A school's journey in creating a relational environment which supports attachment and emotional security

Dr Louise Webber

Early Childhood Studies, Plymouth University, Plymouth, UK.

Plymouth Institute of Education, Plymouth University, Drake Circus, Plymouth, Devon. PL4 8AA, 01752 585354, louise.webber4@plymouth.ac.uk.

Dr Louise Webber is a Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies at Plymouth University. She has a particular interest in looked after and adopted children and also mature women learners in higher education.

Abstract

This article focuses on teachers' experiences of supporting looked after and adopted children in one case study primary school in England. Children who are looked after and adopted may have a disrupted attachment with their primary carer which has resulted in an insecure attachment. Children with insecure attachments can feel anxious, uncertain and have low self-worth which can result in a struggle to adapt to school as they are unable to articulate their feelings. This article draws on qualitative research using semi structured interviews with teaching staff in order to illuminate strategies, subsidised through Pupil Premium Plus funding, to support such children. A key outcome was the creation of a school based model consisting of six main components that can be developed to support children with insecure attachments.

Key words: *attachment, adopted, looked after, Pupil Premium Plus, PACE*

Introduction

Being in a primary school environment which is full of routines, set activities and transitions

can be difficult for children who are looked after or adopted as they may find it hard to

develop strong emotional and social capabilities which will affect their learning,

development, and educational attainment (Allen 2011).

Such children often find it hard to make new relationships and may feel insecure which makes dealing with their emotions and feelings a complex task. Children that are adopted or looked after (in the care of the Local Authority, for example in a foster family) are more likely to have an insecure attachment compared to the general population (Minnis and Devine 2001 as quoted in Puckering et al. 2011).

Teachers often feel unprepared in supporting children with insecure attachments due to a lack of awareness of how to respond to their 'responses and learning patterns', (Dann 2011, 456). This article aims to support primary school teachers in this process by raising their understanding of an alternative whole school approach to supporting children with insecure attachments. It does not intend to label children using a deficit model but seeks to encourage teachers to develop strategies to support children with varying social and emotional needs. This article recognises that every school's journey in supporting looked after and adopted children with insecure attachments will be different.

This case study research focuses on one school ([1]Beech Tree Primary) in the south west of England and in particular one child (Jade). Beech Tree Primary has been chosen for this case study as they are currently developing a whole school approach to supporting children with insecure attachments. Jade was selected by the school for this case study as her story illustrates their developing approach well. The school's aim is to develop close, nurturing individual relationships with the children and facilitate an emotionally safe and secure milieu that fosters an effective and challenging learning environment. Their belief is that many children would benefit from focused strategies of establishing emotional security and close social relationships. Previous research claims that over a third of children have an insecure attachment with at least one caregiver (Bergin and Bergin, 2009). Bakermans-Kranenburg and van Ijzendoorn's (2009) emphasise that over 40% of mothers have a

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[1] The school name and participants names have been changed to protect anonymity

insecure attachment, thus supporting the claim that many children and families would benefit from focused strategies to develop emotional security and a sense of safety.

The aim of this paper is not to critically review the developing approach of the school as they are at the start of their journey. Instead it aims to explore how the case study school defines their approach and identify the strategies they put in place to support looked after and adopted children. In short, what do they do and why do they do it?

Attachment

Attachment is described as a lasting and enduring deep bond between a child and their main carer (Levy and Orlans, 1998). The basic functions of attachment are to give children a secure base and to protect the individual from danger (Bowlby 1988). Attachment strategies can help children develop an ability to regulate their emotions, establish positive self-esteem and achieve a balance between independence and autonomy (Levy and Orlans 1998). Attachment theory offers an explanation for some of the behaviours and feelings associated with difficult and dangerous early childhood experiences (Slater 2007). Some, but not all, children that experience neglect or early abuse can exhibit development, behaviour or health problems in the future (Joseph et al. 2014). They can develop alternative adaptive functioning behaviour patterns that help them to feel safer and survive (Priddis and Howieson 2012). These early experiences can lead to a difficultly in developing coherent or commonly recognised attachment strategies or emotional responses which can be traumatic for children and create anxiety. Children who have developed these types of attachment strategies may demonstrate behaviours in school that are viewed as disruptive, controlling or withdrawn. They may struggle to adapt to early years education and respond to the social and academic requirements (DfE 2015; Geddes 2006; Golding et al. 2013; Pearce 2009). Making a secure and stable attachment to others has two purposes in a classroom, firstly to provide feelings of

security in order to motivate children to explore and learn and secondly to enable socialisation with others (Bergin and Bergin 2009).

