Kaz Stuart

Reclaiming our agency: working together for children, young people and families

Context

- Change for children – directives to work together to protect children following the Climbié and Baby Peter incidents such as the;
- 2004 Children Act that mandated integrated working, leading to;
- Key policy changes and support tools such as; Information sharing, lead professional, common core, contact point, common assessment framework. All reinforced by the;
- 2011 Spending Review meant people had to work together as there was less of everything
- On-going difficulties as it wasn't that simple…

Why is collaboration hard?

There is complexity structurally and interpersonally:
- Multiple personalities, identities, cultures, practices coming together
- Different views of what should be done and what are priorities
- Structural differences in pay, status, hours, location
- A complex and dynamic system of work
- Complex nature of social issues
- Can't stop the day job to affect the change

What it is supposed to achieve..

- More effective working (can such causality ever be proved when it is so longitudinal and multi factoral)?
- More cost effective working due to cost savings in pooled budgets and more effective work (but collaboration can take longer and so cost more)
- …and therefore collaborative advantage (achieving more together than you could alone)..but you run the risk of collaborative inertia (achieving less than you could have done alone)
- The 'only' solution to intractable social issues (an assumption that it is the panacea of all ills).

Messages from society

- It's all about winning – the free market economy promoted competition not collaboration
- We don't trust you – increased management and evidence based practice meant you had to 'prove' you were working well
- You're no good – media coverage, participation and increased control reduced people's sense of professionalism
- It's all your own fault – individuals people and practitioners were expected to take personal responsibility for themselves and their situation
- Be afraid - ideas of being at risk and vulnerable affected the people we work with, and practitioners attitudes to work in that they were afraid of getting it wrong.

This study

- 4 action research cycles with 196 participants across multiple sectors and levels of the children's workforce
- 1. My diary of leading a collaborative group
- 2. Activity System analyses with groups of managers
- 3. Developmental workshops with a collaborative group in a Children's Trust
- 4. Interviews with individuals and observation of a multi disciplinary team
- 196 participants
- The findings of each action research cycle were brought together and a new model for collaborative agency proposed.

Why agency?

Agency is a combination of:
- Awareness of the situation or context, awareness of self and awareness of others
- Making choices or decisions on the basis of that awareness
- Intentionally acting (even if that act is doing nothing) on the basis of the decisions made.
- We all need to use our agency to benefit children and young people – and we need them to use their agency to help themselves.

There were five central themes that emerged from the study of agency

- Structures that enable and constrain
- Professional identities that support or detract
- Empowerment as a process of developing agency
- Agency, and the ways that it can be supported
- Professional learning as a vital tool to sustain the collaborative agency

Structures

Practitioners work together

Children, young people and families.

Organisations and 'professions'

