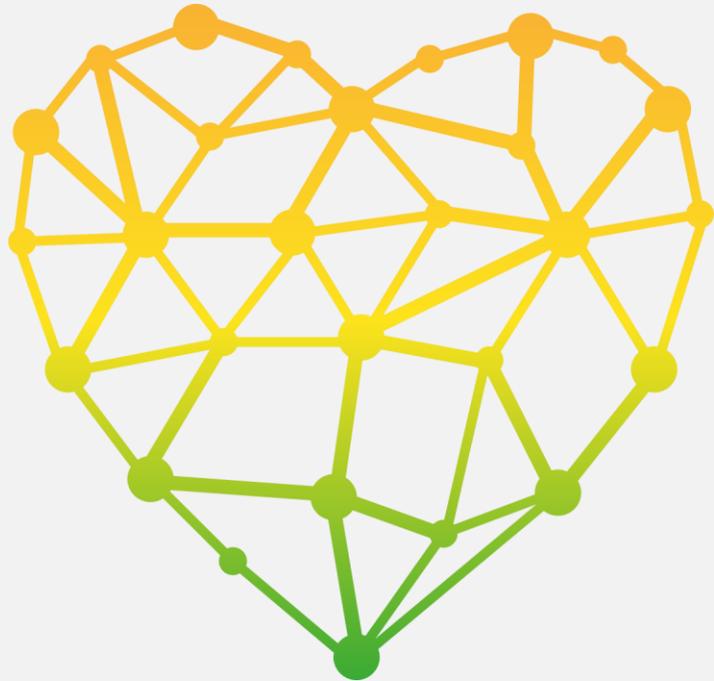




Tulevaisuuden  
lastensuojelu



# Making Space for Dialogue in Child Welfare Services

Katarina Fagerström



# Systemic approach in a context of control

- In what way are dialogical and systemic practices possible in the context of child protection?
- What kind of expertise does a family therapist bring to child protection services?
- How was the learning process for the social workers?
- How do the clients receive the systemic practice services?



# Background

The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare has coordinated the systemic practice model of child welfare since 2017. The model is the Reclaiming Social Work model (RSW model; the so-called, Hackney's model), from which a practice model adapted to the Finnish child welfare system was produced (Fagerström 2016 and Lahtinen et al. 2017) as part of the Program for the Transformation of Child and Family Services (LAPE).

The practice model was piloted in 31 municipalities in 14 regions in 2018–2019. The developmental work of the model continued at SyTy! project in 2019. Since 2020, the national coordination of the National Institute for Health and Welfare has organized a national steering group to consolidate and further develop the practice model and to extend it beyond child welfare to family services (Laitinen 2017; Petrelius 2020).



