NCB Document

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November 2006

<u>Behaviour and the Learning of Looked-After and other vulnerable Children.</u>

Despite the many instances of success and achievement, there is a high level of concern about the educational performance of many Looked After Children. They are also disproportionately represented in offsite units and school exclusion rates, are over represented in special schools and in prisons and numbers also reflect disproportionate numbers of African-Caribbean boys. Such figures suggest that behaviour is a key issue influencing decisions to place Looked After Children. Behaviour may also be linked to the challenges and expectations of teaching and learning. These two issues will be examined here and the links between them considered in terms of adverse Attachment history and as indicators for intervention.

In **Part 1** the following issues will be discussed:

1. Behaviour as a Communication.
The meaning of behaviour will be examined in detail and transformed into a communication about children's needs and fears.

2. Attachment history and implications for behaviour and learning.
The most challenging aspects of the behaviour of the more vulnerable Looked After Children will be examined more closely within a framework of Attachment Theory.

3. Working to make a difference
Intervention will be discussed in relation to behaviour and learning and include some reference to aspects of the educational curriculum.

4. Working with emotional and developmental needs
The experiences of working with challenging behaviour will be briefly discussed as another way of contributing to our understanding of behaviour and needs.

Summary and conclusion.

In **Part 2**, the needs of professionals, concerned and affected by children's behaviour will be acknowledged and an appropriate working method of intervention with be described and explored as a way of maintaining thought and reflection in the workplace rather than reactivity and stress.

Part 1

1.Behaviour as Communication

Most children can communicate their distress effectively by talking and explaining to those who are likely to understand and to make a difference. But for some, this kind of telling may be difficult for a range of reasons and changes in behaviour can cause others to notice that 'something is wrong'. Unresolved separations, losses and perceived abandonment are often aspects of the histories of Looked After Children and behaviour can reflect this.

Freddie (aged 7) had been adopted in infancy. At age 6, his adoptive father died in a car crash and his adoptive mother had been very distressed and unable to help Freddie to understand what had happened. His teacher complained of his restless behaviour; he would not stay where he was told to sit and wandered round the room, defiant and distracted. He never finished a piece of work.

In the one to one sessions, Freddie ranged around the room, unable to settle to any task or to play. After some time, he came across a book, 'Father Christmas Goes on Holiday' (Briggs 1975). He looked through the pages and stopped at the page where Father Christmas is packing his van and then saying goodbye to his cat and his dog. Freddie seemed profoundly interested in the pictures. It was as if he had found what he was looking for and at that point I felt aware of Freddie's intense sorrow and the moment when he began to experience his painful feelings about his father's death. Endings of sessions and holiday breaks were then marked by anger and sadness. Freddie's behaviour in school seemed to reflect his inability to think about separations and endings until his unresolved feelings abut the loss of his father had been acknowledged and processed. As he began to work through these feelings in actions which were understood and interpreted into words about sadness and loss, he began to settle to a task and contemplate finishing pieces of work.

Sometimes, families are unwilling to discuss important events and children are aware of feelings and events that they are unable to express but which preoccupy and confuse them.

John (aged 10) worried his teachers by persistently leaving the room and wandering the corridors. He had recently learned the family secret, that the person whom he thought of as his sister was actually his mother and his 'parents' were actually his grandparents. The two families lived in different parts of the country. In one to one sessions he drew a picture/map of two houses separated by a great distance. He drew himself on the road between the houses. He was constantly preoccupied about his mother's safety and felt he needed to be near her to protect her. When these concerns were understood, the family was prepared to talk more about his history. Understanding his own 'story' helped him to tolerate his feelings about the distance between himself and his mother. He decided that when he was older he would go and live near his mother and help her. Meanwhile, the families would get together more often. As his anxiety about the separation from his mother and his pre-occupations about her safety were acknowledged, John was gradually able to stay in class and stopped wandering. Wandering out of class seemed to be a way of describing his worries about what was happening outside of school, in his 'other' world.

Behaviour can be a communication about unprocessed experience and a key to understanding what it is that the child continues to be distressed about. Making sense of this communication can begin the process of healing the painful wounds.

The bully may be telling us about what its like to be a frightened victim of other's brutality. Bullying may be about being afraid.

The pupil who taunts others when they make mistakes may be telling us about what its like to be made to feel humiliated and stupid.

A pupil can attack another pupil whose experiences are painful reminders of their own unprocessed distress.

The boy who tags his name all over the walls of the estate may be struggling to find an identity.

The gang who hang out and frighten others may need the protection of a peer group which will collude in denying their own helplessness and vulnerability but act out their fears by intimidating others.

The girl who is caught up in prostitution can be telling us about her earlier experiences of being treated like a sexual object and abused.

The victim of sexual abuse can become the perpetrator.

For Freddie and John described above, their communication was also affected by the difficulties that their adult carers had in tolerating their own distress and pain let alone that of their children.

An important factor in working with children whose emotional pain is great is the adult's need to be able to acknowledge this pain without being overwhelmed by it and the pain of many Looked After Children can be extremely distressing and potentially overwhelming. This is a key factor in the work described in Part 2.

Violence and Aggression

However, for some children their behaviour may be a way of acting out a traumatic experience which was never effectively understood or put into words.
Boston and Szur comment that **'it makes a deal more sense of the seemingly unreasonable behaviour of many … children if one bears in mind that they are often doing to others what they experience as being done to them, both externally and internally'** (Boston and Szur 1983,p.3).

The most worrying pupils are inevitably those who inflict harm on others. They can react to the slightest provocation with a hit or aggressive action. Proximity to others can be a time of inevitable conflict and especially when there is less adult supervision and a sense of fear may be heightened. Play times and breaks can be times of

increased aggressive incidents. Often others are blamed as if the world is against them and everyone else is a potential danger.

Sam was in Year 10 and for some time had been a risk to others. He reacted violently to the slightest provocation. He was often seen, after break, sitting outside of the head's office with an expression of profound 'unfairness' on his face. Whatever he had done, was always someone else's fault. He had been excluded several times. Sam had been removed from his family when he was 8 because his mother's partner was violent and there had been considerable domestic violence including violence towards Sam. His mother chose to stay with her partner and so Sam had been moved to live with a relative. It was evident in sessions with Sam that he was unable to explore his history of fear and violence. He avoided any opportunity to communicate by talking, drawing or stories and would only play football games or explain complex maths. It was as if thinking about football and numbers was his way of protecting himself from feelings that otherwise would overwhelm him. However over time a new character entered his football game, who fouled him in the penalty area. This was repeated over and over again and eventually he was 'sent off' forever because he was too dangerous to be allowed to play. At last it seemed that Sam had a metaphor for thinking about a dangerous person. Over time communication about past events was possible. Sam was able to put into words, what had happened to him. He became less reactive and gained considerable control over his reactivity in the classroom, making himself a yellow card so that he could leave the class for a safe place until he felt calm enough to return.

It was as if Sam was suddenly overwhelmed by feelings which triggered retaliation that was not under his control.

Over-reactivity without any apparent self awareness or control is a feature of the behaviour that causes great concern and leads to high levels of exclusions from school. Reactive behaviour is when a child is suddenly aggressive in response to an apparently trivial provocation and with little awareness or apparent control over his actions. Such acting out can represent memories from the past in very early infancy – procedural memory, or a re-enactment of traumatic events which have not been processed or acknowledged with words and thoughts.

Such experiences can also be linked to early experiences of overwhelming and uncontained fears for which there has been no other mechanism for responding or coping other than by 'fight and flight'. Such fears are also associated with intolerable feelings of helplessness and vulnerability.

Aggression is often the greatest concern in schools where keeping children and teachers safe is quite rightly, a priority. Anger Management has become a popular intervention. However this behaviour may also be a communication about levels of risk and uncertainty reaching far back into childhood.

The APA Commission on Violence (1993) investigated factors linked to aggression and violence and concluded that weak bonding in infancy and weak parenting are key factors. Fonagy (2001) comments that the child calls forth rage to protect the self from feelings of infantile vulnerability and Holmes (2001), comments that outbursts of rage are a form of 'displacement activity' triggered when an individual is torn between fear and need. Such comments suggest that much of the aggressive behaviour we see in young people may stem from very early experiences reflecting chronic fear and uncertainty and the absence of a mechanism to deal with such fears.

Violent reactivity and fear and helplessness can be closely linked (de Zulueta 1993).

Chronic vulnerability to fear and uncertainty may be a key factor in understanding the challenging behaviour of many children and in order to explore this behaviour further it is necessary to investigate the earliest experiences and needs of childhood.

Memories do not remain in the past but become actions in the here and now. Behaviour is a communication and understanding the meaning of behaviour can be an invaluable tool when considering interventions.

To reframe behaviour as a communication about experience may also be a way of defusing the terrible impact on those working with such behaviour as the

behaviour can be thought about and understood rather than endured. This is a key aspect of the work described in Part 2.

2. Attachment history and implications for the behaviour and learning of Looked After Children

Children clearly respond very differently to challenge and adversity. The two children described here, responded with very different behaviours.

Danielle was a diminutive 5 year old referred to the Behaviour Support Services because of unmanageable behaviour in school. She spent her school day in the Early Years unit where she played all day and did not respond to any interventions by staff and was making no progress in term of behaviour or learning.
Danielle had already had a challenging start in life. Her mother was a young girl who had a violent relationship with her equally young partner. The baby was taken into care and now lived with foster parents..
On entering the room at the behaviour unit, she ran about on tip toes sweeping surfaces clear of any objects and toys, books and pens scattered to the floor. When approached by staff to help to calm her and engage her she screamed and bit and kicked. There seemed little way of communicating with her or of engaging with her. There was a task at the table for each member of the small group and for several sessions she gyrated about ignoring the adults. However she had noticed that the other pupils were engaged in their tasks, a different task for each child. She gradually approached the table as if a little curious about what the others were doing. Her task was to colour in the letters of her name. She sank into her chair at the table and began to colour. She could conform when she chose to but could not tolerate being told to. This was followed by cutting out the letters and each session when she arrived she arranged the letters of her name in order and it seemed the point of beginning – she began by seeing herself represented by the letters of her name and with a task over which she had some control. After some time, Danielle could conform to the

ritual expectations of the group, begin to participate and to produce work that seemed to have meaning for her and to which she could apply herself.