The National context, policy, and taken for granted ways of being
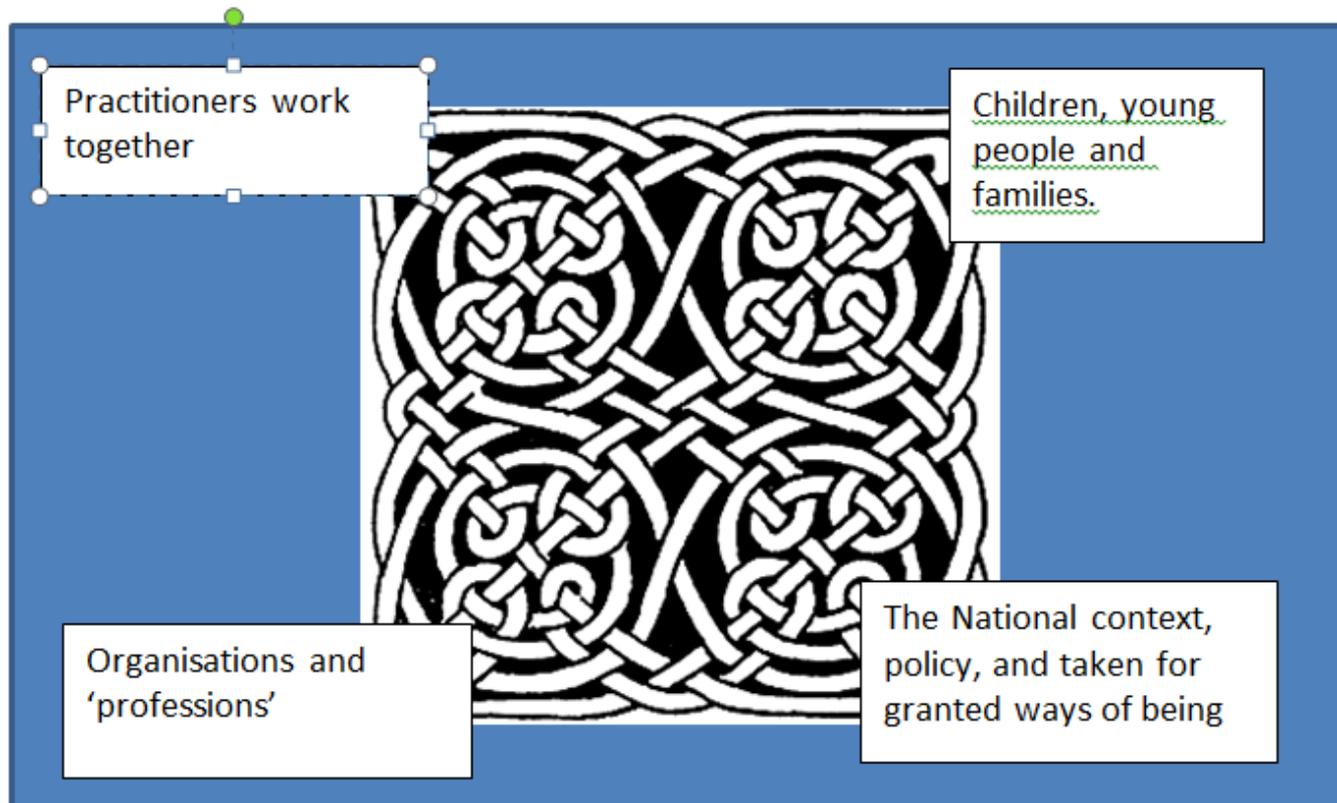
Figure 42: 'Structure and Agency at Multiple Levels' in the Collaborative Agency Model for Practitioners

Structures

There were four integral levels that co-exist (they are not nested or a hierarchy). These are;

- Macro – government, policy, societies messages
- Meso – your organisation, their rules, practices, ways of working
- Micro – you and your practice and ways of working
- Clients – the children, young people and families we work with

Multiple factors at all of these levels will enable and constrain our agency, and the agency of one another.

So for example.....where are the different layers?

- I am a social worker in a team around the child. I have been assigned to work as the lead professional. We all get together and talk, but people seem to listen to the teacher more than they do to me. We have to use this form, but its really long. The young person just wants me to help them, not to go through all these questions. People don't have time to help, and disagree on what to do.

What enables and constrains you? How aware of structures are you?

Tools to support structural awareness

Tool	Purpose	Location
The Power Matrix (Ledwith)	The matrix 'illustrates the potential ways in which oppression overlays and interlinks' (Ledwith, 1997: 55)	http://www.stes-apes.med.ulg.ac.be/Documents_electroniques/MET/MET-PAR/ELE%20MET-PAR%207510.pdf On page 18 of the PDF.
PESTLE analysis	A simple but important tool that helps you understand the big picture of the environment you are operating in.	http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_09.htm
Activity System Mapping (Engeström)	A tool to aid mapping of systems	http://www.edu.helsinki.fi/activity/pages/chatanddwr/
Forcefield analysis	Identifies the forces for and against change	http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_06.htm
Barriers to partnership working	This is a practice guide for health managers that maps the territory very well	*www.jitscotland.org.uk/.../1250518249-Chapter%204%20-...*