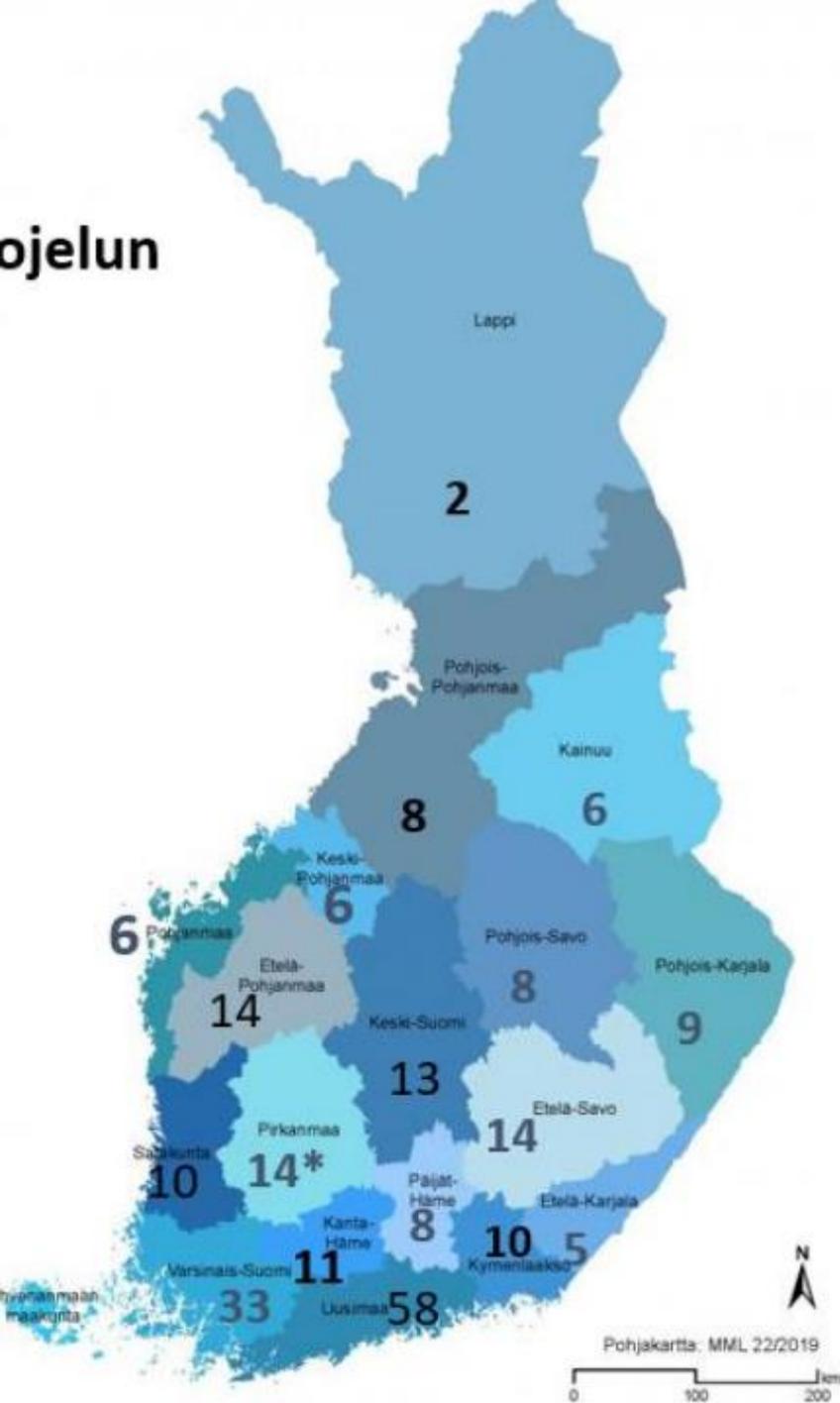
The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare has also continued trainer training to support the consolidation work, organised international advanced training for trainers, established a trainer bank on the THL website and maintained a writing developer network (Petrelius et al. 2021; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, quality recommendation 2019).

In 2021, suitable evaluation models have also been launched. Flinck & Aaltio (2020) applying to support your work through FIT instrument piloting (Miller & Bertolini 2018). Systemic thinking and the practice model have also been strengthened and disseminated as part of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health's government grant projects for the multidisciplinary development of child welfare in 2020–2022.



