

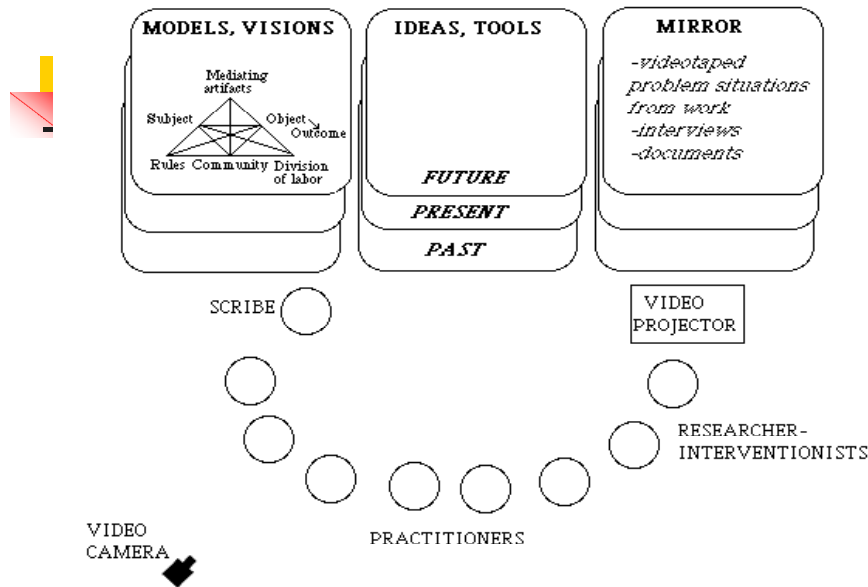
## **Intervention and changes in practice**

In the *Learning in and for Interagency Working* Project the focus of our research has been on the operational work of education, social care and health professionals working within children's services. In each local authority our research methodology has been organised around series of 'developmental work research' workshops involving operational staff. Prior to (and in between) the workshops the research team collects interview and observational data that is then scrutinised in workshop settings by researchers and children's services professionals from each local authority. The aim is to build upon professionals' 'everyday' understandings of multiagency working, juxtaposing these with reflective, systemic analysis of the ways in which current working practices (or 'activity systems') either enable or constrain the development of innovative multiagency working.

Our workshops are broadly derived from the 'Change Laboratory' intervention sessions, developed by Engestrom and his colleagues in Helsinki (Engestrom, 2007). In the most recent phase of the research we have conducted six workshops in each of our three local authority research sites. Each workshop lasts about two hours. The central tool of the Change Laboratory is a 3x3 set of surfaces for representing the work activity (Figure 2). Practitioners participating in the Change Laboratory process face the surfaces and also each other. One or more researcher-interventionists are present to guide the process. A video projector is important since videotaped work situations are typically used as material in the laboratory sessions. Each session is also videotaped for research and to facilitate the reviewing of critical laboratory events in subsequent sessions. In these sessions current working practices of team members are discussed, tensions and dilemmas are highlighted and alternative ways of working proposed. One way of interrogating practice is for a practitioner to be invited to present an overview of a case based on a pupil trajectory. This will have been prepared in a prior meeting with a researcher from the LIW team. The purpose of these sessions is that the practitioners discuss the objects of professional activity. This work is supported though the use of a range of devices and procedures. These include templates of calendars (to summarise important events in the trajectory), maps (to depict the key parties involved), and agreements (to summarise the division of labour amongst the parties). Practitioners may also employ support devices (agreements,

calendars, and maps) to highlight and remediate the temporal aspect, the sociospatial aspect, and the relational negotiational aspect of the work (Engestrom *et al*, 2003).

**Figure 2: Developmental Work Research sessions (layout)**



The *mirror* surface (see Figure 2) is used to represent and examine experiences from work practice, particularly problem situations and disturbances, but also novel innovative solutions. Videotaped work episodes as well as photographs, stories, interviews, quotes, narrative accounts can be used as mirror data. Engestrom (2007) describes the essence of the process of dual stimulation in the laboratories:

‘...the *model/vision* surface is reserved for theoretical tools and conceptual analysis. The complex triangular model of an activity system (Engeström, 1987, p. 78), displayed schematically in (Figure 2), is used to analyze the development and interconnections of the work activity under scrutiny. Systemic roots of specific but recurring problems and disturbances are traced and conceptualized as inner contradictions of the activity system. In addition to the general model of activity system, more specific conceptual models are often used. The third surface in the middle is reserved for *ideas and tools*.’ (Engestrom, 2007, p.10)

