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Response to Commentary on ‘Attaining Theoretical Coherence within Relationship-Based Practice in Child and Family Social Work: The Systemic Perspective’.

We welcome the opportunity to respond this commentary on our article. As we read it there seems to be three main points, and we will respond briefly to each in turn.

1. The ‘hybrid’ comment regarding the combined use of systemic and psychodynamic concepts is disputed

The bulk of the commentary seems to present a long argument to dispute our comment that Hingley-Jones and Ruch (2016) is adopting a ‘hybrid’ combination of systemic theory for understanding wider systems and psychodynamic principles for the personal interaction. While this point is not central to our argument, we hold that a straightforward reading of the paper does in fact indicate that the said authors’ conceptualisation of ‘relationship-based practice’ is more than simply a psychodynamic approach. This is clearly evidenced in the article abstract which states the intention to explore, ‘*the contribution of psychodynamic and systemic ideas to promoting relationship-based practice*’ (Hingley-Jones and Ruch, 2016, p.235).

2. The term ‘Relationship-Based Practice’ should refer exclusively to psychodynamically informed relationship-based practice.

We would counter that the phrase ‘Relationship-Based Practice’ simply denotes a practice that places the relationship, however theorised, at the heart of practice. While this phrase may have a heritage in the psychodynamic field, no orientation can credibly sequester a common language phrase such as this for their enduring exclusive use. What model of counselling or psychotherapy would nowadays be willing to accept that it is not relationship-based we wonder? The briefest Google Scholar search brings up articles on Relationship-Based Care (health care); Relationship-Based Partnership (Education) and Relationship-Based Model (Autism), which are all practices of various sorts, so it seems self-evident that ‘that ship has sailed’. Further, as noted above, even within the narrow frame that the commentator wishes to reserve its use, we can see that ‘Relationship-Based Practice’ includes more than psychodynamic theory according to some of its key theorists.
3. A range of theoretically distinct models should be maintained

We wholeheartedly agree with this point. The article is our attempt to set out how systemic and social constructionist theory in effect underpins the current predominant models practiced within Child and Family Social Work, which are commonly referred to as relationship-based models. It is our claim that the clear systemic underpinnings for these models are currently under-represented in the social work literature. We seek to redress this under-representation, thus hoping to ameliorate a degree of practice confusion and assist social workers to see the complementarity of such models. We do not seek to exclude Psychodynamic or Person Centred approaches as is inferred (or any other evidence-supported approach for that matter). We welcome them all as distinct and sometimes complementary 'lenses' that can help to organise our thinking and practices in ways that are helpful to our clients/service users. To seek to clarify the systemic approach is not to diminish others. Inherent in the ‘lens’ metaphor is the understanding that there is no single ‘correct’ way of seeing, but a series of lenses that may be brought to bear. Let their utility be our guide.

Reference