Danielle appeared at first to have little sense of herself, little expectation of the adults other than conflict and no capacity to reflect or communicate in any effective way. Her behaviour seemed a way of expressing her feelings on the outside as if they were being evacuated into the outside world with little evidence that her feelings and experiences had been processed into language and thought.

Tom was aged 5. He had concerned his teachers by crying uncontrollably at school but unable to say why. In a meeting with Tom and his mother, she described the recent break up of her marriage and the devastation she had felt. She commented that Tom hadn't seemed to be affected and was good at home. As his mother talked, Tom made a robot out of plastic bits. He said it was a robot that could do anything. I wondered if he felt that he had had to manage to do everything like the robot when his mum was so upset. He drew a vivid picture of a dream about a sinking boat and fears of drowning. I wondered if he had felt as if his mother had sunk for a while and not been able to help him. His mother reacted sensitively and said that she was sorry that she had been so upset for a while but she was feeling better now and wanted him to be himself again. They went away, mother confident that she was in touch with her son again and Tom confident of the return of his mother's attention. He no longer cried at school.

These examples demonstrate the contrasting experiences of Danielle and Tom with implications for their responses to coping with distress and uncertainty. In an opportunity where he could express his distress Tom did so very effectively through play and drawing and language, confident that he would be understood and his distress would be relieved – an expression of his experience of confidence in the sensitivity and responsiveness of the relationships in his world.
Danielle responded to new situations and challenges by pure reactivity, with little use of communication other than action and reaction. She appeared to have little capacity to understand her own feelings in any way that could be effectively communicate to others and little expectation of being understood.

Something about the differences between the nature of the experiences and responses of these two children describes the challenges faced in infancy by some Looked After Children. What is it about Danielle's experience which inhibited communication and pre-disposed her to reactive behaviour and finding relationships and learning very difficult? The nature of Danielle's difficulties may be common to many Looked After Children and this will be examined briefly within the framework of Attachment Theory in order to understand the basic factors which affect development, relationships and the capacity to cope with uncertainty.

Outline of Attachment Theory

Human infancy lasts for many years during which time the infant needs protection and care to assure survival. The infant also needs to develop strategies for facing inevitable challenges and difficulties in later life as well as a framework for experiencing others as the foundation for later relationships in the context of the family and the community (see NCERCC document on Attachment). This experience is usually led by the care of committed adults, usually the infant's mother and father and supported by close family and community.

In this close and intense contact the infant begins to:
- learn about himself and develop feelings about others,
- communicate effectively
- become confident in exploration and learning,
- develop resilience in the face of adversity but also be able to seek help when needed
- become self confident and
- be able to relate appropriately to others.

These core characteristics are fundamental to emotional and cognitive development and have implications for behaviour and learning (Summary in Appendix 1).

However, 'In homes where the baby finds no mutuality, where the parent's face does not reflect the baby's experience and where the child's spontaneous gesture is not

recognised or appreciated, neither trust in others nor confidence in the self develop'
(Hopkins 1990).

This comment sums up the experience of children whose early attachment experience
is less than secure. Adverse experience of early relationships, not relieved by more
positive experiences with others is very likely to have negative implications for
communication and behaviour, exploration and learning and for the development of
self esteem, response to adversity and expectations of adults. Researchers have
identified patterns of behaviour in response to adversity which are readily identified in
schools (Sroufe 1983).

**At the heart of this experience is the absence of sufficient development of the
capacity to cope with adversity, linked to the unavailability of a reliable adult,
which has particular relevance to Looked After Children who have frequently
experienced considerable adversity, disrupted care, change and uncertainty.**

The mechanism for coping with uncertainty.

The developing infant invariably experiences many fears and uncertainties. Even
feeling hungry can cause distress as it is an incomprehensible discomfort. However,
the sensitive mother recognises the hungry cry and responds by offering feeding. The
infant learns that his sensations and feeling can be understood and transformed into an
appropriate response with associated words and thought which gives experience
meaning. This daily experience of being understood and having fears and
uncertainties transformed into thoughts and words, is the core of what the mother
offers to the child. In the words of Kate Barrows (1984) '…. The first gift from
another person is the maternal gift of taking in his feelings, absorbing them and giving
them back to him in a way he can accept'. Emanuel (2000) describes this as: 'A baby
needs a container to investigate his feelings and to find out what he is feeling and
what it means'. As language begins to enter into this experience, words can play a
part in diminishing anxiety and fear can be understood by using language and thought.
The child acquires the capacity to cope with his fears, mediated by talking and
thinking.

'The mechanism of thinking, when challenged by uncertainty then becomes available to the baby as a way of coping with future fears alongside the expectation that when challenge is too great, supportive others will be available to provide a containing function' (Emanuel 2000)

In the absence of this coping mechanism, acting out of previous unprocessed experience takes the place of words and thinking. Acting out plays a major part in the behaviour and communication of many Looked After Children.

Implications of the lack of an available 'secure base' and consistent containment of fears and uncertainty.

For many children the level of uncertainty may have been excessive. The adult carer may have had significant difficulties of their own which have made consistent parenting impossible and can appear as neglectful and abusive.

Drug and alcohol abuse can mean that the parent is present but not emotionally available. The infant can experience this as a parent who is unpredictable, unreliable and out of touch with them with implications for basic needs to feel safe, understood and have their fears contained.

Mental illness and depression can have the same effect on the child's experience of a continuous and consistent availability of an attuned carer (Society Guardian 18.10.06).

Domestic violence can have traumatising effects as well as a threat to basic safety and survival.

Separation and perceived abandonment are common experiences of children in the care system. It is a fundamental aspect of early reception into care that the maternal bond is disrupted often with little capacity or opportunity to understand the experience. Repeated movement between carers and foster homes can exacerbate the

experience of emotional abandonment as a core experience of many Looked After Children. Fear of abandonment can be a constant threat and the slightest experience of change can precipitate catastrophic feelings of abandonment re-enacted in reactive behaviours.

Such experiences imply that the infant has not experienced sufficient care and protection during the critical early years of development. On a continuum of severity, they have instead experienced:

- an absence of a reliable presence at times of adversity

- a profound mistrust of adults

- a brain 'hotwired' for fight and flight with few alternative pathways of choice when threatened by uncertainty or fear

- unprocessed trauma and fear embedded in unconscious memory which are acted out rather than communicated by other means

- little sensitivity or awareness of their own feelings or those of others

- a confused sense of what is right and wrong and true and false

- hyper-vigilance to protect against ever present uncertainty and risk

- a feeling of denigration and worthlessness in response to 'not mattering' to anyone

- a profound lack of self respect and a capacity to sabotage positive outcomes in order to preserve their negative expectations

- and a need to deny their fears and to take control in the face of unreliability and profound uncertainty. – omnipotence.

With such experiences, children can arrive in school with expectations that are wholly negative and fearful and can behave in ways that reflect and communicate these experiences and the associated unprocessed anxiety:

- A defensive bravado in the face of fears and uncertainties

- Vigilant to all the interactions in the classroom to the detriment of listening to the teacher

- Absence of trust and respect for adults and the authority they represent

- Behaviour that is likely to be reactive and confrontational

- Extreme sensitivity to the perceived humiliation of failure

- An inability to tolerate not knowing

- Little development of the capacity to think in the face of challenge – a coping mechanism for uncertainty

- A lack of self awareness and sensitivity to the experiences of others

- Absence of an experience of being held in mind and a sense of continuity of experience

For children of such experiences, response to being taught and to learning is likely to be affected with implications for learning outcomes and achievement.

The absence of trust in adult support and fear of engagement in learning about something unknown can be significant inhibitions on the capacity to engage with being taught and learning. Such lack of engagement in the learning task may be

a predictor of later social exclusion – social life is largely about relationships and engagement in work.

Danielle's behaviour reflected these characteristics. However she also demonstrated a capacity to change and to develop as have many young people given sufficient opportunity and reflective intervention.

As the structure of the group became clear, Danielle began to imitate the others. She appeared to be able to conform to the structure and expectations of the group by observing and copying others rather than by accepting the adult's instructions. It was as if she could conform by adaptation rather than by engaging in relationships. When she wanted the teacher to read her a story she pushed herself into the chair the teacher was already sitting on. She picked up the reading book and pushed it into the space between her face and the teacher's. She began to make crude indications that she wanted the teacher to do something for her exclusively. It was as if she had little perception of how to share an experience between two persons.

The hopeful characteristic about Danielle was that she seemed to want something from the adult. She particularly liked to have stories read to her exclusively. It felt as if she wanted to share an understanding about something with an adult, perhaps seeking a possible understanding of the narrative of her own story/experiences – a before, middle and after. She gradually accommodated to the expectations of the sessions. Over time she became able to more or less accept instruction, follow the rules and take part in learning activities. A significant experience arose from the story 'Charlie's House' (Schermbrucker and Daly) followed by the experience of constructing a small house in a shoe box. This was a very precious item to Danielle. She seemed to be constructing a physical container which paralleled her experience of finding some containment in the unit and in the minds of the workers.

3. Working to make a difference.

Bringing about change in the light of such experiences may need to begin with the recognition that the most primitive needs have yet to be met. Early recognition of such needs assists in planning interventions as the longer children stay in adversity, the more difficult it becomes to change established patterns of expectations and behaviours. Teachers and schools provide a daily opportunity for change and it has been recognised for some time, that 'education' needs to be part of all planning for Looked After Children (Jackson 1987). The integration of professional resources, as a core factor in planning to meet the challenging needs of the most vulnerable children, is essential. The mechanism for such collaboration is described in Part 2.

Long term strategies for intervention.

1. Being safe and reducing uncertainty
The experience of feeling safe is the most primitive need and the foundation for the development of the capacity to face future challenges and uncertainty, essential in order to learn.

Predictability.
There is safety in being able to predict what is going to happen. Predictability can be made concrete:
- reliable rituals of starting and ending and marking change
- a diary of the day/weeks to make all forthcoming events clear and concrete
- particular attention given to anticipation of changes and movements of class
- calendar work which helps pupils to understand time in the past, linked to now and the future
- repetitive use of days of the week and months of the year to give time a sequence and predictability.
- particular attention to endings to avoid triggering the terror of repeated, unprocessed feelings of abandonment

- in order to experience safety, all areas of the building need to be supervised and to be free from unexpected danger.

Physical containment

The building is important. It becomes the symbolic container within which many vulnerable pupils first experience feeling safe, noticed and thought about. It is remarkable how pupils who appear to disregard learning can be 'persistent attenders' even trying to break in at weekends!