Although attachment theory can be helpful in understanding children's emotional responses it is often criticised for being mechanistic and not recognising that positive attachments strategies can be developed in later life (Slater 2007). It can be used as a deficit model that labels a child and does not always acknowledge the child's potential for achieving meaningful relationships outside of their first relationships. In contrast to this, research by Joseph et al. (2014) concluded that almost 50% of children with insecure attachments with their birth parents could develop secure attachment relationships with others.

Attachment theory gives us another tool to understand behaviours caused by insecure attachments, but it must not be used in isolation. A developmental pathways approach is in opposition to the more pessimistic approach that associates negative lifelong consequences with insecure attachments (Slater 2007). Children's development, according to a developmental pathways perspective, recognises that children's progress can take a number of pathways (Waddington 1957). These pathways are influenced by the interactions between a child and their care givers. This model 'offers opportunities to overcome difficulties and move forward along routes through positive experiences', (Slater 2007, 215). This gives a positive message to teachers and demonstrates the important role they play in supporting children with insecure attachments in the school environment. Through fostering social and emotional capabilities in children (Allen 2011), positive teacher and child relationships can be created which promotes a child's educational success (Bergin and Bergin 2009).

Beech Tree Primary maintain that having an awareness of different attachment styles is a useful starting point in identifying initial strategies. However it is important to recognise, that the child should be viewed holistically using a range of techniques to give the child

opportunities for different pathways. When the focus is solely upon an insecure attachment, then inappropriate behavioural strategies may be put into place that may not adequately support the child (Slater 2007).

When considering attachment theory it is useful to consider the impact of a parent's early attachment giving behaviours, using Ainsworth's three patterns of attachment (described initially by Ainsworth and Wittig 1969 as quoted in Salter Ainsworth et al. 2014). These show connections between parenting behaviours and a child's emotional security and later behaviours and relationships (see Table 1).

Table 1 –Patterns of Attachment

Children develop an internal working model of how relationships work based on this initial attachment relationship (Bowlby 1988; Follan and Minnis 2010). Without a meaningful relationship a child's image of themselves can become distorted which affects relationships they hold in the future (Shemmings and Shemmings 2011). However research by Joseph et al. (2014) suggests that a child's working model, developed through experiencing severe maltreatment, can be susceptive to remoulding through the development of secure relationships. Therefore in the home and the classroom environment opportunities can be offered to change this insecure internal working model to a positive and resilient one (Geddes 2003). When a child is in a secure attachment relationship they are more likely to have, 'higher academic attainment, self-regulation and social competence', (Bath Spa University 2014) this will affect their learning capabilities.

Specific attachment types and schools

Children will show different behaviours when they feel anxious or insecure within a school environment, Beech Tree Primary believes that this can be dependent upon their attachment styles (see Table 2). Research by van den Dries et al. (2009) showed that adopted children are

more likely to have a disorganised attachment style than non-adopted children. Teaching staff can find this attachment style the most challenging and testing (Geddes 2006).

Table 2 – Possible child's classroom behaviours linked to their attachment style

There are many different strategies applied in schools to support children in building connections and a feeling of emotional safety with others, thus supporting the developmental pathways approach (Slater 2007).

Strategies to support children with insecure attachments

The Pupil Premium Plus fund was created to ensure each adopted or looked after child had an entitlement to £1900 to ensure early interventions are in place with the assumption that educational gap would be reduced (DfE 2016) enabling them to succeed in life (DfE 2015). The school ethos makes a difference to the attitudes and interventions for looked after children and adopted children (Giling 2014) thus making a difference to how Pupil Premium funding is spent for each child. The school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) plays an important role in ensuring that children's needs are meet through appropriate allocation of this funding. Schools have an opportunity to use this funding to support children with insecure attachments in a multitude of ways.