# Systemic Child Protection Teams in Finland

ojelun

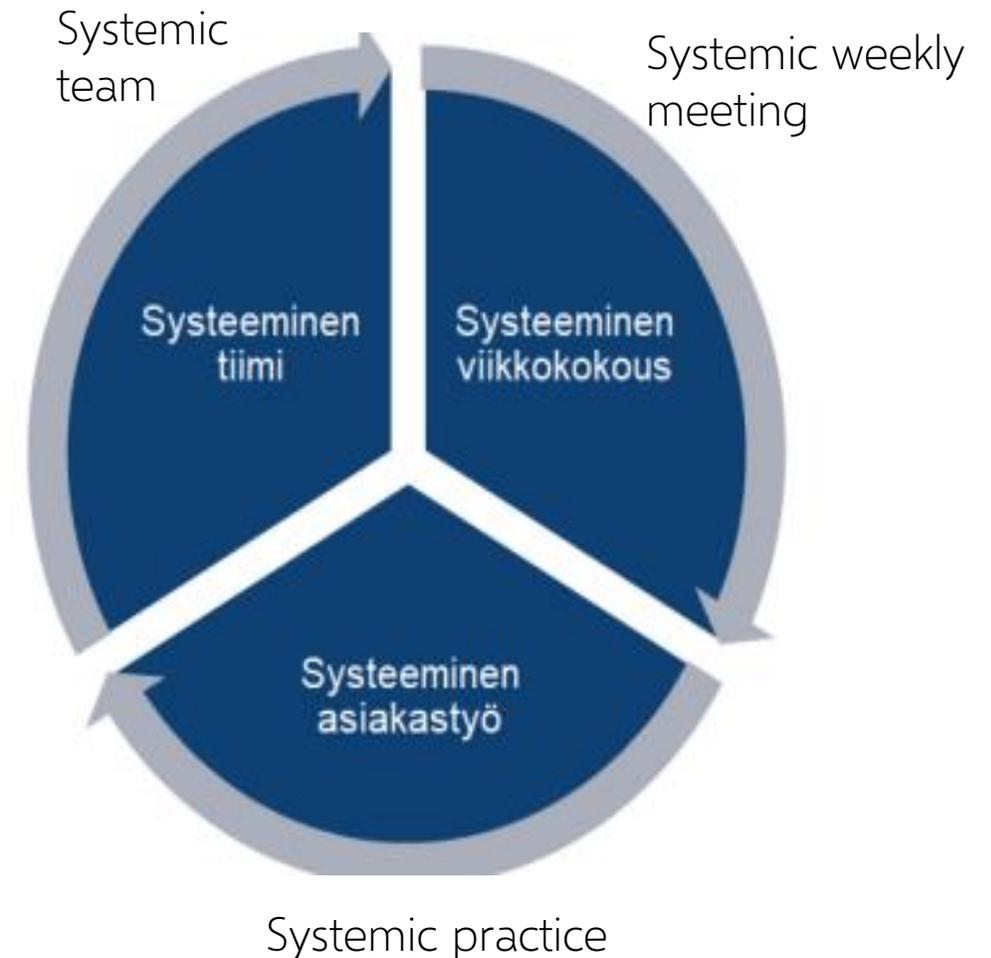


- The Systemic Practice model is in use in 18 counties (22 welfare areas). All together there are 220 teams in the whole country.
- Clients are involved in systemic teams, as a rule, 26%, and occasionally 70%, 4% never.
- In 2021, child welfare network partners have been trained in the systemic practice model in the regions. (Child psychiatry, school social workers, substance misuse workers etc.)
- To guarantee that the model is rooted in the services, there are, according to a national questionnaire, local steering groups in 48 % of the welfare areas.
- The systemic practice model is included in the welfare plans in 50% of the welfare services counties.



# Key Elements (Aaltio & Isokuortti 2019)

- This practice model has three core elements, which are all interconnected:
- systemic practice,
- a systemic team,
- and a systemic weekly meeting.