Hiding under desks at times of fear is an example of the sudden need to feel physically safe, a small safe area can provide a place to withdraw to when such feelings are aroused.

Physical containers can also have symbolic significance and boxes and drawers where personal objects are kept can acquire this significance. Moving to alternative carers with a black plastic bag clearly reinforces insubstantial containment.

Often a supervised, structured group at break times provides an opportunity to experience being with others safely, until anxiety about the proximity of others has reached manageable proportions and return to more public break times can be negotiated.

Reducing uncertainty and the importance of consistency of carers.

The characteristic that often affects behaviour most is the lack of a mechanism for coping with fear and uncertainty: the absence of sufficient experience of being noticed, held in mind, understood, of having uncertainty transformed into thoughts and put into words. Emanuel (2000) describes this as an absence of the experience of the containing and translating capacity of a mother with implications for the child's confidence to be curious and to face uncertainty, knowing that the unknown is not a mortal threat and can be survived. In the face of excessive uncertainty, thinking and learning are impaired. Consistent and reliable carers who can make sense of the communication in the behaviour, make the links between challenging behaviour and underlying uncertainty and begin to process such experience into thoughts and words, can become the secure base / reliable container and are the cornerstones of this experience.

Contained anxiety can facilitate thinking and learning

Excessive uncertainty can inhibit thinking and learning

For many children, school/care staff can become their first experience of long term, persistent, reliable adults who can 'hold them in mind' and 'think about' them and be able to make sense of their behaviour and their feelings – their first experience of finding out about themselves by being known to someone else. Over a period of time this can become an experience of being understood, learning to trust and by being remembered from day to day by another person, experiencing events being joined up – an important characteristic of building knowledge and understanding.

Primary schools are able to provide this containment and the feeling of being known. The transition to secondary school can be a time when uncertainty is again triggered and behaviour erupts. Size may matter and larger institutions may trigger unbearable fears and consequent challenging behaviour in children who had been making useful progress in the small familiar primary school.

Such important relationships are likely to be imbued with the significance of earlier relationships and it is important that those working with pupils of adverse early experiences do not collude with such expectations of the child. It is easy to repeat the experience of the 'rejecting parent' when faced daily with the rejection and disregard of challenging pupils. Part 2 describes the importance of recognising this experience and responding differently to enable the child to develop a more positive experience of themselves and others.

2. Reliable and consistent limits.

Children who do not experience firm boundaries in infancy (Rutter1975) can become aggressive in later years. Tantrums in infancy are a way of finding out that someone else is in charge and can keep you safe from your own overwhelming rages. Challenging behaviour may be a way of asking for the safety of boundaries and controls and may go on relentlessly until the boundaries are met and kept. This may contribute to the many 'out of control' young men finding their way into prison systems and the high recidivism rates.

Boundaries need to be evident and consistently kept within a system where:
- rules are based on keeping oneself and others safe rather than on good and bad behaviour

- there are clear expectations of every child so that conforming to what everyone else does avoids confrontations about adult authority
- clear and strong leadership is respected by all and re-enforces the experience of safety for pupils and adults
- rules are based on response to behaviour and not on rejecting the child by loss of love.

Children who have experienced chaotic lives can often create chaos around them. They can suffer from uncontrollable fears and fantasies of danger and risk for which they have no coping mechanism. Such feelings are then evacuated into the outside world in acts of random and apparently meaningless vandalism. This may be the origins of the behaviour of peer groups, hanging about estates seeking to relieve themselves of their chaotic fantasies by creating chaos in the community - reactions to such behaviour are often led by the need to punish rather than to contain. Such a community needs to be well supervised with no frightening corners. Community police are an important aspect of the containing professional network around the most acting out pupils.

Consistency by all adults is essential both from within schools and in the community and ideally with consistent communication and understanding between them.

3. Strategies for response to crisis

It is possible to minimise outbursts of reactive behaviour by careful observation and prediction of likely triggers and good consistent practices but crisis will inevitably happen when reactivity is unexpectedly triggered and the reactive brain patterns govern responses with little capacity to self control. It is then useful to have a clear strategy of response to protect others and minimise the event. The elements of this are likely to be:

- Step back
- Remove to a quiet safe place
- Calming left brain tasks
- Once calm, put into words

- Reconciliation.

Colin, whose behaviour had been of serious concern for some years, was responding well in his calm and well structured Year 6 class. He was due for his one to one session in which he had begun to make progress in permitting the beginnings of a relationship based on a shared task. An incident at break had provoked a reactive event and he was rampaging about the corridors cursing and threatening to hurt the girl who had 'offended' him. I caught up with him and reminded him it was our time. He said he didn't want to come to the session, in an aggressive tone and I felt a surge of his rage and despair. I wondered aloud if he was too upset to cope with his feelings today and needed to be in class and working, to help to calm himself down. We went to his classroom and the teacher directed him to his table where his work was set out and he settled straight to the work sheet. At the end of the class the teacher arranged a discussion with the girl who had upset him. The teacher helped them to put the incident into words, revealed the misunderstanding and mutually apologise. Colin had rejected the relationship implied in the one to one session where his feelings may have been too intense to tolerate and had chosen the calming task in the classroom. We congratulated him on a wise choice. He was becoming able to recognise and make choices about his own strong feelings.'

This collaboration between therapist and teacher, feelings and calming work, helped Colin to begin to develop some sense of self awareness and self control.

4.The task and the curriculum
The nature of the task.
Pupils who have little coping mechanism in the face of uncertainty, often show a preference for structured and concrete activities. These are essentially 'left brain' led and can have a calming effect on emotional arousal.
Access to such tasks as colouring, word searches, sequencing numbers, picture puzzles, counting (Soduko!) and structured routine activities are a good beginning to lessons which can become more challenging when the child has established control over their initial uncertainty.

Making complex knots out of plastic string was a craze which seemed to appeal recently to many acting out boys!

A Year 2 teacher in an EBD day primary school described beginning each day with 15 minutes of cross stitch – calming and focused left brain activity.

Many teachers use brain gym to restore calm when the class becomes unsettled.

When reactivity is aroused, left brain tasks can help to restore calm and return the capacity to think again and can be used to self moderate – 'ten minutes in the quiet corner with your box of activities…and then we will talk about what happened'.

Creativity and the task.

It has also been noted that pupils who are emotionally vulnerable may resists tasks which involve writing or drawing or even blank sheets of paper. Such forms of work can feel like a threat to unexpressed feelings – something may spill out onto the page. Even the pen can be perceived as a fearful weapon which might write something that is strongly repressed. Work often seems devoid of expressiveness and creativity because of fears of self expression and the feelings that need to be denied. Hence the use of metaphor using drama and stories as vehicles for expression and exploration of feelings.

The safety of the task.

The pupil who is challenged by relationships and mistrust is more likely to seek to be autonomous and to avoid asking for help. Beaumont describes the task as the emotional safety barrier between the anxious pupil and the adult (Beaumont 1991). The pupil is then less exposed to their feelings of vulnerability and helplessness as they are confronted by their need for support. Thus the task needs to be accessible in the first instance and to re-assure rather than challenge. Shared/mutual interest can be tolerated as long as dependence is not triggered. Homework can be equally fraught if the task triggers uncertainty. The task needs to be do-able, linked to success and only challenging in small steps and preferably involve a piece of equipment – a tool to do something concrete with rather than a dependence on written or spoken instruction.

The content of the curriculum

The earliest experiences may affect readiness to learn at the most basic level.

For many children whose very early experience was with a carer who was unavailable and unpredictable, their experience and subsequent concept of time and proximity can be without meaning. (Beaumont 1999). It may feel as if time has no end, distance is impossible to understand and the physical experience of the constancy of two-ness is unreliable.

The experience upon which we base our understanding of the world around us is absent or confused. It may be that the curriculum for children of such a beginning may have to begin with remediation of the absence of these basic experiences of <u>self, time, place and two-ness.</u>

Geography that relates to where now (Google Earth) can help children to feel located and to join up the often unrelated places they have passed through with no apparent linking in time and place.

Measuring time in relation to their own experiences helps to join up an often disjointed experiences into a coherent sequence of events – their own time line.

Counting 'concrete' objects, games involving pairs and two-ness and grouping objects helps some pupils to begin to develop a basic sense of the constancy of numbers and two-ness often lacking in their experiences of severed and 'unattached' relationships.

Stories with a metaphor about feelings and fears can help to develop language and 'emotional literacy' around subjects which are not yet processed and available to the child to think about.

Project work about houses, buildings, bridges and structures can help to develop in concrete ways, a sense of a symbolic container.

Brain calming activities throughout the day can help to maintain the calmness of thought. Music, rhythmical activities, brain gym, are now common in schools to maintain calm concentration.

A project about protecting endangered fierce wild animals was a calming task for a very angry boy – he chose to research this in his project time. His hostility towards the teacher was expressed in board games where she was 'killed off', 'wiped off the board', each time that he won. But the expression of his hostility, expressed safely in

games with rules, relieved tensions and assisted in enabling him to become more involved in permitting her to help him to learn.

The curriculum is rich in opportunities to begin to think about unprocessed experience but from a safer position, with the teacher/ support staff providing the materials and the language which facilitates the thoughts and the task providing the emotional safety from exposure to the relationships – the ongoing development of emotional intelligence through interactions with others who can put words to experience and so enable the child to experience being able to think, take risks and to learn.

And of course, learning to tolerate success can take some time for children whose negative expectations are being contradicted by successful outcomes and positive comments from adults. But the experience of success can become, over time a means to an end – the gratification of achievement.

4. Working with emotional and developmental needs.

The daily effects of anger, rage, reactivity and unpredictability take their toll on those working with it. People often feel professionally deskilled, useless and devalued after a day of such challenge. Feelings of depression, anger and frustration are common. But these feelings can be important communications about how the child is feeling, passed on or projected into another 'receptacle/container' who is able to bear them. Overwhelming feelings are split off and projected out into another person – a common device of infants who are overwhelmed by intolerable feelings (Klein 1952).

This is also part of the communication process and in particular is likely when the worker becomes attuned to the child. This tuned in sensitivity is part of the communication process and as such is another important way of understanding the feelings that are disowned by the troubled child. Admitting to such feelings helps to understand what is happening for the child. This involves a situation of trust in colleagues where one's own sensitivities can be exposed and explored with the purpose of helping the child. If this is not safe to do then the worker is at risk as well.

