU
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