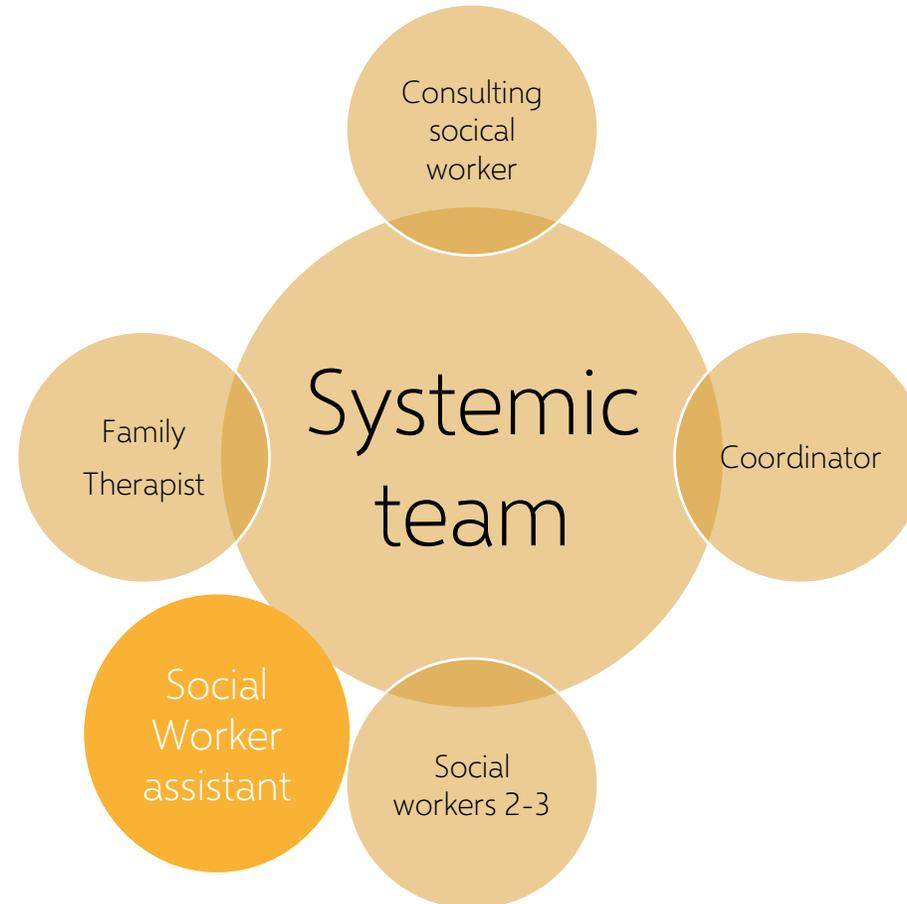




1. workers are trained to carry out systemic practice with service users.
2. they are organised into small systemic teams, in which they work under the guidance of a consulting social worker and together with a systemic family therapist and coordinator.
3. the team handles cases and reflects on them together in the systemic weekly meeting in which the workers in the team learn to carry out systemic practise and receive systemic supervision for their work.



# Systemic team structure





## **Scientific dilemma: implementation research / flexibility in systemic practise**

- Aaltio & Isokuortti 2020:
- The assumption is that gaps in the implementation of these three core elements will weaken the model's effectiveness, and thus these are all core elements, which cannot be freely selected and applied.
- But: variety in contexts, different learning styles, developmental work teaches....