Some research studies (Ubha and Cahill 2014; Lucas 1999) illuminate interventions in schools to support attachment but these interventions are often short term (Ubha and Cahill 2014) or use only one strategy (Lucas 1999). Despite recognition of the importance of whole school approaches, often insufficient training is a barrier to achieving this (Ubha and Cahill 2014). Having a holistic view of children's development by the Head and a supportive governing body enables a whole school approach to be facilitated more easily (Sanders 2007).

Although there are many strategies that can be used to support children develop attachments with others I will focus on the four main approaches used in schools. These four approaches were developed through reading and were seen by the author as most important based on her initial research with the school and her review of the literature. The approaches of Teaching Assistant support, meeting emotional and social needs and working with parents are commonly used across primary schools dependent on the individual needs of the child. The PACE approach (introduced in the following section) was an approach that was important to the case study school.

Teaching Assistant Support to meet learning, organisational and concentration needs

Looked after children and adopted children with insecure attachments often struggle with learning and concentration (Cooper and Johnson 2007) and begin to fall behind academically due to proximity seeking behaviours, low self-confidence or lack of trust of the teacher (Geddes 2006). Teaching Assistants are often employed to provide educational support for such children with the premise that this will provide a positive influence on educational attainment and individualised support (Higgins et al. 2014). What is missing in this assumption is that the child may be 'behind' academically because of their feelings of insecurity acting as a barrier to learning. This is a cyclical process, as they fail educationally this increases feelings of insecurity which leads to withdrawal from educational engagement and so the cycle continues. Providing children with educational support alone is not sufficient when their needs also include feeling safe, building a relationship and empathy (Golding et al. 2013). Therefore meeting children's social and emotional needs has to be addressed in order to facilitate learning.

Meeting social and emotional needs

Children with insecure attachments often communicate their emotions and feelings in what is viewed within a school environment as inappropriate and ineffective (Pearce 2009). Using social and emotional dimensions of learning rather than focusing purely on academic or cognitive aspects of learning can be effective in raising educational attainment thus focusing not just on an educational approach (Higgins et al. 2014). Therefore having an adult to verbalise their feelings for them can be beneficial. This allows the adult to guide the child through their emotional responses through providing a PACE approach of support, modelling and emotional safety. This is a role that a Teaching Assistant can fulfil, but adequate training is essential (Cooper and Johnson 2007; Giling 2014; Pearce 2009).

PACE approach

The PACE model offers a therapeutic attitude towards others that aims to deepens bonds, creates acceptance and a sense of safety within a secure base (Hughes 2009). The key objective is to maintain the emotional relationship between the child and adult. It is characterised by:

➢ **playfulness,** through shared humour and playfulness then a reciprocal relationship can ensue, this also eliminates blame and judgement

➢ **acceptance** of the child's thoughts and feelings in a non-judgemental way which reduces rejection and feelings of being not wanted. The behaviour is subject to evaluation and change, not the child himself.

➢ **curiosity,** in an interested and curious manner to explore why the child is feeling or acting like they are (non-judgemental)

➢ **empathy,** showing compassion, awareness and connection with how the child is feeling enables the child to see the adult as responsive to his needs (Hughes 2009).

This model advocates accepting and empathising with children's experiences in order for relationships to grow and thrive, rather than trying to change or reduce behaviours in a culture of behaviour modification (Golding and Hughes 2012). When adults interact with children in this playful, accepting, curious and empathetic manner it builds trust and enables adults to build closer social and emotional relationships with the child. However, 'an attitude of PACE is not the same as tolerating difficult behaviour', (Golding 2008, 98). PACE provides a calm and empathetic approach that contributes to facilitating a secure base for children to explore their emotions, behaviours and relationships. It is important that this structured approach is consistent with the school team but also shared and encouraged with the child's family.

Parent or whole family support

Building links between the child, school and child's family are important in building relationships, trust and a consistent approach. Resilience can be improved by children having a reliable and dependable key person relationship within their early years (Elfer, Goldschmied and Selleck, 2012). This relationship can give security and be used as a platform to forming other relationships and a bridge between home and school.