Collective Professional Identity
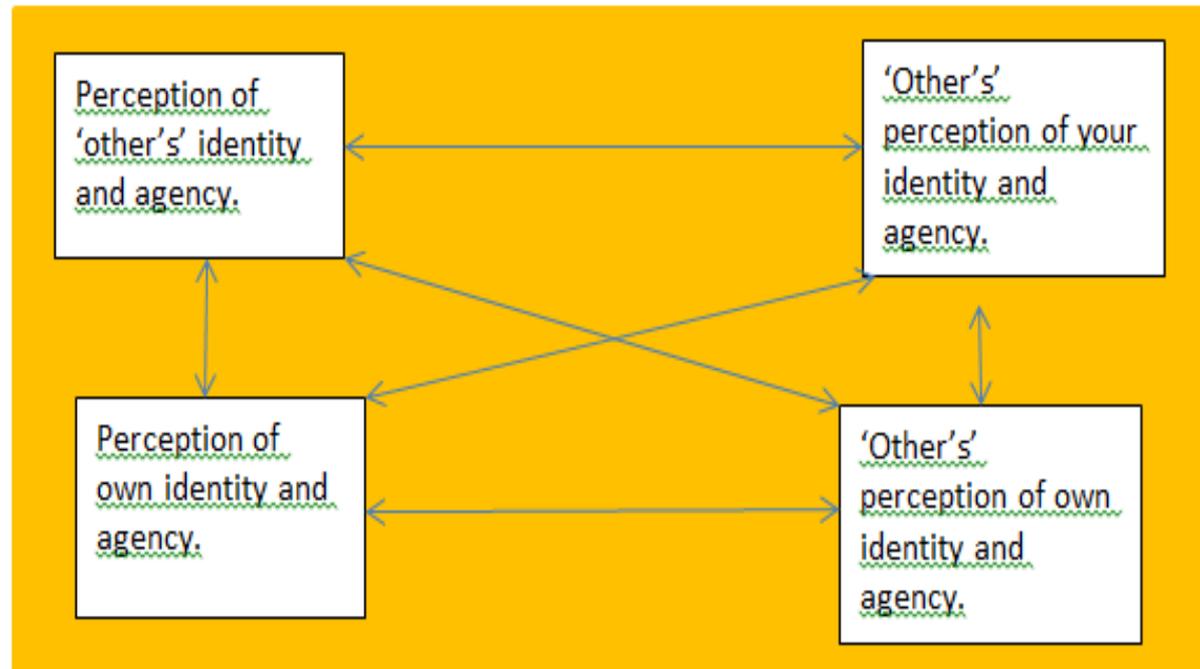
Figure 45: 'Professional Identity' in the Collaborative Agency Model for Practitioners

Collective Professional Identity

- We have a personal identity, and an individual professional identity, and when we work in groups, a collective professional identity.
- It is iterative – it keeps changing and is never fixed
- There is something unique about a multi professional identity and the associated ability to work across boundaries
- It influences what is viewed as possible
- It is influenced by others and influences others
- Our individual identities will affect the group or team's collective professional identity

So for example…..who is influencing who here?

- I really love my job because I think that I can do things well. The families I work with all like me and think that I help them. I fit well into the team, I feel like the things that I say are valued and that people listen to me. I am good at developing solutions, and really happy to go the extra mile to get things done. I feel like I am an effective community development worker.

What is your collective professional identity? What has shaped it?

Tools to support collective professional identities

| Tool	Purpose	Location
McKimm's Professional Identity Model	A useful tool to identity aspects of professional identities (used in this online article)	http://www.ijic.org/index.php/ijic/article/viewArticle/URN%3ANBN%3ANL%3AUI%3A10-1-101701/1507
Huxham and Vangen's Professional Identity Model	A great pictorial guide to how professional identiteis develop	
Who are you activity?		
Supervision and annual review opportunities		
360 degree feedback		
Lencioni's Dysfunctions of a Team	A great (if deficit) model of how teams of people can go wrong – how well do you work together?	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dRKa7ooRaQ