This is even more likely when the feelings that the child arouses in the worker actually resonate with the workers own experiences.

A school mentor described feeling angry with the teachers for not understanding the child he was working with but then recalled his anger with his own teachers who had ignored his feelings when he was very distressed about changes in his family which affected his behaviour at school.

The teacher went home feeling depressed about the pupil's recent loss of her father but was reminded that she had not resolved her own feelings about her father leaving the family.

The support worker was aware of feelings of murderous rage when the child she was working with was in touch with his feelings of witnessing his mother being attacked by her partner and recalled her own rage at being hit by a partner of her mother's.

The care worker raged against the stupidity of a Looked After Child's mother for not being more protective of her child but later realised her own anger about her mother who had not sufficiently protected her against certain experiences.

We all have histories which we bring to the work place and which often help us to be sensitive to the feelings and experiences of others but it is essential that we are self aware and in touch with our own experiences of distress which might otherwise make us vulnerable and less reliable. This is a further factor for ongoing and sensitive support of all workers involved with challenging behaviour and emotionally needy children – a way of making personal experiences part of the communication process about the child (Part 2)

Challenging behaviour is a significant experience for those who have to experience it on a daily basis. Relieving this stress is a very important aspect of working with vulnerable children because adults who are overwhelmed and unable to think are unable to process the experiences and feelings of troubled young people and this can exacerbate the problems for the child. Being able to think about experience and make

sense of it are crucial. If this is possible for the adults, then the unprocessed experiences of vulnerable children can begin to be transformed onto words and thoughts and made available to children as coping mechanisms for dealing with adversity for themselves.

This needs to be a shared process so that all share the same understanding of the child and the inevitable anxiety surrounding such behaviour can be shared without splits and mistrust. The institution and the network then become a strong enough container to begin to bear the pain and unprocessed dread that marks this most adverse of experiences – practice can then be led by reflection and thought rather than reactivity. This is described in Part 2 and is the complementary practice to understanding the communication in behaviour.

The school or institution becomes the secure base for the child and the staff by a process of reflective discussion rather than reactive response – making it safer for the pupil and the staff.

Summary and conclusions.

The roots of challenging behaviour have been described here using the framework of Attachment Theory as a way of understanding the obstacles to learning as well as the pathways to remediation and change. Using this framework, it is possible to make links between the early social and emotional development of the child and the relative difficulties in facing challenge, exploring what is not yet known and trusting in others for help and support. Understanding behaviour becomes a way of gaining insight into the defensive behaviours which develop to protect the child from intolerable fears and uncertainties as well as a way of communicating understanding about the feelings, experiences and needs of the child. Such understanding can begin to change the self awareness of the child and so the Internal Working Model of hopelessness and mistrust which can underlie difficulties in learning.

Changes in achievement can thus be addressed by facilitating emotional and social development in the context of reliable and consistent relationships and a curricular framework which recognises the very early developmental needs of the child, the value of the nature and safety of the educational task and a content which facilitates emotional literacy and self awareness.

The work of the staff involved with children is at the heart of change and the issues of this work will be addressed and discussed in part 2.

Part 1 and Part 2 of this document are seen as complementary and relate to the involvement in the whole network to bring about change and greater access to learning for Looked After and other such vulnerable children.

Heather Geddes.

November 2006

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Behaviour and the Learning of Looked After and other Vulnerable Children

Part 2

Promoting Learning through Collaborative Problem-solving

Gerda Hanko

This part of the practice guide, taking account of **the growing concern about a system failing the most vulnerable children and the needs of those working with them within and across educational and child care settings**, describes how **collaborative staff support strategies** can address **the needs of both.**

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It has long been recognised that working together effectively is often difficult for people from different professional backgrounds, and yet that is what this concern now officially **demand**s to deal with the **multi-professional nature of so many problems.**

Practical examples will be offered which show **how a collaborative, consultatively jointly enabling problem-solving** approach **in action can enrich professional expertise, assist in resolving conflicts, and offer the colleaguial support which** is so crucial in the endeavour to meet the needs of vulnerable children.

CONTENTS of Part 2

1. Preamble: Understanding Children's Needs in their Context.

As NCERCC News (2006) emphasises, "working with Looked After Children needs specific skills and knowledge" and requires an understanding of their needs both in their commonality and in their being special to only some children. The effects, for instance, of "… trauma, loss and separation are factors that may be seen to commonly [yet differently] affect Looked After Children, … but also many children not Looked After".

To be able to use such understanding with the skills required for being attuned to children's lives in their particular contexts, it is essential that the **needs of those working with them** are also recognised and met. This, too, requires awareness that there are **circumstantial contexts** in which human needs arise and develop, and that these **involve social and emotional factors,** some of which are common to all, some will be common to some people, and some will be special only to individuals, depending on the psychological dynamics of the circumstances experienced.

Working with children requires an awareness of this **psychodynamic base**, the **social and emotional factors involved** in learning, but also requires an understanding that these factors are **open to further developmen**t affected by past and present experiences linking new **interactions.** Insights into **this psychodynamic base** need to be made accessible to all those involved with looked-after children, to enable every member of staff to be psychologically available and attuned to the complexity of **every individual child's developmental needs** for stability, self-worth, trust and love.

2. The Multi-professional Nature of Problems

Since many of the problems presented by looked-after children are **multi-**professional, they can be more effectively dealt with if **staff across the professional boundaries share** their experiences and informed insights. But doing so is often difficult for people from different professional backgrounds, and yet that is what an 'Every Child Matters' agenda urgently requires.

How best can we **promote, use and share our insights** into the social and emotional factors involved in looked-after children's behaviour and learning? To forestall debilitating surprises ("No one ever told us school mattered"), Sonia Jackson (1988) had already shown how much it helps if all staff involved **realise** that "**TEACHERS WILL BE BETTER TEACHERS IF SOCIAL WORKERS HELP THEM TO APPRECIATE WHAT IT MEANS TO GROW UP IN CARE; AND SOCIAL WORKERS NEED HELP TO CONSIDER THE EFFECT OF FREQUENT PLACEMENTS ON CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE".** It helps if all staff understand, for instance, the multi-professional effects of frequent placements and how they have been handled, as this will affect the task of both teachers and social workers**. [1]**

3. How the System May Fail both the Children and the Staff, but how even systemic difficulties can be addressed through *'communicating worth'* **to a child when informed insights are shared across the professions**

 Placement agencies, understandably, will see foster care as the preferred option to severely damaging family experience and neglect, but foster placements may break down, repeated changes will further increase the child's already profound lack of a sense of self-worth and the inability of learning to trust any relationships, making the residential carers' major task to achieve even harder There are accounts (Cross 2006) of how specialised residential care may not only be seen as 'a last resort' but even be put to the child and family in words that express the frustration they are 'causing' others ("we have tried everything and the only thing now left is for you to go into a children's home").

On the other hand, referrals may be accompanied by messages meant to be comforting, such as that "it will only be for a short time until we can find a suitable

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[1] As the new Green Paper CARE MATTERS (October 2006, www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations) warns, too many children when placed in care are still being moved around from one placement to another, with 13 per cent having had three or more placements this year, and almost one third of children having three or more care placements during secondary school, in one case the information of yet another change reaching the young person just two days before the start of his GCSEs. cf . Harriet Sergeant 2006, 'Handle with Care' Report, by the Centre for Young Policy Studies think-tank, www.cps.org.uk)]

foster carer". Devaluing the service, "the odds are stacked against the child and the placement. How can workers be expected to **communicate worth to the child** when the service has been so devalued? How can a child be expected to respond to and to trust people when s/he has been told you won't be there for long and it is not the best place for you anyway" (Cross ibid.), or when there are conflicts in a mainstream school brewing between teacher and social worker who both doubt each other's judgment about a child's immediate needs (as had been the case in 'Jeanie's' school referred to below)?

Well integrated collaborating teams are the answer offered by both independent residential therapeutic community schools (cf.www.pettrust.org.uk) and non-residential LEA schools like the Ian Mikardo day school for 11-16 boys with severe SEBD (see Appendix 1) who ascribe their effectiveness to their teachers, social workers and other professionals from related settings to working harmoniously in such jointly staff multi-agency teams.

What training[2] would be required for staff in any educational and care setting, to achieve such collaboration, to ensure staff becoming resources to each other, to be able to meet their charges' overwhelming needs and not to be themselves overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task?

4. Examples of addressing multi-professional difficulties in "communicating worth to a child" through sharing informed insights

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[2] The collaborative problem-solving approach to multi-professional staff training which this guide introduces, has its roots in Gerald Caplan's (1961, 1970) epoch-making consultation approach with severely traumatised war orphans. It was designed in support of the social and mental health workers who, almost overwhelmed by the children's desperate experiences, were at a loss how to help them deal with their traumatic memories. The success of Caplan's collaborative consultation approach then influenced education and social work practitioners working with John Bowlby at theTavistock clinic, among them Froebel trained Irene Caspari (1976) and psychiatric social worker Elizabeth Irvine (1979). They applied and promoted this approach in education and child care services training settings across the country and were able to report their experiences of **social workers and teachers fruitfully supporting each other** also over non-referred pupils **by taking on a consultative role, and pooling in discussion their complementary understanding of problems and of approaches to them**. For further developments see Hanko 1996, 1999/2001, where some of the following examples are described in greater detail).]

'Jeanie', *who was frightened that she might become 'mad' like her alcoholic mother*

Fostered since babyhood but not freed for adoption by her alcoholic mother who visited her at irregular intervals, 'Jeanie' seemed happy with her foster parents but (affected by **the impact that an alcoholic parent can have on a child***) was frightened that she might become 'mad' like her mother. At school, trying to be accepted by the other children, she only irritated them with her fussy attention-seeking helpfulness so that no one wanted to work or play with her. Since the rejection worsened with every new attempt of hers to be helpful, her teacher, Mrs.A., presented her case for exploration of Jeanie's needs by her school's work discussion group (who were being trained in the joint* problem-solving consultation strategy of professional development outlined below).