Research by Cooper and Johnson (2007) sought the views of adoptive parents concerning education. The research findings showed that parents wanted school staff to have training about the impact of early experiences on adopted children including the effects of insecure attachments showing the importance of a shared approach and shared understandings (see also Pearce 2009). Although this research does not specifically focus on parents the approach by Beech Tree Primary does include parental support (see Table 4). Sharing strategies and support between school and home can help children who are looked

after or adopted as improving parent–child interactions can promote a secure attachment relationship at home, (Joseph et al. 2014)

Methods

This study was qualitative in design, its emphasis was to illuminate the key experiences of the participants from the case study school. A case study method (Yin 2014, 16) enabled me to understand a 'real-world case' and study the topic in hand in more depth (Bell 2014). This approach utilised mutiple methods of data collection in order to 'establish a chain of evidence', (May 2011, 234). The methods included open ended questionnaires and semi structured interviews in order to gain insights into the participants experiences, feelings, attitudes and values (May 2011). The interviewees recounted their experiences of teaching Jade over the last 3 years, thus showing the journey they had been on. Although there are limitations with a retrospective approach, as there are tendencies for staff to dwell on the positive outcomes, I believe through their accounts of Jade's earlier primary years the staff were able to illustrate some of the struggles they experienced through strategies that were unsuccessful. This case study shows the development of their understanding of Jade's needs and emotional responses and how they adapted their behaviours and reactions to support Jade more fully in feeling secure.

Although this case study cannot be used to generalise the experiences and techniques used by all schools it can be used to highlight the personal experience of one school to inform practice (Simons 2009 quoted in by May 2011). Therefore, although this research is not generalisable it is relatable (Bell 2014) to the experiences of teachers in other primary schools

Research Overview

The research was set out in three phases:

- *Phase One* – Focused interview with Head and SENCo. The semi-structured interviews focused on the strategies in place to support looked after and adopted children, the rationale behind these and the inital impact of these strategies on children with insecure attachments.
- *Phase Two* – Open ended questionnaires with staff with a view to developing an understanding of the strategies used within the school to support insecure attachments and to establish a case study child.
- *Phase Three* – Focused interviews with 3 Class Teachers and 1 Teaching Assistant focusing on strategies developed to support the case study child.

The case study school

Beech Tree Primary is an academy funded school of 427 children. Beech Tree Primary have employed a teacher who acts as a SENCo, Intervention worker and Designated Teacher for looked after children and adopted children. There is one looked after child and nine adopted children at Beech Tree Primary which equates for 2.34% of the school population.

Participants

Table 3 – Participant Table

Ethics

A full ethical protocol was given to and discussed with the participants. All names have been changed for anonymity and in particular to ensure the identity of the case study child. All sensitive or confidential information about the case study child has been removed.

Analysis

The interviews and questionnaires were analysed, using a thematic framework analysis approach (Spencer et al. 2014). Coding was used to identify the main areas of importance to the staff when supporting children with insecure attachments. From this six main components, constructed by the case study school, were identified showing their approach to supporting children with insecure attachments.

Findings

The senior leadership team recognised that looked after children and adopted children often had different emotional and social needs to the majority of the children in the school and believed that an innovative approach was needed:

> *Some children appear to cope or have excellent strategies and coping mechanisms but some slip behind academically ... Although it is different for each child, they find social relationships and dealing with the complexities of emotions difficult ... Teachers have to support looked after children or adopted children in different ways, school rules may need adjustment (Emily – SENCo)*

Due to the high number of looked after children and adopted children, Emily was deployed to research different strategies to support them utilising Pupil Premium Plus funding:

> *Being an academy school gives us the autonomy to directly meet the needs and resources to meet that need, inside or outside of the Local Authority provision. It allows us to create bespoke interventions (Emily – SENCo)*

Many strategies have been gathered to support children not just one approach (Lucas 1999). Table 4 shows some of the more unique strategies adopted by Beech Tree Primary. At the heart of many of these strategies is the PACE approach, selected by the SENCo as a therapeutic whole school approach that could support the needs of children with insecure attachments. Many of these strategies are funded through the Pupil Premium Plus funding money and may not be accessible in all schools as this is dependent on how the budget is spent.

