



Case stories

Seeing the situation afresh:
How can I help resolve a long standing
quarrel between three of my students?

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September 2008



Summary

Monik has seen an issue arise in her classroom and approached resolving it systemically. By bringing the three girls together and using place people as representatives for themselves, she sets up a mini constellation that enables the girls to see their situation from a clearer perspective.

This frees them to tell their stories, and acknowledge who else may play a part in them by bringing in other 'place people' or 'representatives'.

The constellation enables the children to understand their own issues about belonging and to deal with them in a new way.

Monik is made aware of a key systemic principle – to look at a situation without judgement, which makes it much easier to work with and resolve.

The situation I faced

There is a long-lasting quarrel between three girls in my class (one from Morocco, one from Turkey and one from Congo), with a fixed pattern.

S, F and R often seek out each other's company. Lately, there have been frequent quarrels. What I can often see is that two of them are together and the third one is alone. It is a continually changing context. The two girls who are together talk about the third one who is alone. The third one feels excluded. Also, number one tells number two about what number three has said about number two. Number two then gets angry at number three, who denies that she said that, etc.

What actions did I try?

I invite the three girls to have a talk together, sitting round a table. In the centre of it I put a few place people

- I ask each of them to choose a place person for herself
- I put the place people in a constellation that represents the situation as I see it
- I ask the girls if they perceive it in the same way and say, "This is what I can see, can you see that too?"

Then there is an avalanche of stories. These three girls often have difficulties in finding the right words. But apparently the place people help make things clear. They begin to move the puppets from left to right, to stand behind a wall, sit on the bus and the stories are going on and on. Also other place people make appearances. After this talk I thank them for their explanation and feel they have done enough.

What insights did I get?

I am impressed. For me this is the first time I have done something like this and I can see that the children are 'in' from the start.

I was impressed by what the children 'saw'. They had a clear understanding of the situation (actually they saw more than I did). Bringing the situation into vision by means of the place people created the necessary distance to view the situation.

I realised how important, but also how difficult, it was to look without any judgment, to look in the same way as looking at a painting. My introductory sentence, "This is what I can see, can you see that too?" surely added to the problem. I can see that it often goes wrong if you have a particular judgment about a quarrel, or are defending someone, accusing someone, even if you don't say it. Children will feel that immediately. The more I refrain from that, the quicker the quarrel will be settled in a way I do not expect.

How does my insight affect what I'm now doing now?

The place people help to avoid the pitfall of accusing each other (it was you who did it, no, it was you...). As everybody's attention was directed to the centre, the figures and what was happening, there was hardly any attack, defence, etc... I was highly impressed by the children's involvement.

Two months later I perceive that there is much more peace among the three girls. When two of them are together, the third one seeks the company of someone else.

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