As a result, Mrs.A. *decided to try and guide her in continuing to be helpful but less obtrusively so, and to encourage one or two of the more mature children in the class to work with her in their 'friendship' group. Soon this strategy was beginning to work and Mrs.A. reported to her colleagues' group, as well as to Jeanie's social worker, that Jeanie was responding quite nicely and that 'a lot was now going for her'.*

M*rs.A. became however worried when she heard from the foster mother that the social worker, whose frequent visits Jeanie apparently feared, thought Jeanie should be referred to a psychiatrist. Mrs.A. now feared that a referral at this stage could lead to Jeanie again being made to 'feel different' when she seemed to be so nicely 'on the mend'.*

The *teacher could understand Jeanie's difficulty about the social worker's visits since she herself did not find him easy to relate to, especially when he had apparently told the foster parents that teachers aren't really 'qualified' to judge on whether a child should or should not be referred. But the idea of such a referral also distressed the foster parents who saw this as an indication that they were failing Jeanie. From Jeanie's' frequent happy accounts of her relationship with her foster parents, however, Mrs.A. felt that no child could be in better foster care.*

At their next session, the training group then examined how best to arrange a meeting in which foster parents, social worker and the school (Mrs.A. and the headteacher) could exchange information in such a way that all sides could listen to each other and explore what they thought Jeanie really needed. This mitigated the existing tension, school and social worker amicably agreed that, in the light of Jeanie's recent improvement, things could be left to tick over for a while so as not to reinforce the child's feeling of 'being different'. Thus the social worker's suggestion of referral would not be rejected but postponed; and help through child guidance be perhaps used to prepare the ground, depending on what needs emerged.
Thus the initial disagreement between social worker and teacher was prevented from escalating into defensive insistence on premature suggestions from either side, the foster parents' confidence was restored, and it all helped of course Jeanie.

Altogether, this unhappy situation was resolved by an inspired redeployment of the teacher's enabling skills, fostered and promoted in her work discussion group's explorations.

Equally, **such collaboratively enabling training groups can help to address perceptions of helplessness** in teaching and care situations, when **joint explorations discover** a **teacher's or carer's untapped resources.** This happened to 'Ivan's teacher Mr.E., "*when Ivan, a totally unresponsive boy, suddenly responded once in writing about a story I had read to the class – but he was soon back in his shell*"

In10-year old Ivan's case the work discussion group consisted of primary and secondary teachers and pastoral care staff focusing on across schools transition issues. Mr.E.,his young teacher, in his first appointment and **in despair how to get any further response from this seemingly withdrawn boy** -"who *didn't respond to anything, not even when I could praise him one day, at least momentarily, for some quite imaginative written work*" - was alerted during the group's exploration how he, unwittingly, had been offering the boy a chance that somehow seemed to chime with his emotional world (cf. Elton's 1989 use of the concept of an '**affective curriculum',** and Bettelheim's emphasis on how books can help in dealing with

emotional conflicts)[3] when he introduced the class to a story to write about. *Ivan did respond to that, but he was soon back in his shell*".

 The group's exploring what the story was about, and learning that it was Kipling's 'Just so story' "how the hedgehog got his prickles" which Ivan could write about, suddenly gave Mr.E.one of those 'Aha-experiences' to link its content to this 'prickly' boy's apparent relationship needs. He could now focus on how to further develop Ivan's responsiveness. And on parents' evening Mr.E. gained an additional understanding of Ivan's withdrawn behaviour: for, when he mentioned to his parents "that Ivan was now getting on so much better ", he gathered from their surprise at Ivan having any problems at all, how a family's concern, not so much for Ivan but for his **older brother living away from home in residential care, can affect another sibling living with the family, and interfere with his learning, too.**

5. Vulnerabilities and Resilience, Perceptions of Helplessness and Negative

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[3] **The Elton Report's** (1989) inspired revival of the concept of the 'affective curriculum' was based on the increasingly emphasised importance of understanding the emotional and social factors involved in children's learning. Elton therefore extended its enquiry on discipline in schools to examining how pupils' educational experience might be enhanced by a curriculum through which [even] subject teachers can attend to children's and young people's emotional and social realities in support of their learning, by providing them with meaningful personal experiences to which they can relate (cf. Hanko 2003).

 Bettelheim (1985) had recommended introducing emotionally damaged children and young people to the many 'stories available that deal with emotional conflicts in a world where bad things can happen, but where people can help each other in dealing with difficulties'. (See also appendix 2 for 'left out' children's poems on this issue).

Interestingly, according to Benjamin's recent article on 'Secrets of a happy home'(Guardian 11.10.2006), the new Green Paper on Care Matters reflects Bettelheim's philosophy through what DfES officials and their 'minister for social exclusion' learned from their recent visit to the Bettelheim inspired Kinderhaus care home in Berlin

Feelings in Learning and Teaching: how an understanding individual can matter more than a system

"Most teachers already have much of the knowledge and skills they need to teach [responsively]. What they lack is confidence in their own competence" (Mittler 2000)

Discrepancies between what children may remember of their teachers' effectiveness, and what teachers remember of their successes with their 'dfficult' pupil**s**, were highlighted by David Quinton and Michael Rutter through their much acclaimed publications on **the effectiveness of experiences at school in the later years of young parents who had grown up in care.** (cf. Quinton, 'Parenting Breakdown' (1987); Quinton and Rutter, 'The consequences of care' (1987); Rutter, Pathways from Childhood to Adult Life: the role of schooling'; Rutter, Critical Review in JCPP 2006).

Their research suggests at least four things:
- that teachers may have been more successful with their most difficult pupils than they had thought they were,
- that, by extrapolation, they could have been even more successful than they had been, had they understood the relevance of Bowlby's attachment theory (see Part 1) according to which an individual is seen as "progressing along a variety of different pathways, each of which is influenced by later, as well as by early experiences**".,**
- that an understanding individual can matter more than a system, (such as former in care children ascribing their growing resilience to one teacher whom they remembered as helping them to feel more confident)
- but could also be made aware that an individual's enabling skills will affect at least some colleagues similarly, and thus eventually also affect the system.

The researchers had set out to examine the childhood memories of young parents in their mid-twenties who had **grown up in children's homes** and who at secondary school had given their teachers cause for concern. How were they coping now? Among them the researchers found that frequently these quite resilient young parents **retrospectively ascribed their later resilie**nce in coping with the hazards and

dilemmas of life **to some good experiences at school, provided by at least one or two understanding teachers.** They could remember such a teacher as "not writing them off ", as giving them "the experience of some form of success, or just pleasure in activities at school … rather than just success in formal examinations"; and this, they felt, had developed their "feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy" (Quinton 1987).

These effects, however, were **so subtle that the teachers had remained unaware** of them! For, when the researchers traced those teachers to hear what they in their turn remembered about those former 'difficult' pupils, the teachers mainly remembered their own lack of success with them, their 'having-tried-everything- but-nothing-seemed-to-work' syndrome of **negative feelings and resignation**. But 'unknowingly', their latent **untapped professional know-how** of the needs of children in care to feel acknowledged and valued, had put these children on the road of a ' developmental pathway' to which the children could respond at least at the subconscious level of future remembering.

The teachers had thus quite needlessly remained at the mercy of their negative feelings of resignation. Attending to this likely possibility, as Rutter (2006) implies, is particularly crucial **when working with children in institutional care and their experience of forced separations. Those working with them need to know how to apply their informed insights** about such children's need for recognition, for developing a sense of self-worth, 'feeling thought about' by someone important to them, feeling that they matter to someone who does not give up, which is above all a question of being someone who knows **"how to create and how to convey empathy and respect** (Sennett 2003)

6. An individual team member's attempt at empathic dialogue with a 'difficult' boy, and how this added to the whole group's understanding of creating respect

As we saw with Ivan's teacher, it is an aspect of a collaborative professional support strategy that through joint reflection it raises awareness of how an individual teacher's or carer's as yet untapped, latent 'implicit' resources (Mr.E.' choosing a story whose effect he had not yet appreciated while *'in action'*) can be brought to light and thereby 'validated through *reflection on action'* (Claxton 1997). In contrast, the teachers in the

Quinton/Rutter research did not at the time have the benefit of a collaborative strategy to liberate their expertise. Seemingly by chance only, and to their great surprise, had they managed to make their pupils feel appreciated without realising it.

What understanding does a multi-professional workforce need to liberate each other's expertise, for staff to become resources to each other?[4]

Similar ways of such 'wanting to be enlightened' are explored in the following.

Examples, conveying respect through opening the door to empathic dialogue:

<u>"*I don't know anymore how to react to this boy*"</u>

I described in greater detail (Hanko 2006) *how during an inter-professional work discussion in a secondary EBD school one of the teachers described her discouraging experience with one of her most disruptive 14-year-olds, whose so far unmanageable behaviour puzzlingly 'changed out of the blue' one day, just when she had felt like giving up on him. In her despair she had asked him, since nothing she did worked, what HE would like her to do with him to help him learn. Could he tell her?*

She noticed him looking puzzled, but got no reply. Since then, however, he was 'different', and in one new encounter, after she lightly reprimanded him about something, he blurted out that 'Nobody liked him anyway – so what's the point?' This now sounded to her like a cry for help from a world he experienced as friendless and unfair and in which he felt he did not belong. She now wondered with her colleagues

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[4] **Steinberg** (1989) describes the fundamentals of liberating each other's expertise through collaborative consultation as asking questions in such a way that the problem that is being explored can be looked at anew, with people assisting each other in finding their own workable alternative solutions.

The essence of an effective learning and caring relationship - whether between colleagues or between workers and children – is part of **Bettelheim**'s 'the art of the obvious': creating respect and conveying empathy unobtrusively.

Between adults and children, this will matter especially in critical moments of conflict when "neither love, nor just wanting to help, are enough". He describes in one such case how he "could elicit no response from [an unresponsive pupil] if my motive was [just] to 'help' him. But if I sincerely wanted him to enlighten me about something of great importance about which he possessed knowledge unavailable to me, this put us on an equal footing as a bond of common humanity and allowed this completely unrelating child to relate to me".

what might have caused this change of allowing her to look into his world, and how should she react to this?

Her colleagues' exploration which now followed had a heartening effect on this teacher: they thought that, rather than adding any anger of her own to his (which the boy had not yet learnt to manage), she seemed to have communicated some of the despair she herself had felt had thus shown sympathy with his despair. She had been able to ask him for help which, she had conveyed to him, only he could give her. As a significant person in his life who was not 'writing him off', but who saw him as 'worth bothering about', she had offered him an important new experience as somebody worthy of being asked for advice.