Table 4 – Strategies used throughout the school to support children with insecure attachments

What was important with these strategies was recognising that all children were different and merely giving classroom support for academic gains was not enough:

> *Many SENCos have contacted me to find out how to develop their looked after and adopted children provision as they use the Pupil Premium Plus money to close the gap in English and maths which does not address the root level needs. I believe our strategies address this. Interventions for individual children have been put in place based on the possible attachment need. If these children did not have an attachment need, more English and maths might be*

enough but the root level is how they are emotionally and relationally wired, that requires specific intervention. (Emily – SENCo)

However this approach is in its embryonic state and the school recognise that this is just the beginning:

> *The strategies are not embedded yet across the whole school, we would like to embed the interventions in the policies of the school and see the impact and difference it makes to all of the children (John – Head Teacher)*

Jade's story

Jade is a 7 year old child who is currently in foster care. She began at Beech Tree Primary School in year 1. She has a disorganised pattern of attachment (see Table 2) which was diagnosed by her Clinical Psychologist. Jade first presented as an anxious child with an insecure attachment that caused some barriers to learning (see Figure 1):

> *Jade came in to Y1 in October and from day 1 she was just so anxious about everything. I can remember the first time I met her, she came into the classroom to meet me but she was just physically shaking and really nervous about everything (Rachel - Y1 Teacher)*

Figure 1 – Jade's typical behaviours at school

Jade appeared to struggle academically as when confronted with a challenge or a change her lack of self-esteem would result in her refusing to do tasks. She would throw her work across the room, shout, refuse to do it or kick or stab her Teaching Assistant with pencils in order to gain some control over the situation. This became very difficult to manage as her behaviours showed aggression, mistrust of adults and high levels of anxiety (Geddes 2005):

> *Initially Jade was not doing well academically but it was always felt she had huge potential. When educational strategies were put in for her, they failed as connection was the root level need. As the interventions and connections were made, her progress was evident including reaching age related expectations … which showed better than average progress in Y2 (Emily – SENCo)*

Putting her emotions and feelings into words (Golding et al. 2003) was really difficult for Jade which would also result in a lack of self-control:

> *She is like a little spring … and all of a sudden she just pops and that is it, she cannot control herself, when she was in my class it would be lashing out or kicking or stabbing someone with a pencil or whatever it might be (Rachel – Y1 Teacher)*

Jade would struggle with understanding the emotions of others, showing empathy and an awareness of how her behaviour affected others (Levy and Orlans 1998). If she apologised she was often sorry for upsetting someone but she was unable to understand why they were upset. Discussing her feelings was also hard:

> *Although she is beginning to talk about her behaviour now I still have the "I don't care" response when talking about others' feelings (Alison – TA)*

Within the classroom situation following rules such as turn taking was often problematic:

> *She did not want to comply with the rules in my class, she had attention seeking behaviour that was quite defiant, it was probably about everything, if I said, 'Black' she would say, 'White!'. It was always the complete opposite I think just for effect really, just to get that attention and whatever sort of attention she could get her hands on (Rachel - Y1 Teacher)*

Initially strategies that were implemented were from a behaviour modification approach where if Jade did not comply with the rules she would often be removed from the classroom. However this was not wholly successful:

> *So it was a lot of putting really, really strong boundaries in place quite quickly and for her to understand that they were consistent … she would have to be removed a lot from my classroom (Rachel - Y1 Teacher)*

Establishing strong and stable connections with one or two main adults within the school was a strategy adopted for Jade that helped her to feel more settled, safe and less anxious. However the teaching staff realised that these approaches were not entirely successful and a different approach was needed. Through support by the SENCo and an adoption of a PACE method of interaction the relationship began to change:

> *I have had to change my approach … but I know to approach it [Jade's behaviour] in a different way (Andrew - Y3 Teacher)*

Having one to one Teaching Assistant support, funded through Pupil Premium Plus funding, has been an effective strategy for Jade as it has helped her to begin to recognise and talk through her feelings. It was important that the Teaching Assistant support was focused on her

emotional needs rather than academic needs, as a difficulty in forming attachments was the

root problem of her difficulties:

> *Alison (TA) does a fantastic job in supporting and keeping her on track … She is having more conversations about, 'Well what happened, how did you feel? Did you see that this happened when …?' she is trying to have more deep conversations with her … but it is more consistent now …so that definitely is improving all of the time (Andrew - Y3 Teacher)*

