Introduction

My current role involves working with a child in Year 1 at a two-form entry Academy in the West Midlands. The child has Attachment Disorder, described as "… a highly atypical constellation of behaviours indicative of children who find it extremely difficult to form close attachments" (The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence [NICE], 2015). For diagnosis to occur, evidence of severe neglect or constant changes in caregiver is required (NICE, 2015). This small-scale inquiry covers a timeframe of November 2018 to May 2019.

This inquiry reflects on the implications of specific interventions. Initially, the school removed the child from the classroom for a half-term to build a strong attachment between myself and the child, in accordance with Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1958). Subsequently, working 1:1 with the child, I could respond flexibly to the child's learning experience implementing further interventions enabling quality learning experiences.

Discussion of Theory

Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1958) was formulated from research on long-term separation of a child from its parent. "In separating parent from child a delicate

mechanism had been disrupted, a fundamental bond broken linking one human being to another" (Holmes, 1993, p62). Bowlby's Theory (1958) goes beyond the need for food but instead embraces the child's absolute need for love and the presence of their mother.

Bowlby (1958) drew comparisons from ethology where goslings followed their mother (Lorenz, 1935), displaying signs of distress when mother could not be seen even when hunger or food was not involved. Harlow (1958) carried out experiments with rhesus monkeys and Bowlby's concluded from Harlow's experiments "an attachment system unrelated to feeding, which, adopting a biological approach from which psychoanalysis had increasingly become divorced, makes sound evolutionary and developmental sense" (Holmes, 1993, p64). Harlow's monkeys displayed their preference by seeking comfort and protection over the basic need for food. It could be argued it is my role to provide this comfort to allow the child to thrive in the school setting.

Bowlby advocated the need for professionalisation of all child-care workers with principles now evident within the regulations for child-care practice (Bowlby, 1958). My own understanding of child development and surrounding theories has grown through academic study and working with children in a school setting. This knowledge allowed me to understand Bowlby's requirement for a practitioner to recognise and support the child's individual needs as an essential element to develop a sufficiently strong enough attachment with the child. This raises the potential for the practitioner to solely be able to meet the child's individual needs.

Rutter (1981) critiqued Bowlby's suggestion that it was only the 'mother-child' relationship that was able to provide a secure base for a child and in fact there could be a number of significant carers. Therefore, I, as the practitioner, can contribute to the child's emotional well-being, rather than the child having been subjected to irreparable damage (Bowlby, 1958). Colozino (2006) also confirms, in terms of neuroscience, neural plasticity can occur as a result of positive relationships which heal the brain of an individual. There is potential for a quality attachment to be formed providing the child with a 'secure base' (Ainsworth, 1982) where self-worth and emotional confidence can grow and for learning to occur without anxiety.

Interventions

In accordance with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of the whole child, and within the regulations for Early Years services, the school worked with other agencies to identify the child's needs and required steps to allow inclusivity. The conclusion drawn from this collaboration was the need for an investment of time in the short-term to allow a secure attachment to be nurtured, with the long term goal of inclusion to the classroom. Therefore, the school released me from other duties to be with the child every morning as well as their removal from in-class data information. Although this action segregated the child from their peers, the overall aim of the intervention was to aid development of a secure attachment with me subsequently reducing the child's perceived fear within the classroom enabling them to engage meaningfully in learning activities. From my perspective, this short-term action was necessary to allow for a successful long-term intervention.

A specific area was established using the role-play 'shop' outside the classroom, but in close proximity. There was no expectation or requirement to enter the classroom or engage in classroom activity for a 6-week period. My approach was to play with the child allowing them to take the lead in all activity within a safe and comfortable environment. I believe the time taken to develop this attachment was invaluable and contributed to the child's social engagement evident through a dramatically reduced number of incidents reported from the playground of aggressive behaviour. "…compassion, warmth, and love have the power to change our brains" (Cozolino, 2006, p315).

Before the intervention, the child displayed aggressive and disruptive behaviour within the classroom, negatively affecting the learning of their peers. This is an expected reaction when aligned with neuroscience evidence. "…some interpersonal experiences result in the mind's becoming unable to form a cohesive and adaptive state" (Siegal, 2012, p190). In traumatic experiences, a danger signal causes a reaction in the amygdala for an individual to enter a fight or flight state. Childhood trauma has the potential to trigger this automated behavioural response when exposed to a danger signal, however minor (Siegal, 2012, Cozolino, 2006). The number of instances of aggressive behaviour against peers has dramatically reduced over the period.

For the next half term, in line with advice from the Specialist Inclusion Support Service [SISS], it was agreed to attempt re-integration of the child in the classroom. I made a wholescale change to the environment outside the classroom from a play area to a work space whilst remaining as a perceived safe space. This provided me

with the opportunity to introduce play-based, learning activities to our morning timetable. A specific safe space was designated inside and outside the classroom for the child to retreat to in times of stress and a visual timetable was introduced, beneficial in this situation to provide the child with sufficient information to recognise how the morning will run, what activities were required and the passage of time in order to reduce their anxiety (Dundas and Hutchinson, 2017). It could be argued that the secure base of the child's attachment to me allowed for this transition. Other factors that may have contributed to a successful transition are the child's view of segregation from their peers, wanting to be included in the exciting classroom activities and potentially pressure from the parent of the child. The school believed in the research behind the intervention and success was measured through the number of times the child entered the classroom at maths, completing the maths activity and the reduction of time taken to achieve emotional regulation in times of stress or anxiety. Alongside this maths activity, towards the end of the second 6-week term, I was also able to successfully introduce a reading session twice a week.

It was interesting to see how the child reacted to the new timetable. Piaget's Theory of Learning (1953) shows knowledge is constructed through past experiences, or a primary schema, and built upon with new experiences, or a secondary schema, and knowledge is grown through the assimilation of the secondary experience creating an equilibrium. The child had an already established schema of what school entailed, was then faced with the new situation where maths was introduced to the daily morning routine and was able to assimilate this new information and organise themselves sufficiently to an equilibrium point where it was natural to enter the classroom at maths time.

At the end of the second 6-week term the child's EHCP was awarded and the school extended my hours to the whole school day. Therefore, they had the opportunity to take part in more relaxed activities of the afternoons with peers within the security of my presence, in addition to the more academic focused morning timetable.

The last 7-week term of the small-scale inquiry required the addition of Phonics to the timetable as well as a target set for 1-3 dictated sentences being written every day. The child was put back on to the class data set. Although it was initially thought the child may not react well to this further addition to the morning timetable, the child assimilated the new schema and settled well to the new routine.

Now the child was sometimes working within the classroom environment, this allowed for a socially constructed learning experience where the child was learning together with their peers. Arguably, by providing the child with the safe space to retreat outside the classroom and with me being close at hand within the classroom, the child could confidently engage in a more quality learning experience, allowing Vygotsky's Theory (1978) of learning to be recognisably displayed. Bruner advocated learning as a social model, "learning takes place alongside others and involves the making and sharing of meaning" (Smidt, 2011, p80).

Conclusion

Allowing time to develop the secure attachment between child and practitioner has proven to be a successful intervention, in line with Bowlby's Attachment Theory

(1958) and Ainsworth's secure base concept (1982). Time spent in the classroom has been achieved over and above expectations, allowing Bruner's (1996) and Vygotsky's Theory (1978) of social learning models contributing to a more quality learning experience. The progress made is significant and although there are still times where the situation does not go to plan, reflection assists to recognise what went wrong and to look at how a similar situation could be improved. Being part of their journey has not only consolidated learning through active participation, it has also given me great satisfaction.

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