# The story how systemic practise was rooted i Porvoo child welfare services 2017-2022





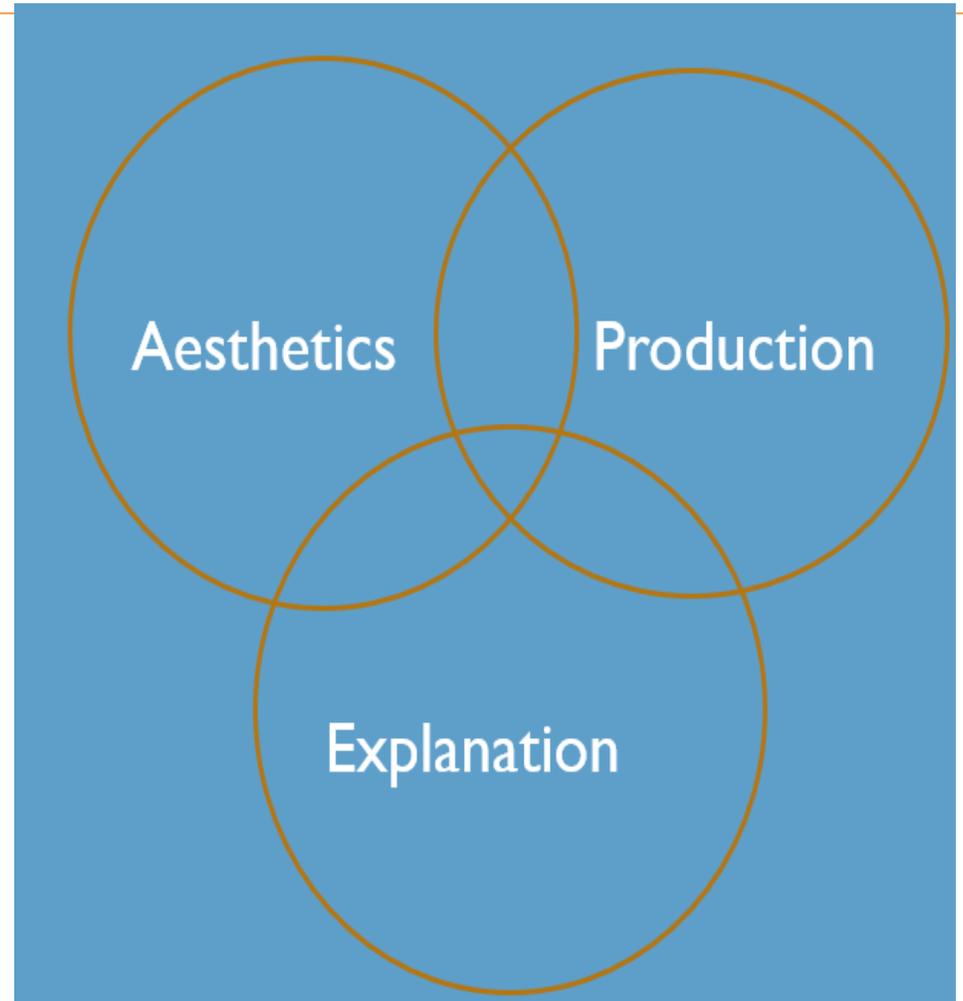
# How did we put systemic thinking into practice?

- Systemic training 3x2 days + 3 supervisions autumn 2018
- Weekly meetings + family therapist, september 2018
- Systemic methods – traffic lights (clients' situations) genograms, three houses (signs of safety), collaborative helping map
- Coordinator, january 2019
- 2 Systemic teams. January 2020
- Pandemic – weekly meetings and systemic teams on Teams
- September 2021, almost the whole staff had changed. 3 social work assistances (social handledare) added to the teams



# Domains Model (Lang, Little and Cronen, 1990)

- Tensions between acting more 'therapeutically' and acting to protect in terms of the different kinds of activity required.
- Which domain (or context) is strongest in influence, or requires most attention, in a given situation?
- We do this in order to create a useful frame for hypothesizing and guiding action and as a tool for structuring conversations.
- Within each domain the individual values a particular way of seeing and acting in the world.
- In order to be able to do this we need to understand that there isn't one way of seeing and acting in the world, knowing that the position we take is temporary.





## Domain of production = Domains of action

- Acting “as if” there was an objective reality
- One established truth – a “universe” where there is right and wrong, good and bad
- Clear set of rules and conventions
- Assessments and judgements are made within established criteria e.g. diagnosis, court, safeguarding investigations
- Consent is not always necessary e.g. CP investigations, Court orders
- Domain of production are allowed to talk ‘as if’ they is certainty about issues.



