



Case Story

On the brink: How can I best support a student who is experiencing considerable difficulty?

by Christine Charles, Special Leader for Behaviour, Ralph Allen School, Bath, UK
May 2008



archive photo

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Summary

The incredible effect that Tim had on the adults present was largely due to his immediate willingness and ability to take part in a constellation, with no knowledge of the process. Straight away, he began to show an intuitive understanding and was able to sense, feel and see insights from the constellation. Tim has special educational needs, largely for areas concerning communication, both spoken and written. However, he was able to describe his feelings and what he sensed in an articulate manner which pleasantly surprised those he works with, and all of us present.

In his own constellation, Tim's representative was visibly torn in two by his loyalty to family and to his peers. This demonstrates how much young people will carry in order to support the systems around them, and how easily they can adapt in order to belong to those systems. For Christine, it has been a fascinating learning journey and one that has taught us all that the dissolving barriers to learning experience is only the first small step on a journey. There is often a huge amount of follow up work that is required by the people who work daily with these youngsters.

What was your question all about?

Tim was a student at the school who has language difficulties. He was struggling to control his anger in certain situations and was involved with drugs and alcohol misuse. This, along with his other issues, was having a big impact on him. Despite all the support he was getting, his problems in school and at home were getting more and more serious, behaving badly in class and at the weekends getting into all sorts of trouble surrounding alcohol.

I was brought in after an incident that left Tim feeling that he was in a particularly bad place, one that he didn't want to be in anymore, but that he didn't know what to do about. When asked if there was anything I could do to help I thought of taking him (instead of his mum as I would normally do) to a Dissolving Barriers to Learning (dbl) workshop. This was a highly unusual thing to do because he was still only 15 years old.

What things did you try?

I spoke with Tim about the workshops and what happened. He said, very bravely, that he would try anything that might help. I then got his Mum's permission for him to go. So she brought him to the workshop but didn't stay in order to give him privacy. He and I went in together.

The constellator, Judith Hemming, asked him if he would like to take part in the first constellation as a representative or just watch. Amazingly, Tim chose to be a representative in it. Tim's courage to do this was absolutely brilliant. It gave him the opportunity to feel what it was like to be in a

constellation and directly feel the power of it. He amazed everyone, not only with his responses, but with his articulation of them.

Then it was his turn. He chose his representatives and chose me to represent his mum. There was a significant issue between his parents, and Tim seemed to be caught in the middle – dividing his loyalties. He took on board everything that Judith said and stood in as himself in the constellation.

Again, the maturity and insight of the things he said and felt were simply amazing. Many adults in these situations can be so overcome by the emotion of it that they find it difficult to say anything at all, but Tim seemed to carry the emotion within him, without letting it overpower him.

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What did you learn and what insights did you get?

For everyone concerned it was incredibly powerful to directly witness the strength and ability of this young person, and I think it made us realise even more how much children are able to carry and deal with – every second they are exceeding our expectations.

I was both amazed and proud to see how mature Tim was and how much he gave of himself and opened up about his background, especially with a member of staff (me) sitting there listening to him. He was going to leave after his constellation but he chose to stay and listen to the other issue holders, to be a part of it. I'm not entirely sure how the day has impacted on Tim in the long term, but I would like him to know, as I'm sure all those there would, what an impact it had on me.

The one major insight was to explore ways of doing simple constellations directly with the children I teach. It both encouraged and inspired me to try. Another was the importance of attending to the follow-up after a constellation. Tim got a lot of new thoughts from the constellation which he needed support in thinking through.

How does your insight affect what you're now doing and what difference is this making?

As a school, it changed the way we view the possibilities of the workshops; personally, it touched me deeply. It was a very powerful thing to do, especially with a student of that age. We learnt that it was not only possible to take a student to a dbi, but that they could be such a valuable and insightful part of the group.

Tim continues to face difficulties at home and in school. Although the day helped him to understand his situation better, it also opened up new issues for him. It must be acknowledged that these workshops are not a panacea, they are more a way of opening a door that enables us to begin to develop new ideas for moving forward. How we choose to move forward, and in which direction, is up to us and the journey is often as plagued with difficulties as it previously was.

Words of Appreciation

I would like to give thanks to Tim for the knowledge and experience that we gained from him that day, and to everyone who was a part of the day, for all their support.