Through a therapeutic approach that recognises the importance of recognising and talking

through feelings as well as giving opportunities to have physical contact Jade is beginning to

make emotional relationships with others and feel safe:

> *We have recently been able to re-visit some behaviour/choices made and discuss them, and through my questions Jade has been able to retell the events and what would be a better way to do things next time … Jade is also showing signs of wanting a hug now, she will open her arms towards me, this usually happens where she has needed to calm down for some reason (Alison – TA)*

Discussion - Creating a whole school approach to supporting the development of secure relationships

> *It is not just an intervention but a whole school ethos that embraces the training and participation of all stakeholders including all staff, parents or carers and wider professionals to address root level issues that may present as barriers to learning or accessing the school community (Emily – SENCo)*

Beech Tree Primary's whole school approach to supporting the development of secure

relationships consists of 6 main components (see Figure 2). Although these components have

been developed through the school to suit their needs they could be adopted or adapted by

other primary schools wanting to develop their own strategies for supporting children with

insecure attachments. It should be acknowledged that whole school training and ongoing

support is needed to assist the adoption of a PACE attitude; however the other components

can be developed within a school quite easily.

Figure 2 – Six main components of a whole school approach to supporting the development of secure relationships

Whole school approach of a therapeutic PACE attitude

Through the adoption of a PACE approach throughout the school, a nurturing and relational

school ethos can be created. Although this is in its infancy at Beech Tree Primary, in terms of

implementation, the school claim that its effects can be seen already. Whole school staff

training is important in formulating a whole school approach (Ubha and Cahill 2014; Cooper

and Johnson 2007; Giling 2014). However, this must be ongoing training and support rather

than a one off event:

> *Teachers require further training to support looked after and adopted children. Also we need to continue to develop a whole school approach as the current behaviour policy does not currently reflect how to deal with the behaviour of a child with insecure attachments (Emily – SENCo)*

A main aspect of the training must be the understanding of the PACE model (see Table 5 for

examples of the school's implementation)

Table 5 – Examples of the PACE approach

Although it can be argued that adopting a PACE approach is a heavy time investment in

terms of ongoing staff training and requires patience to embed it fully within the school,

according to Golding and Hughes (2012) it can have a significant impact over time.

Communication between staff including support for transitions

Supporting transitions through effective communication is crucial for all children but

especially those with children who struggle with change. Although all schools would

advocate good communication between staff, Beech Tree Primary works hard to ensure a

smooth transition for each child with insecure attachments. The connection, that children like

Jade have made with their previous Class Teacher, is encouraged to continue and is used as a

secure and safe base (Bowlby 1988). Also, previous Class Teachers are asked for advice

about transitions and are involved in the recruitment of new support staff for looked after

children and adopted children. These simple but effective strategies ensure that children like

Jade, know that there are consistently available adults in the school who are responsive and attentive to their needs which reduces feelings of fear and anxiousness.

> *The relationships between the teachers work because we all get on so well and we can pass on this information to set up a really good transition. I spoke to Andrew and we arranged for her to send a blank note just so that she could be face to face with him and she was meeting him[before Jade moved into Y3] (Amy - Y2 Teacher)*

> *When she moved to year 2 I would come back from lunch and she would be sat in my chair waiting for me, she just needs that little bit of contact and as the year went by it was less and less (Rachel - Y1 Teacher)*

Physical contact – touch, regulating of emotions

The importance of touch cannot be underestimated (Golding and Hughes 2012). Although this is often a sensitive topic in educational settings and there has been much debate about the appropriateness of touch (Piper and Stronach 2008), it appears to be essential in Jade's story in creating a secure relationship with others.

> *Or she will just come in and jump on your lap, have a cuddle and goes again, it is just a safety thing as well as she knows that we are there for her (Amy - Y2 Teacher)*

> *But when I am doing it [discussing behaviours or outbursts] I will smooth her arm or put my hand on top of her hand …. I am acknowledging how she is feeling (Alison - TA)*

The use of touch will need to be discussed within the whole school so that an agreed approach, within the setting's safeguarding policy, can be created.

Bespoke provision for each child

Using a multitude of strategies rather than a one size fits all approach (Lucas 1999) is particularly important as all children with insecure attachments will be different. Through having a holistic view of children's development (Sanders 2007) both their academic and emotional needs can be cared for.