# Domain of explanation

- Many truths all equally valid, although not necessarily all equally desirable – the “multiverse”
- Consent is essential
- Primary focus is to facilitate change
- Through elaboration of many stories/truths
- Concerned with understanding and creativity.
- Curious about meanings
- Let go of ideas that ‘fit’ in order to hear other ideas and perspectives
- Do not give advice as to what should be done

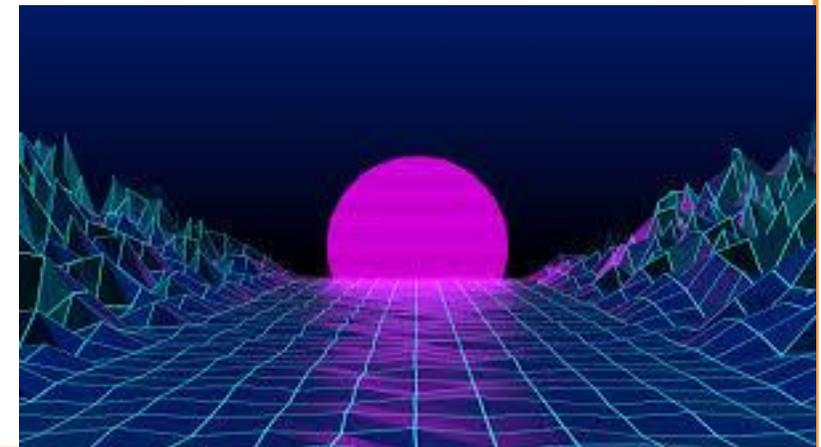
**I have no  
special talent.  
I am only  
passionately  
curious.**

**ALBERT EINSTEIN**



# Domain of aesthetics

- The fit between theory and practice, ethical issues, grace and elegance.
- Be concerned with 'how does it feel?' and 'how does this influence?'
- How are you approaching? What are your biases?/ moral judgments? Conversation about how we think we are presenting and what others might think. (talk as though family listening/ or what would family think about that statement?)
- POWER - skillful (and measured) use of authority. Ability to constrain/ GRRACCEESS





Illusion  
Action to limit consequences of unknowns. Immediate safety decisions.

Exploration of new understandings enables more choices for action which 'fit' with multiple positions.

**Certainty (knowledge)**

**Uncertainty**

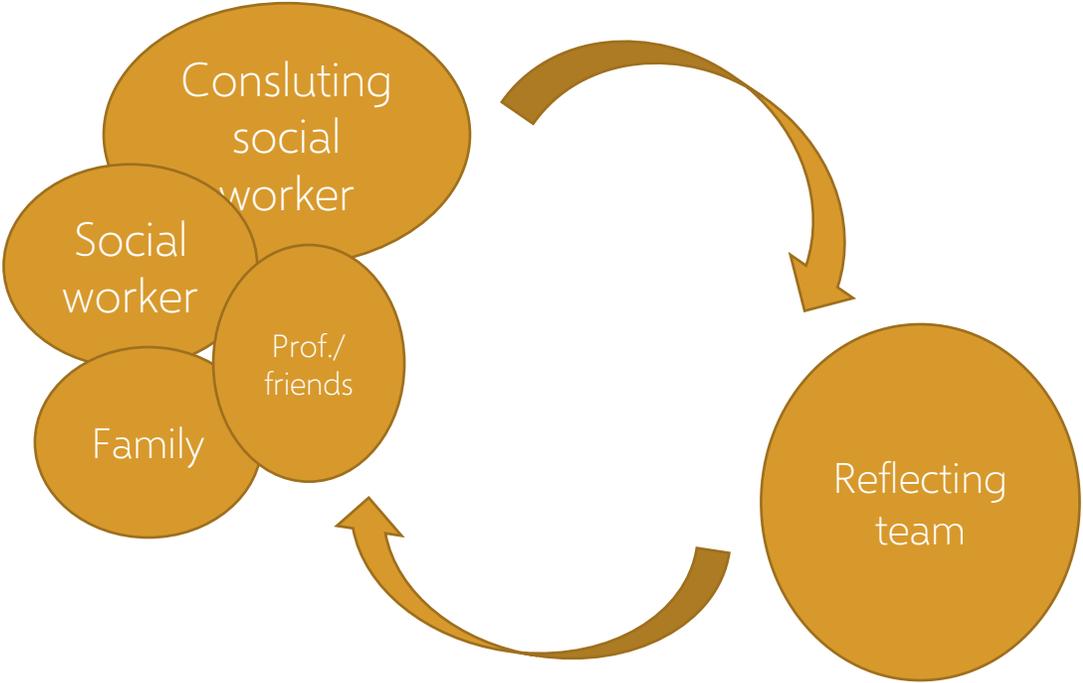
Poor fit between limited (known) choices and intuitive sense of something else...

