

Who's Walking Through the Door:
Working with the Clinician's Construction of the Student

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Program Overview

- A 2-year program funded by the New York Community Trust and The New York State Health Foundation, serving 10 Sponsoring Organizations (SOs) each year
 - Grant year runs for entire calendar year, e.g., January – December 2022
- **Goal**: to enhance the capacity of the New York State’s School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) to respond to the increase in students’ behavioral health needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.



Today's Agenda

- Learning Objectives
- The Imaginary Student
- Transference & Counter Transference
- School Environment
- Tools of the Trade
- Q&A

Learning Objectives

- Define Imaginary Client
- Identify contexts at school in which the social worker confronts the Imaginary Client.
- Articulate how to work through transference and counter transference issues for the clinician.
- Create a toolbox of strategies based on working with the Imaginary Client concept.

EXERCISE

- Jot down first impressions of the referral and place them on a piece of paper into three categories: Description of client; reaction to client, engagement process, meeting parent?



Referral

Person making the referral: Ms. Applegate

- Students Name: Jose Rodriquez
- Reason for referral:

Jose is a 10 year old boy in my fifth grade class. The boy is totally obnoxious and won't listen to a word I say, definitely *hard to reach*.

Although he's pretty articulate, he fidgets around in his seat a lot and makes fart jokes which all the children laugh at. He looks at me sometimes and just stares. He also bites his shirt and chews his pencils. I've tried reprimanding him about his behavior but it doesn't work. I've tried giving him consequences like keeping him in his seat or having him stand in the back of the class but it doesn't seem to do him any good.

His mother rarely returns my phone calls. She came in once but was so demanding that I had to stop the meeting mid-way through – *just like her son*.

Recently he's been saying threatening things to the kids and just yesterday he threw a desk. Please see this kid!!



Creating the *Imaginary Client*

- In a nut shell what we've just done in this exercise is to see how easily we create an *imaginary client* from just a few notes and descriptions.
- Question: Are we treating the *Imaginary Client* or The Real one? Does being a clinician in a school exacerbate this phenomenon or not?

Imaginary Client



Polaroid Snapshot



Real vs. Imaginary



Stranger Anxiety





Assimilation +
Accommodation
=
Personal Introjections
≈
imaginary Client

Clinical Projections

- Transference
- Counter Transference



SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT



Tony's Mom



Treating the Diagnosis or Person?



Referrals





Notes on Memory & Desire

Memory is always misleading as a record of fact since it is distorted by the influence of unconscious forces. Desires interfere, by absence of mind when observation is essential, with the operation of judgment. Desires distort judgment by selection and suppression of material to be judged.

- W. Bion

Tools

WE NEVER BATH IN THE SAME RIVER TWICE.

- Heraclitus

- How do you prepare yourself to meet a new student?
- How do you pick up on meta-communication?
- How do you leave behind all expectations?
- What is the behavior saying?

Meta-communication



DONALD WINNICOTT



A Holding Environment

The Neutral Zone: A Safe Space to Work



The good enough mother

Social Worker as *Good Enough Mother*



Transitional Object

Social Worker as Transitional Object



Good Enough Social Worker



Supervision



The Major difference between the social worker and their SUPERVISOR – a good supervisor has been down the same path...just a few steps ahead.

Supervision

- Reality Testing
- Re-Parenting
- Good Enough Supervisor
- Container of Projections



Summary

- Curious Stance
- Suspend Judgment and Desire
- Resist Internal Distractions
- Relax, Let Go, Keep Breathing
- Treat the Person, not the Label
- Creating a *Holding Environment* in the Office Space
- Referrals Can Be Deceiving
- Reflect on the content, feeling and meaning of what you hear
- What is the Meaning of the Symptom
- Good Enough Supervision

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Bachelard, Gaston *“The Poetics of Space”*

Bion, Wilfred *“Notes On Memory and Desire”*

Kilduff, Arthur

Kivlahan, Coleen *“Burnout”*

Lenzi , John *“Deconstructing the Imaginary Patient”*

Simo, Joseph *“On the Construction of the Imaginary Patient”*

Winnicott, Donald *“The Maturation Process and The Facilitating Environment”*
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Questions



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[https://www.nysbhfoundation.org/behavioralhealth program](https://www.nysbhfoundation.org/behavioralhealth%20program)