Collective Empowerment
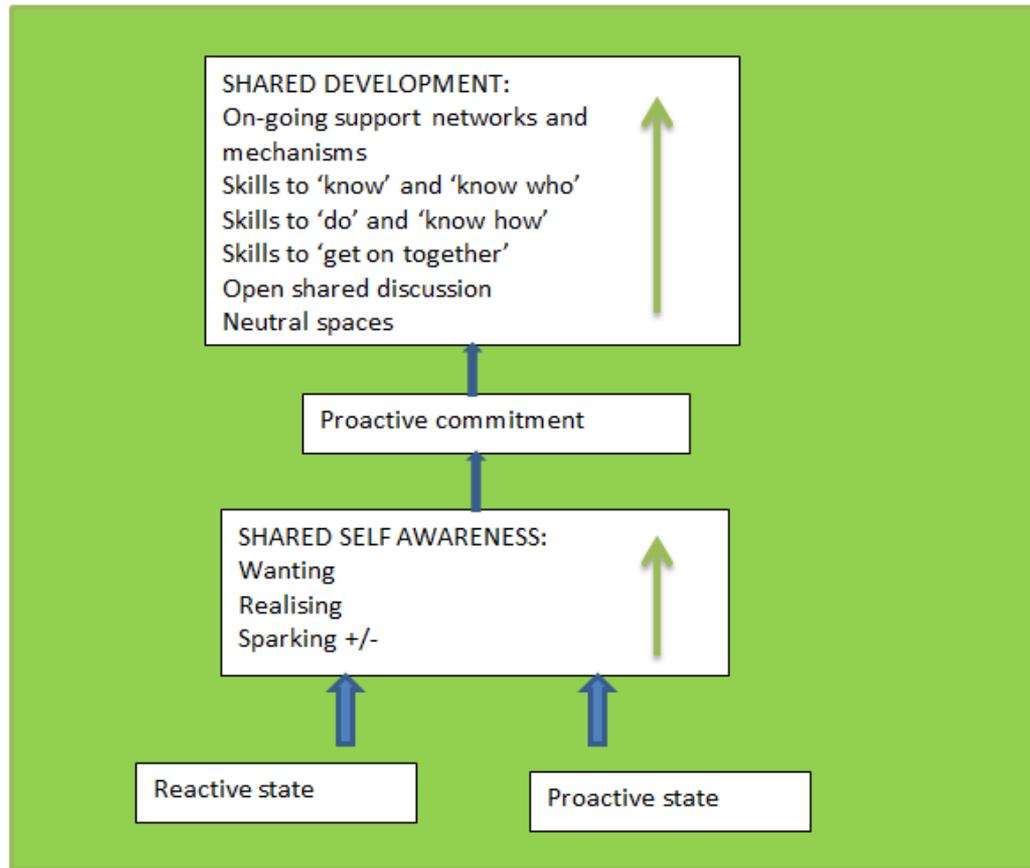
Figure 44: 'Empowerment' in the Collaborative Agency Model for Practitioners

Collective Empowerment

- The extent to which the group feels empowered is influenced by the structures we work in and our collective professional identity.
- Empowerment is the process by which we develop agency.
- In response to any situation we can be reactive or proactive
- Empowerment is not a fixed state, but ever changing from situation to situation.
- There are three key stages to empowerment as shown in the diagram.
- Individual levels of empowerment will affect the collective level of empowerment

So for example…..how empowered is the group that this person is in?

- I just think that it's all useless. Whatever I try I get blocked. The family are fed up and don't want to commit to doing anything. The team never listen anything that I have got to say so I just keep quiet in meetings now, and I am so tired of it all. There is just endless paperwork and pen pushing to prove that I have met their stupid targets.

How empowered are you in different contexts?

Tools to support collective empowerment

| Tool	Purpose	Location
Goal setting	Great tools to help you work out how to get what you want.	http://www.mindtools.com/page6.html
Motivation	Obvious, but useful tips…	http://zenhabits.net/get-off-your-butt-16-ways-to-get-motivated-when-youre-in-a-slump/
Self Belief	Neuro Linguistic Programming helps develop positive self belief, here is an example of how…	http://www.uncommonhelp.me/articles/self-belief/
SWOT	A simple way to identify where you are…	http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_05.htm

Collaborative Agency
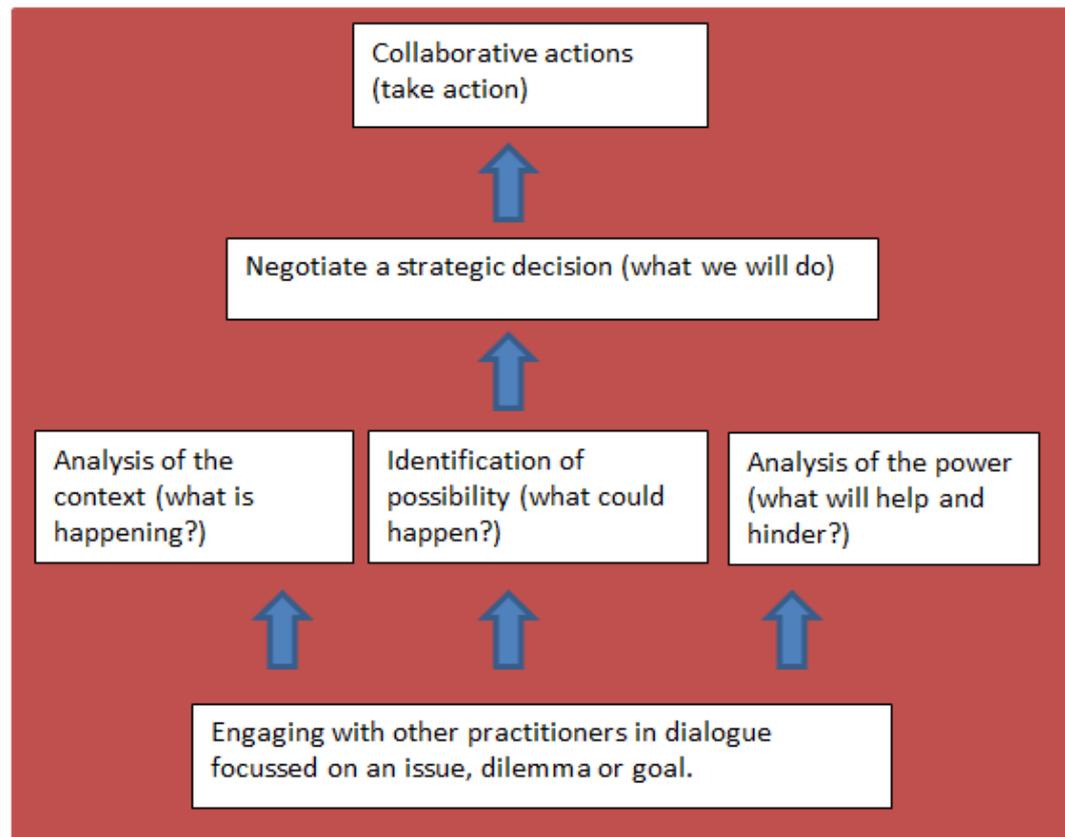
Figure 43: 'Agency' in the Collaborative Agency Model for Practitioners