> *But it is that nurture which I think this school is good at in terms of understanding each child's needs but not just from an academic view … every child in this school is a single child (Rachel - Y1 Teacher)*

When you know the attachment styles inside and out, the appropriate response to the behaviour can be given. I have read that these children can be given the naughty label! We need to have an understanding of insecure attachment needs before the intervention is decided upon. However I do not have a one style fits all approach to attachment! (Emily – SENCo)

Not shaming children

Children that have insecure attachments often feel a sense of worthlessness and can engage in defiant or aggressive behaviours in order to gain control (Hughes 2006). Having a therapeutic approach includes conversations with the child that are shame-reducing in order to provide an empathetic response rather than reinforcing their feelings of worthlessness (Hughes 2006).

There is no point in saying, 'Why did you do this? What have you done?', as they won't feel anything other than shame and that is the worst thing (Rachel – Y1 Teacher)

At Beech Tree Primary, previous strategies of time out and behaviour modification were not always effective as they increased Jade's feelings of shame and worthlessness. Behaviour modification can 'reduce the behaviours of concern and increase alternative adaptive behaviours', (Hughes 2006, 284) but do not address the emotional and insecure attachment needs of the child. In contrast a 'time in' approach (Weininger 2002 quoted in Hughes 2006) has been utilised in order to keep the child close rather than isolating or rejecting them.

This is not an intervention that extracts the pupil from the class but an approach that includes 'time in' to support access to school community learning and life rather than 'time out' with one trained member of staff where learning from the intervention may not be transferred back into the whole class and setting (Emily – SENCo)

This shows empathy and acceptance of the distress the child is feeling as well as retaining the emotional bond (Hughes 2006).

If she is finding it difficult I will sit right next to her and let her know that I am here … my gut feeling is that I need to do more 'Time in' where she is next to me (Alison - TA)

Working with families and multi agencies

Working with families is a crucial component in providing holistic support for children with insecure attachment needs (Shemmings and Shemmings 2011; Gilling 2014). Through working together a greater understanding of the child can be reached:

> *When foster carers share the details of the contact [with birth family], whether it was a positive or negative experience, it will prepare us in supporting Jade to navigate her emotions and make sense of it all (Emily – SENCo)*

Through staff training on the impact of early experiences on attachment (Pearce 2009) through having a named person in school (Gilling 2014) then a shared approach to supporting insecure attachment needs can be developed (Cooper and Johnson 2007).

> *We use a 'Team Around the Child' approach, where the child is at the centre of what we do. All the professionals have an open dialogue so no one professional works in isolation so that we all have the same goals for Jade ... What makes this different is when you pair this up to parent training and raising parents' confidence and then equip them to use therapeutic approaches like PACE. All of these strands together have brought impact and there is evidence in responses from the parents e.g., 'greater peace, greater connectedness, changed atmosphere, children can name feelings and communicate in a new way' (Emily – SENCo)*

Conclusion

Through the development of new strategies, Beech Tree Primary are beginning to adopt a consistent approach to supporting looked after and adopted children with insecure attachments. This comprises of six main components:

- Whole school approach of a therapeutic PACE attitude
- Communication between staff including support for transitions
- Physical contact – touch, regulating of emotions
- Bespoke provision for each child
- Not shaming children
- Working with families and multi agencies

Every school's journey will be different. These components, developed by Beech Tree Primary, can be adopted or adapted by other primary schools wanting to develop their own strategies for supporting children with insecure attachments. From the research presented, Beech Tree Primary have begun their journey of creating a relational environment which supports attachment and emotional security. Areas still to be developed include:

1. Identifying a key worker (personal TA) for each child who has an insecure attachment who can move through the school with the child

2. Ongoing support for all staff to develop and facilitate these approaches in the school

3. Continued support for staff and parents to encourage an attitude of PACE and partnership between the school and home environments

This study has limitations as it is only based on one school; however my intention was to use this case study to highlight strategies that have been developed within Beech Tree Primary to support children with insecure attachments. My hope is that this article will serve as a tool for discussion and strategy development to support staff in primary schools in facilitating close emotional relationships and security for looked after and adopted children.

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