All the time the teacher listened thoughtfully. She confirmed that she did feel 'on his side' but had not really been aware of how significant that was. Moreover, her colleagues, so non-judgmentally sharing their being on HER side, thus made her feel supported and cared about, and this meant having her strengths recognized and respected when she had herself underestimated these

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When I finally asked the group how the session had worked for the group as a whole, they felt that contributing from their own expertise in such supportive, reflective ways, like noticing their colleague's apparently 'instinctive' professional response when *she* asked the boy for *his* view, was really also deepening their own awareness of the **potential in empathic dialogue between teacher and pupil** for coping in similar situations. Altogether, they, too, had felt enabled to 'look at a problem anew' (Steinberg footnote) and had become a resource to each other..

<u>"I don't llike yyouu!" – "But what makes you think you have got to like me?"</u>

Dialogue was also opened when in a secondary EBD school *a 14-year-old, frustrated at not being able to meet his much liked teacher's expectation in completing a particular task, snarled through gritted teeth "I don't llike youuu!", his teacher calmly asked "What makes you think you have got to like me?". But he did not wait for an answer, so as to allow the boy to think more deeply about the significance of that question.*

<u>"I am sorry you are feeling so bad… has something made you very sad?"</u>

Similarly 'instinctively' empathic, and without waiting for an answer, seemed the reflective response of the teacher in a junior school during an encounter with one of her ten-year-olds' extreme aggressiveness and anger directed at her. She somehow understood his anger as an outward sign of some distress, and thus managed to react to the child's seemingly angry façade, not with any anger of her own but managed to convey her concern by telling him how sorry she was that he was 'feeling so bad'. Asking him whether there was something that made him very sad, the boy burst into tears.

When invited to **reflect on** their colleague's action what understanding her 'implicit know-how' **employed in action** may have conveyed, members of the group thought that she knew that

- **attacks like these come from unhappy children**, and are, deep down**, not directed personally** at this teacher but at all those other past adults at the root of this child's unhappiness;
- by reacting to him as a sad child rather than an angry one, she taught him imperceptibly something that he will have to learn to manage himself some time, namely that strong negative feelings can be contained;,
- that one can learn to understand one's feeling a bit better by learning something of the connection between anger and anxiety ('angst'!);
- and above all that she allowed him to feel that he was, after all other past experiences, capable of making a person significant in his life, feel concerned for him, that he was worth caring about.

 A different example of the effect which a single question arising from such explorations can have on a teacher-pupil relationship was provided by a pastoral care tutor who attended a training course on collaborative staff development (Hanko 1999). *In one of the workshop sessions she had presented her difficulties with a disaffected 14-year old, unapproachable in her hostility towards the staff, including the tutor, who was at a loss how to help her. When the tutor told the group that she was aware of the girl's clearly difficult home circumstances, a member of the group merely asked whether the girl herself was aware of her tutor's concern about these difficulties at home? The tutor thought not, not wanting to seem intrusive, but*

reported at a later session how, when passing the girl in the corridor the next day, she had briefly stopped, asking whether "things are still quite difficult at home? We must have a chat some time". Three days later, this seemingly hostile girl had hesitantly reminded her that "we haven't had that chat yet". A feeling of having been 'kept in mind' by a supportive adult, had clearly helped to start creating for the girl a better learning environment within which to make progress.

7. Becoming aware of the psychodynamic base behind children's behaviour

What enabled the participants in the above work discussion groups to enter so supportively into the spirit of exploring one colleague's seemingly specific concern and way of handling a problem? How had they managed to discover an individual colleague's particular strengths and difficulties so non-judgmentally, accepting and then supplementing them with their own experience and expertise without 'telling' her how to do things differently?

All the groups and individual practitioners referred to in this practice guide had been able to participate in **awareness-raising inter-professional training sessions**, mostly in their own places of work.
It was suggested to them that to overcome difficulties which we often experience when we come from different professional backgrounds, we need to agree on some **professional basics** within these differing backgrounds, such as

- **respect for professional boundaries while communicating across** them,
- a professional ethos which accepts **being responsive to every child** in accordance with the 'every child matters' workforce agenda,
- understanding of the **interactional dimensio**n of our work

Within an at first general discussion of the group members current concerns the essence of **understanding the psychodynamic base for addressing the needs of children whose behaviour is hard to manage,** was then – **based on attachment theory** (see Part 1) - summarised as follows (cf. Hanko 2002):

That it helps to realise:

i. that children with problem behaviour are experiencing feelings they find difficult to bear, but that behaviour is more likely to be managed to the extent to which these feelings are understood by those who are involved with them;

ii. that children's difficult here-and-now behaviour, whether displayed overtly or masked in over-compliance or withdrawal, is a likely reaction to a **present** situation they perceive as 'unmanageably' difficult; it may also echo similar **past** events in perhaps damaging relationships. For instance, a teacher's reprimand, even if justified, may fit into a past pattern of being rejected, not feeling valued, believing themselves inherently dislikeable (cf. one of the above examples);
just as a teacher's well-meant praise may lead to an outburst of despair in children who, believing themselves to be 'born stupid', may irrationally fear having to disappoint a teacher who appears to believe in them (cf. Hanko 1994)).

What matters then is **that something changes** in the way in which the child is helped to perceive himself differently, such as feeling valued in relation to others important to him (Waddell 1998);
Altogether it helps to realise that a child's behaviour is further influenced by our response to him which then, in its turn, influences ours. Thus **the trained professional's response will be a major influence on whether the interaction becomes a virtuous or a vicious circle.**

Psycho-dynamically aware, professionals may then also learn to understand, and to **deal with, the negative feelings which children can make us have about them. This should include using our own negative feelings as a vital source of information to gain access to the child's "teachable self"** behind the behavioural façade (as shown in one of the above examples about 'feeling bad…being sad'). It helps to contain one's own anger if one asks oneself what the anger displayed by the child is likely to mean to him.

8 Setting up and developing a consultatively enabling joint problem-solving work discussion group (for detailed accounts cf. Hanko 1995 3rd edition & 1999/2001; Hanko 2002)

Outline of a **collaborative skills enabling approach**: **Principles and Practice**

In accordance with Steinberg's outline (cf. footnote 4, p.11) of the fundamentals of a consultatively enabling joint problem-solving approach, colleagues need to be introduced to the skill of asking each other questions in such a way that the problem which is being explored can be looked at anew, so as to assisting each other in **finding their own alternative solutions.**

As an initial awareness-raising input the following skills can be offered to professional training groups, later to be deepened as the group members develop their consultative explorations:

- *asking answerable questions (* **which may widen insights about a child's needs displayed in his behaviour, and how he might respond to possible interventions in the course of an ordinary working day); but asking such questions in a genuinely exploring, non-judgemental and thus supportive way);**
- *(from the answers to such questions) discovering the teacher's/carer's strengths and building on them, -*and, through the sharing process accepting and supplementing (rather than supplanting) the professional's existing expertise with that of the other colleagues and supporting consultant/facilitator as co-equals;
- *generating information that can help to highlight the* issues relating to the situation that is being explored in any one session..

As we saw in Mr.E.'s case, the way in which he was asked questions, enabled him to extend his competence vis-à-vis Ivan, and soon for all other children, by understanding in which most appropriate way he could work out a curriculum more geared to Ivan's and the other children's social and emotional needs. He also used his communication skills with Ivan's parents, gaining considerable additional insight on Ivan's behalf;

as Jeanie's teacher, Mrs.A, proceeded with the approach, she further developed her own expertise as well as that of all the others involved in the problem situation: the social worker, the foster mother, the headteacher, child guidance, and, above all, Jeanie, on whose behalf they all met;

as the suggested enabling questions affected the staff involved in the whole range of situations presented, learning the art of initiating an empathic dialogue was of the essence, both for liberating the staff's expertise and for promoting the well-being of the children.

As was shown, **consultative enablement skills are first and foremost language communication skill**s: they are based on an awareness of how language works, how communication processes become effective, how one can prevent them from being ineffective or be counterproductive in **dialogue across professional boundaries while respecting them by everybody involved in the discussion.** They may be colleagues from within or across schools, education, social and health services, feeder schools, or parents, all bringing their own understandings which these skills are designed to help them to share without 'fear or favour'.

The introductory initial awareness-raising stage of starting a group is thus of great importance. Participants tend to welcome some **guidance about possible contents of question**s they may like to ask and how to do so in a supportive way, rather than a challenging questioning one.

Thus, to ensure a genuinely supportive exploratory climate rather than making it look like an official interview, one may, for instance, as the exploration develops, **'wonder'** about:

- what may be known about the child's behaviour in and out of school, what he seems to feel about others and himself, peoples' response to his behaviour ;

- how at school others in the class relate to each other, how are praise and reprimand, success and lack of it, encouragement and discouragement, being handled? What positive experiences might one be able to design?

- How the child reacts to the day-to-day teaching programme, his likes and dislikes in comparison to other children?

- What other adults might one be able to enlist in partnership from within and across the school and school services, members of the child's family (parents, siblings, grandparents).

Sharing ideas, 'wondering about' alternative possibilities, requires questions to be genuine, i.e. fed by a guiding idea in an informed questioner's mind, rather than pseudo-questions that convey the questioner's own answers, e.g.

genuine	pseudo
"how might this child react if one tried…?" /	"don't you think one should…?"
"could it be that …?" /	"why don't you try…?"
"is he always like this? When isn't he?" /	"have you tried…?"
"what might she like to hear from you?" /	"have you told her…?"
"what might influence the parents to come?" /	"did you tell the parents to come?"

<div align="center">etc.</div>

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What consultancy facilitators will need to forestall – preferably with some humour – is that
- questions do not make people feel worse by seeming to imply that others can handle things better,

and that they instead
- convey appreciation of colleagues' experience and expertise,
- share own expertise so that it supplements those of others, rather than setting out to supplant it,
- recognise strengths in a colleague's answers, tap untapped skills and know how to build on them, as we saw in the examples discussed.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is hoped that this widely acclaimed collaboratively multi-professional support strategy here presented, **designed to assist education, health and social service providers to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people**, developed in this country and elsewhere (see, for instance, the developing 'Berlin Initiative of the Caspari Foundation'), will now also be officially supported to ensure meeting the aims of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda.

The support strategy described is clearly also a most economic strategy to further develop the kind of. enrichment process which this training practice guide outlines, a **support strategy in which professionals can feel their endeavours recognised, feel themselves cared about as they care for colleagues and children in often overwhelmingly difficult work settings, but where it is possible to stimulate a new sense of professional worth and worthwhileness** on behalf of so many children.