Collaborative Agency

Working together in conversation (dialogue) it involves three things:

- Collective awareness (of the context, possibilities and power)
- Collectively making choices
- Collectively acting with intentionality (doing nothing is acting)

So for example.....how effective is this team?

Well we all sat down together and worked out what was going on. We were really surprised to see how many contradictions there were between service aims! Once we mapped them all we tried to all step back and see it from the families perspective, and take a needs led approach. The answer was then clear, but it still took a lot of discussion to sort out how we would make it happen.....

How much agency do you have? What impact do you have on the world?

Tools to support your collaborative agency

Tool	Purpose	Location
Group processes	The classic model by Tuckman	http://www.infed.org/thinkers/tuckman.htm
Faciliatation	This is a resource for researchers, but very applicable to all contexts	http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/1.Vitae-guidetofacilitation-191208-V1.pdf
Conflict management	This is the classic conflict management programme	http://www.kilmanndiagnostics.com/catalog/thomas-kilmann-conflict-mode-instrument
Communication		
Cultural web	A tool to align culture with strategy	http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newSTR_90.htm
Consultation tools	The Scottish health authority super guide to consultation	http://www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file77988.pdf
Partnership / participation tools	Wilcox's comprehensive guide to participation and parntership	http://www.partnerships.org.uk/guide/tour.htm
Emotional Intelligence	It helps if you are all self aware and aware of others	http://danielgoleman.info/topics/emotional-intelligence/

Collaborative Professional learning

- Situated learning i.e. relevant to your specific context and happening IN that context with regard to that context
- Inquiry based i.e. asking questions about what works and what doesn't work, exploring issues and questions that are grounded in practice
- Using a third space i.e. a place that is neutral for all the participants
- Learning together in multi disciplinary teams, learning about and from one another and negotiating new practice
- All of which help develop a shared critical pedagogy i.e. the ability to be aware of and critique current policy and practice, to develop new possibilities, and to act together collectively.

So for example.....what kinds of learning can you spot?

Well we get together once a week and review cases. Its really useful as we get to hear how other people are doing things. Sometimes we have right arguments, but I think its good that we all say what we think. Sometimes we then go off and try to find out more, or see what other ways there are to compare to what we do. Mainly though its sorting out issues as they arise.....

How do and when do you learn? What type of knowledge to you value?

Tools to support inter professional learning.

Tool	Purpose	Location
Action learning sets	A useful site to show you how to set up action learning	http://www.actionlearningsets.com/php/news.php?id=4
Types of knowledge		
Interprofessional learning	This is the lead site for IPE (within health)	http://www.caipe.org.uk/resources/principles-of-interprofessional-education/
Problem based learning	This paper describes PBL for professionals	http://online.sfsu.edu/~rpurser/revised/pages/problem.htm
Communities of practice	Here is Wenger's site itself	http://www.ewenger.com/theory/

Reassembling the parts…..