In later laboratory sessions the participants are facilitated to envision and draft proposals for concrete changes to be embarked upon. These actions will be guided by notions of professional learning informed by reflections on the tensions and dilemmas raised by data. In this way critical incidents and examples from the ethnographic material are brought into Change Laboratory sessions to stimulate analysis and negotiation between the participants. We predicted that different professions will often initially interpret these objects differently. The gradual affiliation to the object as a shared genre will, in part, evidence professional learning. The laboratory sessions are designed to serve as microcosms where potentials of co-configuration and knotworking can be experienced and experimented with. For example in one of our three study sites a multiprofessional team (MPT) has been formed by the local authority. The formation of the MPTs represents a reconfiguration of the material and social division of labour. It is one of four which have been established in this large rural / suburban authority near London. At present the MPT is comprised of individuals who were formerly members of professional teams within education which were centrally managed within the authority (Special Need Support, Educational Psychology, 1

Language Support, Attendance Officers etc). Each MPT is now managed locally. In the case of the MPT to which reference is made here, the local manager is a former attendance officer. Patterns of 'line management' have transgressed well established and powerful professional categories. For example, the educational psychologists are now managed by an attendance officer.

'...it's early in some ways stages of development. I mean we're still going through a process of development and there's a lot more work to be done in order to achieve if you like the ultimate government aim which is a totally holistic approach for children in delivering the out-... on the outcomes of the you know, Every Child Matters outcomes. ... The multi-professional team has come together and that works in an integrated way because formerly all those different Education professional groups worked separately. And now we're working much more closely together. Erm... but there... there's a way to go before we're all working together, and also we have our partner agencies such as Health partners and police. But we're only at the very early stages of

making those links. So there's quite a lot of... still a lot work to be done.'

Attendance Officer

In our most recent intervention a new form of working was discussed. Old lines of control were being disrupted as new forms of 'personalized' collaborative patterns of working emerged. For example, an attendance officer made direct (mobile phone mediated) contact with a psychologist in order to ensure that a child who was not attending school could get access to support for the bullying she experienced and her difficulties in learning. The traditional pattern of communication would have been for the attendance officer to ensure the child returned to school (which she did not) and that her difficulties with bullying and learning were reported to the school. The attendance officer 'broke the rule' of instituting attendance procedures and also subverted the traditional pattern of reporting. When the psychologist engaged with the child she also made enquiries at the school, which responded that her needs were not a priority and that the school's allocation of psychological support should not be expended on this pupil. The psychologist maintained engagement with child. The emergent and strengthening values of the MPT, which are cast in terms of a moral and ideological commitment to the needs of the whole child, rather than the services that have existed, subverted the former patterns of professional practices. Interestingly, the individual actors involved in this new form of practice seemed to be unaware that they were acting in a novel way. Thus, driven by this emergent ideology of the new interagency formation the old rules of the individual services were bent and broken. The new division of labour within the co-located interagency team provided a context for tacit learning.

In each workshop, analyses of multiagency practice are developed collaboratively between the research team and children's services professionals. These focus upon:

- **Present practice:** identifying structural tensions (or 'contradictions') in current working practices
- **Past practice:** encouraging professionals to consider the historical development of their working practices from their different perspectives/agencies

- **Future practice:** working with professionals to suggest new forms of practice that might effect innovations in multiagency working to support effective work with clients.

The stated aim of the workshops is to address the challenges of multiagency professional learning by:

- encouraging the *recognition* of areas in which there is a need for change in working practices
- suggesting possibilities for change through *re-conceptualising* the ‘objects’ that professionals are working on, the ‘tools’ that professionals use in their multiagency work and the ‘rules’ in which professional practices are embedded.

Clearly this intervention constitutes a new form of professional practice in and of itself. It will take some time to embed this in and across professional ways of being. It will also require strategic support from each agency. The central advantage is that the intervention places the development of effective interagency working at the centre of the professional gaze. It also recognises that work should be organised for learning new forms of practice, particularly when that practice involves changes in boundary relations between agencies. In a professional context where so much emphasis is placed on skills and knowledge this form of work is important because it tacitly recognises that desired forms of practice require professional ways of being as well, as skills and knowledge.

### **References:**

Engeström, Y. (2007) Putting Activity Theory to Work: The Change Laboratory as an Application of Double Stimulation, in: H. Daniels, M. Cole and J.V. Wertsch (Eds.)

The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky (New York, Cambridge University Press), in press. Engeström, Y., Engeström, R. and Kerosuo, H. (2003) The discursive construction of collaborative care, *Applied Linguistics*, 24, 286-315.