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Appendix 1: The Ian Mikardo School – A Relational and Multi-Agency Approach
            (the head's and the development teacher's account)

Appendix 2: "She chose to have me taken away, my mum"
        "Being left out"
         "I have feelings"
         (poems by 'left out' children, nasen collection 2006)

Appendix

Ian Mikardo High School
A Relational and Multi-Agency Approach

Context

Ian Mikardo High School , in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, is a day special school for secondary boys aged 11 – 16 with severe and complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) which present significant barriers to their learning. All the students have Statements of SEN for SEBD . 75% of the current roll are of White UK heritage and the others are from a range of black heritages. All receive free school meals. 80% have current or previous Social Services involvement and nearly 70% are known to the Youth Offending Team. 65% have involvement of mental health services. 10 % are Looked After Children.

The current Head Teacher, Claire Lillis, was appointed in Summer Term 2002. The school had been in special measures since October 2001. In March 2004, the school was removed from special measures by the HMI Team responsible for monitoring and then in June 2006 as a result of a Section 8 OFSTED Inspection the school obtained outstanding status.

The school's mission statement says *"We are a school for students with severe and complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. We strive to offer all students opportunities to improve their chances in an inclusive and non-judgmental environment. The school embraces diversity and gives a voice and respect to those who are not always heard."* To *s*upport this offer, the school adheres to a pedagogy based on consistent and reliable relationships and where the developing needs of the individual student informs practice in the classroom and around the school, including resolving conflicts when their behaviour has resulted in distress to themselves, their peers or staff.

Learning and Emotions

The psychological assessments undertaken as part of the statutory assessment process prior to the students arriving at the school nearly always indicate that the students are not achieving to the level of their potential and that this is not so much attributable to cognitive ability as to social and emotional difficulties.

The school has tried to look at how we can understand the emotional barriers which prevent the students from being able to take up the learning offer. The school's hypothesis at this point is, that if the emotional aspects of learning and teaching are thought about (through supervision and seminars as well as classroom observation and feedback) then the staff will be better placed to devise tasks which somehow take account of this. Tasks which are devised and presented bearing in mind the emotional impact of the task on the learner may be less likely to intensify the resistance to learning and be more supportive of engagement.

At Ian Mikardo it is recognized that the young people are unlikely to engage in a learning process unless they feel 'safe enough' and 'contained enough'. It is our belief that this can only be achieved through establishing a working relationship with the young people. Most of the young people have a history of poor interpersonal relationships both with adults and with peers. One of the most important aims of the school is therefore to create an environment where young people can start to engage in a learning process. One of the teachers says ***"We are trying to create a place in which children that have not engaged at all in education or really in anything can come to engage in something productive be that academically productive or just socially and emotionally productive."***

Part of the basic learning therefore has to the establishment of a relationship with adults whom the young person can trust. It is because of this relationship that the young person is able to start to develop skills that will equip them to function in the outside world. Obviously a secondary function of this relationship is that the young person will be able to take aspects of these relationships forward and use them as a template in future relationships.

The staff in Ian Mikardo are in constant relationship with the young people and are therefore at the forefront of the struggle these young people are experiencing. The staff inevitably experience the attention the young people crave and the demands they make emotionally as extremely draining and potentially very stressful. The ethos of the school, although one which tries to respond effectively to the needs of the students, places enormous demands on staff. The staff need on-going support to understand that the young people's behaviour is not wilfully directed at them. Staff are given the opportunity to reflect on what might be influencing a young person's behaviour and encouraged to develop informed responses. It would be very difficult for a staff which did not receive this kind of support to be able to effectively support these young people. The school uses weekly supervision and seminars with the school psychotherapist and the School Improvement and Development Teacher not as "add – ons" but as an intrinsic part of the staff support structure.

The students are aware that all of the staff have supervision sessions on a weekly basis with the school psychotherapist where they discuss the challenges and difficulties of working in the school. They are also aware of the daily briefings where staff discuss and arrive at collaborative decisions. Because of the Breakfast Club and the communal lunches as well as many other opportunities to see staff together e.g. on trips, the students see staff interacting in a way which demonstrates a range of emotions – irritation and humour, vulnerability and resilience, sadness and celebration etc. All of these contribute to building a healthy model of human interaction from which the students can draw.

What follows is an account under various headings of practice which has evolved over the last four years based on the school's beliefs about the challenge of learning for students manifesting social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

To create a school community which is welcoming, caring, non-judgmental and respectful of the individual the school has :

- An extended breakfast (8.30 – 9.50) every morning helps bridge the gap for the students between home and school. They have something to eat and a chance to acclimatise to the school environment. Staff can observe any particular changes in a student's behaviour and address it or take it to staff briefing
- Organised itself so that the students and staff have lunch together in a kitchen which the students themselves created out of a former Home Economics classroom
- Encouraged student voice .The school council meets regularly. Students have accompanied the head teacher to meetings with the LEA e.g. in recent negotiations about Building Schools for the Future and were included as part of our staff consultation day on the School Improvement Plan. Students were also consulted about the redesigning of the school curriculum. Recently, one of the local CAMHS teams wanted to know more about how their services were impacting on users and one of our students who had used their psychotherapy services was able to give them feedback on his experience of the service as part of a CAHMS service development day
- Tutor group meetings in the morning and in the afternoon for briefings and de-briefings (which mirror staff process – see below) about the day to look at what they might be bringing with them into school in emotional or social terms and how they have experienced being at school that day
- A mini bus pick up for a number of students who might have organisational or motivational difficulties relating to home factors outside their control

To provide a curriculum which engages the young people, engenders a love of learning and equips them to be included in society the school has:

- Developed a new curriculum in consultation with staff , students, parents, Governors and LEA which was then mapped against the national curriculum to ensure that students had access to their full curriculum entitlement (see map below). Within each key stage, students are taught in groups organised flexibly and this sometimes means that the students needs rather than his age will determine the teaching group he will belong to. The new curriculum has a particularly strong focus on strengthening of the students' entrepreneurial and creative skills. The students run a Juice Bar, a hair salon and a bike repair workshop in the school; a market stall selling their own design products, and there are plans to open and run a community bakery. They have access to a fully equipped sound studio and produce their own compositions.

My Life Curriculum				
My Body	My Self	My World	My Passport	My Future
PE PHSE Health Education	Art Dance Drama Music Story–telling Film making Circus skills Group work	Science Humanities Politics RE Citizenship Community links	English Mathematics ICT Individual review	Careers Education Vocational learning Work experience Preparation for post-16
←Enjoy and Achieve→				
Be healthy Be safe		Make a positive contribution	Achieve economic well -being	
My School and My Voice (Tutor Groups)				
Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
Be healthy	Be safe	Enjoy and Achieve	Make a positive contribution	Achieve economic well- being

- As the legacy of underachievement diminishes, our current Year 11s take a range of GCSE and GNVQ examinations; of last year's 2005 – 2006 cohort, 5 out of 8 students are entered for GCSE English, 4 out of 10 entered for PE, History and Geography short courses, and all 8 are entered for GNVQ Art and Design (which is equivalent to 4 GCSEs up to Grade D).

To work with the young person and the family to assess and address their social and welfare needs alongside their educational needs the school has:

- Created the basis for a full-service school which will reduce to an absolute minimum the need for students to be cut off from their educational opportunities .Within the context of Children's Services and the ECM Agenda, we see our school as having the flexibility to be able to offer these young people continuity and support through crisis or particularly challenging circumstances.
- Encouraged parents to maintain close links with the school. Not only do teachers and teaching assistants regularly call parents to update them on their children's' progress, but the Deputy Head for Inclusion who is also a qualified Social Worker also works with parents to provide them with support and advice. She has supported the families with applications for re-housing, has accompanied then to court when issues affecting the welfare of the children have arisen. She organises regular medical and dental check-ups for students who might otherwise not have these. The non-judgmental and

practical approach which she has established with the families has meant that the schoolhas their trust and support when it comes to supporting their children to attend and achieve.

- Arranged for many students to have access to support in the school from local CAMHs services, Drugs Agencies. Anti-Social Behaviour team interventions and others as the need arises. This ensures that the students needs are met in the environment where they feel safe and supported.
- Introduced an "Every Child Matters Plan" which is co-created by the student and their tutor once a term. This plan looks at what the student aspires to in relation to the 5 ECM target areas, and, very importantly how the student thinks the school can support them in their efforts (e.g. to eat more healthy food, to enjoy learning more, to achieve a longed for goal such as a holiday abroad or a CD compilation of their own compositions in the sound studio etc)
- Sought funding to appoint to the permanent staff a health worker and assistant social worker who will contribute to ensuring that the welfare and social needs of the young people are addressed in tandem with their educational needs and never constitute and unacceptable barrier to their achievement.
- Created a new conference room in which to hold our regular multi-agency meetings
- Currently been granted funding with Building Schools for the Future to create a short term off-site Residential Facility (comprising a 10 bed hostel) to be staffed jointly by Education and Social Services with the aim of providing short term placements for vulnerable students from within the LA and mainstream schools which would enable the students to continue to attend their educational placement at times of crisis rather than having to be placed out of borough with the disruption and emotional distress this entails

To develop a behaviour management system based on fairness, trust and caring relationships which enables the young people to begin take responsibility for their actions the school has:

- Actively pursued a policy where the response to behavioural incidents is guided in each case by the outcome which will help the student to take most responsibility. The school does not operate a " tariff" or points system. Each incident is dealt with according to the principles at stake. Staff come together every morning and every afternoon to share issues which have not been able to be resolved during that day and ask the questions "What is going to work for each individual child?" and "What ways of dealing with the situation are going to have a positive effect in changing the behaviour?"
Although this is a more demanding approach in terms of the amount of time it necessitates and the often very difficult decisions which need to be made, the school has found that this approach contributes significantly to behavioural change. The change when it happens comes from the student's own development not the fear of sanction.
- Developed a positive partnership with the local Police whereby if the young people committed crimes in school (e.g. carrying offensive weapons, causing criminal damage, assault etc) we will involve the Police who may decide to arrest the young person. The school sees this not simply as a deterrent or sanction as such but as a way of ensuring access to the services they would

need to support prevent them falling into "career crime". We will not however exclude them if they are arrested unless their immediate return to school constitutes a risk to themselves or others. We will however hold a restorative justice meeting to arrive at a resolution and an understanding on the part of the young person. (It will be of interest to note that in the period 2002 – 2005, the school has significantly reduced the incidence of mid to high level conflict between students and students and between students and staff through a combination of its behaviour policy, its community ethos and its curriculum. An indicator of the success of the behaviour management approach might be found in the fact that the school's bill for vandalism to the building and contents stood at £70,000 in the year 2001- 2002. The Governing Body have had to budget for an estimated £2,500 for repairs to building and replacement of contents based on the 2004-2005 figures. Indeed the lack of this level of conflict was seen as 'remarkable' by the Restorative Justice auditors. Equally after an offensive weapons amnesty in 2002, we have had one single incident of a student bringing a weapon into school since)

- Developed a policy of zero permanent exclusion and one where fixed term exclusions are not used as a sanction but as a way of keeping students and staff safe while suitable arrangements might be made (e.g. family meetings, external agency involvement). This might involve supporting the young person to remain in school throughout a period of court attendances etc and liaising effectively with the judicial system on their behalf.

