



The four hidden orders

by the head teacher of a primary school

Seven daughters, seven mothers: all individually delightful people, but since joining the school as four-year-olds, the girls had been collectively very difficult. Often their behaviour, tears and misery had affected the whole class.

Five years later, the group became six as one mother withdrew her child from the school. The other mothers had started bickering, blaming each other and threatening to take their daughters away also.

From a recently acquired understanding of the four orders of change, Janet, our teaching assistant, and I sensed the disharmony and conflict crossed the boundaries between school and home life.

We decided to involve the mothers in the process of finding some resolution. I invited them in one afternoon to sit in a circle with me in a quiet room. At the same time, Janet took the girls into another room and we each constellated using small markers with the girls' names written on (see page 170) to tease out some of the hidden dynamics.

The mothers were initially nervous, but soon they began to trust the process and me. What emerged was an overwhelming need on all their parts for their daughters to belong and be liked. Importantly, some mothers became aware that they had played too great a part in attempting to contrive this. They began to talk about their own situations and relationships and how these were impacting on the girls.

Then the girls rejoined us. Janet had been constellating with them and had rehearsed some sentences for them to say to each other and to their mothers. Each came in and sat at their mum's feet. They looked at the constellation of themselves that their mums had mapped out and set about 'putting it right', saying their sentences clearly.

Lucy moved her marker to the edge of the circle and told her mum, 'I don't need friends like you do. I'm happy on the outside, looking in.'

Rachael moved her marker nearer Anna's and told her mum, 'I appreciate what you do for me, but please let me ask who I want for tea and not who you think I want.'

Anna cried and told her mum, 'I understand you have to work and Dad meets me from school, but I wish he'd let me join some clubs with the others and have them home to play. I feel left out.'

One year on both groups still talk about the afternoon and remember the messages they heard. Since then they have become much more considerate of each other.

This intervention was an important learning and healing experience for the school and it confirmed for me that the two systems of home and school overlap at this age of a child's life and we need to find ways to deal with issues by involving members of the families themselves.