How these fit together....
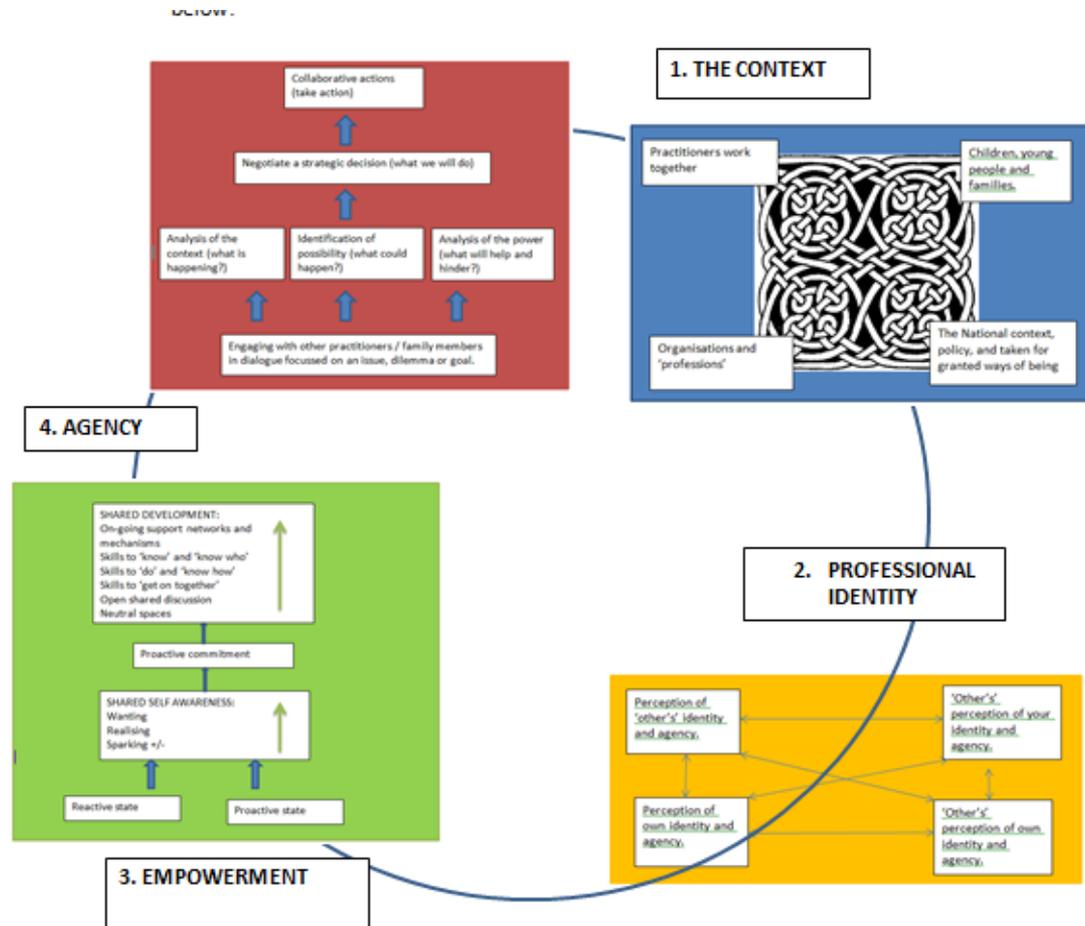
The Collaborative Agency Model

- 1. The **structures** or context exists before we arrive in it – it has been created by the agents before us. It provides enabling and constraining factors.
- 2. How we are placed in the context, and viewed by others influences how we see our collaborative **professional identity**
- 3. This in turn influences our level of collaborative **empowerment** – we may either be proactive or reactive to the structures that we are in – this leads to people's agency.
- 4. To affect positive change (for ourselves!) or the children and young people we work with, we need to be empowered to act with positive intent – we need collaborative **agency**.
- 5. The affect of our agency is to change or reinforce the structures in which we are situated, creating the same or new conditions that shape future identities, empowerment and agency.

Implications

- Critical pedagogy to help us be aware of the mutual interplay of structures that enable and constrain us
- Professional identity work – this needs to be done and not taken for granted
- Explicit process of empowerment – nested empowerment means we need to empower at every level
- Deliberate fostering of collaborative agency requires situated learning in third spaces and shared inquiry
- Organisations, groups of practitioners, individual practitioners and the people we work with all need agency. Developing it at any level will help foster it on other levels….

How, if it all, is this useful for you? Please send feedback to:
kazstuart480@gmail.com