To provide appropriate support and professional development to enable staff to understand and be committed to the demands made on them of educating socially, emotionally and behaviourally challenged young people , the school has :

- Pursued a recruitment policy which as well as appointing 7 qualified teachers to the staff has seen the appointment of a range of professionals to work in the school. The Deputy Head for Inclusion is a qualified Senior Social Worker. There is also a professional hairdresser, an artist, a jeweler a ceramicist, a graphic designer, a drama therapist, 2 local professional DJs, a qualified carpenter, a journalist and a psychologist. The TAs are almost all drawn from the local community many of whom began working in the school as volunteers. These TAs offer a fantastic role model for the students of life-long learning and for some of overcoming the difficulties they themselves experienced at school. The school also employs a 0.4 f.t.e. psychotherapist and a 0.6 f.t.e. School Improvement and Development Teacher who is also a qualified Educational Therapist.

- Morning staff briefings (8.45 – 9.15) which are an opportunity for staff to anticipate issues with particular students, to share information and to discuss realistic strategies. At Afternoon staff briefing, staff have an opportunity to reflect on the day what has worked and what hasn't and what can be learned from that for future strategies

- Developed a framework where non-managerial Senior Leadership Team supervision with the school psychotherapist is used to step back from the daily tasks of running the school and to have time to reflect on practice in the school in a way which informs the school's strategic decision making. A parallel reflective approach is encouraged among staff through weekly group

supervision run by the school psychotherapist. It is very difficult to understand why at certain times a young person might be acting out in a certain way. It is hard not to feel personally responsible and consequently despondent and blaming of the young person. The young person quickly then picks this up and the situation can become intolerable for all concerned. This is why weekly supervision with the school psychotherapist is a fundamental structure we use to support learning. Although this is direct support to staff, without it the students' learning experiences would be affected in a negative way.

• Instituted weekly learning seminars run by the School Improvement and Development Teacher and School Psychotherapist to support staff to develop classroom strategies based on the understanding they are gaining both from supervision and their own personal development as educational professionals and assistants.

Outreach and Support to others working in the field of SEBD

Encouraged by the results we have obtained, we are keen to establish links with other colleagues in the field. We are beginning to develop a range of professional development opportunities including for example short placements at the school (which we already organise for NQTs in the LEA) and tutorials as well as day conferences for mainstream and special schools interested in the approach we have outlined here.

Concluding words

By way of concluding this case study, here is a quote form the OFSTED Inspector in June 2006 "This is an outstanding school. The school motto is 'Come with a past, leave with a future' ….The main indicator of success is that all the boys want to be there, and, once at the school, the majority make tremendous progress. Many are completely transformed by their school experience. The school has a much higher attendance rate (over 90%) than similar schools and this is a testimony to its success."

The head teacher herself says "We are constantly learning and revising our practice. We don't sit still and we are not complacent. We know our outcomes are fantastic but there is a whole load of development still to be done".

Core Characteristics of Attachment Experience

SECURE ATTACHMENT					
Feeling safe enough to explore	**Learning patterns of behaviour**	**Being noticed and thought about.**	**A mechanism to cope with fear and uncertainty**	**Brain development**	**Who am I and what can I expect from you**
Human infant's need protection to survive. The infant is safest when in close proximity to carer/s. When fear or uncertainty are aroused, the infant can arouse concern in others who will protect and reassure. As the infant grows in experience, responsiveness of carers will become 'internalised' so that some uncertainty can be tolerated in the confident knowledge that the reassurance of the secure base will always be available. With this confidence in being kept safe the infant can confidently explore toys and other objects which excite and encourage further exploration and discovery. Play is the precursor of being interested in the outside world and of learning.	Within their close and intimate relationship the mother and infant negotiate a way of relating which assures the infant of the mother's attention. They adapt to each other's responsiveness. Experimental observation of the nature of the maternal/infant relationship (Ainsworth et al (1978) has consistently identified patterns of relating which are established around year one, are consistent over time and continue into adulthood.	In the face to face intimacy of the mother and infant, communication by facial expression, noises and physical holding are the basis of the mother's understanding of her infant. The mother becomes 'attuned' to her baby. As a result of this experience of being understood, the infant learns about itself. We come to know ourselves by being known first by someone else. This is the basis of emotional intelligence and empathy for others. 'A baby needs a container to investigate his feelings and to find out what he is feeling and what it means'(Emanuel 2000).	This sensitive understanding by someone else has particular significance for the capacity to tolerate uncertainty. The sensitive mother understands her infant's cries of fear and uncertainty. She responds by understanding the fear and making it bearable by thinking about its meaning and giving it words and explanations. This both reassures and informs. Fear becomes something which can be recognised and thought about. 'This mechanism of thinking, when challenged by uncertainty then becomes available to the baby as a way of coping with future fears alongside the expectation that when the challenge is too great, supportive others will be available to provide a containing function'(Emanuel 2000).	It is becoming more and more evident that early experiences affect brain development. Children are receptive to experience from the moment the brain begins to develop. Change the environment and the development of the brain changes. This remains true throughout life. The entire period of infancy is dominated by right brain development which is the seat of sensitivity to feelings and the regulation of emotions. As the infant develops, towards the second year, there is a shift from right brain dominance to left brain development as linguistic ability develops. The left brain specialises in higher order operations and sequential and verbal processing. As feelings acquire meaning and words, the left and right brain become integrated. Feeling and function can work together (Gerhardt 2004).	In Bowlby's terms, a person who has experienced a secure enough attachment 'is likely to possess a representational model of attachment figure(s) as being available, responsive and helpful and a complementary model of himself … as a potentially lovable and valued person' (Bowlby 1980 p.242) and 'is likely to approach the world with confidence and, when faced with potentially alarming situations, is likely to tackle them effectively or to seek help in doing so' (Bowlby 1973 p.208).

INSECURE ATTACHMENT

Feeling safe enough to explore	Learning patterns of behaviour	Being noticed and thought about.	A mechanism to cope with fear and uncertainty	Brain development	Who am I and what can I expect from you
The infant's carers are unable to be sufficiently available to re-assure when fears are aroused. Exploration is inhibited by uncertainty and experiencing the unknown becomes a threat rather than a challenge.	Infants may soon learn that attention is not available when they need it and may develop different ways of achieving interacting – they may give up and become self reliant, try to constantly force the parent to respond by persistent crying or demanding behaviour or even become highly tuned into the parent and change their behaviour to match their mood and availability. They can harbour considerable rage towards the parent but not feel safe to express it.	An infant whose feelings and reactions have not been understood and translated into words and thoughts can find their own feelings overwhelming and incomprehensible. They may then have little way of understanding others' feelings and can act as if what they do to others means nothing.	In the absence of a sensitive understanding and response when fear and uncertainty are aroused, the infant fails to develop the necessary mechanism for coping with adversity by communication and thought. Instead, fear and vulnerability have to be denied or acted out in behaviours which project the fear into others.	When right brain is flooded by experiences such as fear and uncertainty, with little or no moderating function of understanding and words, then brain development can become dominated by fight and flight neural pathways. Feeling and thinking can remain separate functions and right brain reactivity can be easily triggered. Reactivity dominates behaviour at times of uncertainty.	Children whose experience has been of little importance, ignored and denigrated can be very sensitive to humiliation and to feeling stupid. Their sense of self is of an unworthy person, unlikely to be loved or respected and likely to fail. Better not to try and to blame the task or the teacher than to suffer feelings of uselessness and failure.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING

Feeling safe enough to explore	Learning patterns of behaviour	Being noticed and thought about.	A mechanism to cope with fear and uncertainty	Brain development	Who am I and what can I expect from you
Learning by 'finding out' is an outcome of the capacity to play with ideas and possibilities. For some it is safer is engage in concrete knowledge and 'what is known already' and alternative points of view can be experienced as a challenge rather than an extension of understanding.	The patterns of relating learned in infancy can be carried forwards into life and colour expectations and responses to other adults. The teacher/ pupil relationship is a particular version of this experience. Relationships over time invariably reflect something about early experiences, and can cast a positive glow over pupil/teacher relationship or a shadow of unavailability, disappointment and anger.	The pupil whose emotional intelligence is impaired in this way can find social relationships difficult, unable to read subtle messages in other's behaviour and expressions. They may be reluctant to engage in learning which explores feelings because of the confusion that it arouses in themselves and prefer to stick to what is factual, concrete and safe – like numbers.	This containing and translating capacity of the sensitive mother in response to fear and adversity has implications for the infant's confidence to be curious and to face uncertainty. This is a cornerstone of the teaching and learning experience which involves the capacity to tolerate 'not knowing', frustration and uncertainty and in particular to be able to risk making mistakes. Instead, fear and vulnerability have to be denied or acted out in behaviours which distract from the task or project fears into others.	The learning task often demands that children reflect and consider and make judgements – an integration of feeling and function. When feelings are dangerous, then fact, concrete knowledge and structure are safer areas of engagement. Some children find writing and drawing dangerous as feelings can be exposed. The pen is feared rather than a tool of expression. Left brain concrete and structured tasks can be the preferred and safe option.	In research carried out in relation to attachment and the experiences of school aged children (Sroufe 1983) it was observed that securely attached children scored highly on ego-resilience and self esteem, less dependency on the teacher but with more positive feelings towards the teacher. They were also more socially interactive, co-operative and with fewer behaviour problems. The implications for insecurely attached children are obvious.

Summary

Attachment experience is an important factor in preparing children to learn. Many of the Looked After and vulnerable children who are failing in the system are likely to represent the extreme end of insecure attachment. This pattern of responding is discussed more fully in the document and linked to intervention.