Too many unknowns creates overwhelming emotional experience.

**Unsafe (emotion)**



# Reflecting team with family and network



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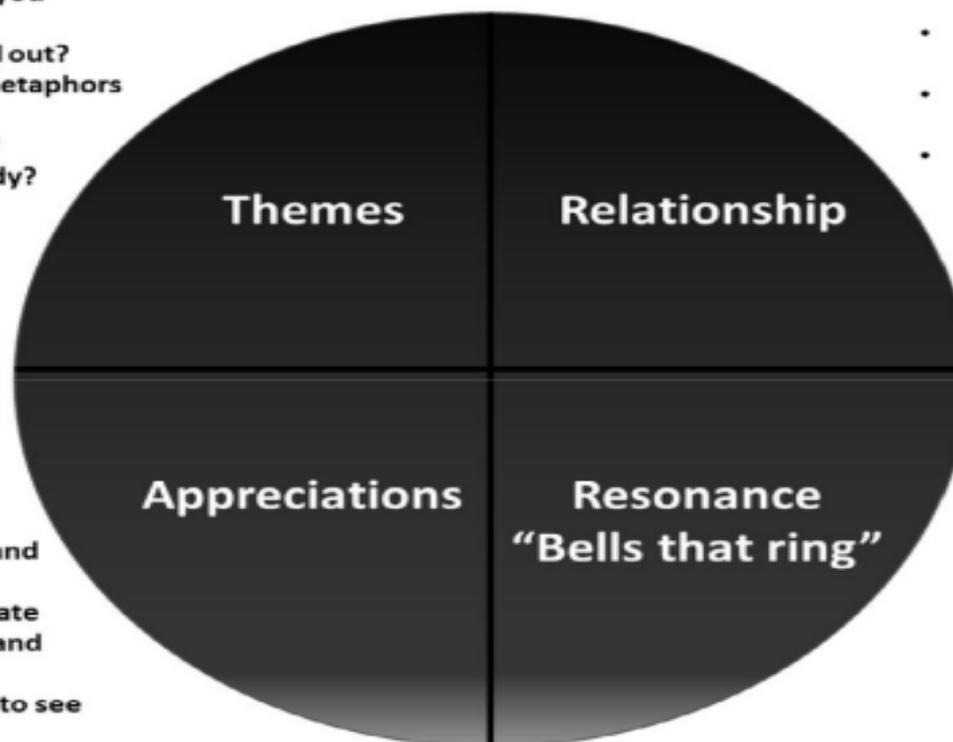
**‘Step by step, side by side’: the quest to create relational artistry through systemic practice within children’s social care**

Karen Partridge,<sup>a</sup> Paul Dugmore,<sup>b</sup> Helen Mahaffey,<sup>c</sup> Mark Chidgey<sup>c</sup> and James Owen<sup>d</sup>



## The Reflecting Discussion

- What themes did you notice?
- What words stood out?
- What images or metaphors did you notice
- What do you feel?
- Where in your body?



- What relationships are getting constructed?
- How are people relating to each other?
- What do they want from each other?
- How are people honouring and respecting each other?

- What did you like in what you have seen and heard?
- What do you appreciate about the presenter and their clients?
- What would you like to see more of?
- What would you like to see less of?

- How does what you have heard connect to you, personally or professionally?
- What rings a bell in your work context?
- How has what you have heard moved you or changed your own thinking?
- What might you take away from this ?



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