



What is the impact of better play training on trainees' ability to; provide and facilitate better play experiences, understand and respond to the behaviour of the child and be aware of their own responses and reactions?

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Alison Woolf

Childrens Workforce Development Council (CWDC)'s Practitioner-Led Research projects are small scale research projects carried out by practitioners who deliver and receive services in the children's workforce. These reports are based in a range of settings across the workforce and can be used to support local workforce development.

The reports were completed between September 2009 and February 2010 and apply a wide range of research methodologies. They are not intended to be longitudinal research reports but they provide a snapshot of the views and opinions of the groups consulted as part of the studies. As these projects were time limited, the evidence base can be used to inform planning but should not be generalised across the wider population.

These reports reflect the views of the practitioners that undertook the research. The views and opinions of the authors should not be taken as representative of CWDC.

A new UK Government took office on 11 May. As a result the content in this report may not reflect current Government policy.

What is the impact of Better Play training on the trainees' ability to; provide and facilitate better play experiences, understand and respond to the behaviour of the child and be aware of their own responses and reactions

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Abstract

The study introduces the 'Better Play Training' programme and describes how an evaluation of the programme is carried out with a group of staff working in a variety of education settings. The evaluation of the programme is presented, demonstrating the impact on the personal and professional development of the trainees.

The training considers the latest research and literature on the neuroscience of attachment and play, as well as considering the burgeoning interest in the dynamics of relationships in the classroom, and the impact of those dynamics on learning and emotional well-being.

The study looked at three main areas, the impact of the training on the trainees' ability to provide and facilitate better play experiences; understand and respond to the behaviour of the child; and be aware of their own responses and reactions.

Trainees perceptions of the impact of the training are presented through quantitative responses to a 'before and after' questionnaire, while qualitative feedback from open-ended questioning adds considerably to the understanding of the training's outcomes for participants.

The training is set in context of current practice and implications for development and further study are considered. The results of the trainees' responses to the evaluations are presented. The graphs representing the collated information illustrate increases in all three areas the study considered. Additional comments on the training experience are also included, providing further

evidence of the benefits gained. The findings indicate that the programme is a valuable training tool for developing skills and understanding and, crucially, increasing self-awareness in staff.

Introduction

The subject of this study is a four-day training course for staff working within the Children and Young People Services. The training builds on knowledge and understanding of attachment theory, introduces advanced skills for managing play experiences and provides opportunities for trainees to explore their own experiences and beliefs. The programme has been developed to extend current practice and to challenge those working with children to engage in personal and professional learning.

Better playtimes are included in school provision in the belief that:

- children will be able to process and express their needs, feelings and beliefs (Chaloner, 2001);
- staff will be able to develop insight into relationships, and an awareness of their responses and reactions and those of the child.

The Better Play training programme which forms the subject of this study is an intensive four-day programme covering the following areas;

- how the child's attachment system affects exploration and learning
- how the adult's attachment system affects responses
- how play develops, the nature of free play, and how to provide resources
- how to communicate through play; and how to respond appropriately
- how to better understand symbolism and themes in play

(See appendix 1 for further information)

The training is delivered by two play therapists, one of whom is also a teacher. The facilitators presented their understanding of play and relationships in order to enhance existing provision in schools.

The study considers how further training for qualified education staff can enhance practice in the workplace. The belief behind the project is that people working in Children and Young People

Services provisions, and particularly in schools, would benefit substantially from additional training about the true meaning and value of 'free' play; the importance of the adult-child attachment relationship for learning and for well-being and the need for the adult to be aware of his or her own part in each unique relationship in the workplace.

The research investigates both qualitative and quantitative responses to a training programme already established in education settings. The piece explores the outcome of the training as a whole, while focusing on the question of the impact of three main areas of enquiry i.e. the trainee's ability to;

- provide and facilitate better play experiences
- understand and respond to the behaviour of the child
- be aware of their own responses and reactions.

The researcher is particularly interested in the impact of the training on the trainee's personal as well as professional development.

Aims of the project

The aim of the project was to consider the impact of the Better Play programme on a group of trainees. By focussing on measurable areas covered by the training, as well as gathering further information about the experience of trainees, the study aimed to examine the value and efficacy of the course. Any findings will inform the development of the training and enhance any benefits to trainees and to children in their care.

The training programme has been developed with the intention of increasing staff knowledge, understanding, awareness and confidence when working with play.

The training includes elements of both theory and practice, and aims to give staff new insight into adult-child interactions and relationships, and a better appreciation of the role of the adult when providing free play. Understanding how to respond to the child is a key element of the training,

and the aim is that the skills learned will become part of the trainees daily interactions with children.

The new primary curriculum, to be statutory by 2011, is based on 'six areas of learning and RE'. The aims of the six areas are to 'develop' skills or ability of a child and to achieve 'understanding'. The language does not reflect current knowledge about learning (Kolb, 1984; Zull, 2002) where experience and reflection are seen as pre-requisites for integration and ownership of knowledge.

The new primary curriculum is the latest government initiative, following many others, such as The National Curriculum, introduced in 1988, and the QCA schemes of work developed in 2000 and updated in 2007. Every Child Matters became a framework for education provision in 2003. All these initiatives have been introduced over the same time-span as the explosion in knowledge of how the brain works. 'We have learned 90% of what we know about the brain in the last fifteen years' (Margot Sunderland, 2009). Recent literature on attachment in schools acknowledges Sunderland's pioneering work as inspiration for emerging practice (Bomber, 2009; Delaney, 2009; Earl, 2009).

There are many pressures on the Continuing Professional Development (CPD), of both school staff and teachers of school staff, to keep abreast of changes in education. Time for study about learning and development may be in short supply across the profession.

Better Play training emphasises new knowledge about play and brain development, and its role in underpinning motor, cognitive and social skills (Brown, 2009; Pellis & Pellis, 2009); as well as emotional development (Stagnitti & Cooper, 2009).

The course aims to introduce staff to recent and relevant literature and research. While play is again being recognised as pivotal to learning (Broadhead, 2004; Moyles, 2005; NUT 2007; Rose, 2008), most of the reported impact is about its use in the Early Years or key stage 1. The acknowledgement of its importance for older children is harder to find in available literature (Sandberg, 2000; Elkind, 2007).

Literature on how play can enhance pupil-staff communication and relationships is only recently emerging (Woolf, 2008; Davis, 2009; Delaney, 2009). Presenting how the latest research into

brain development and the science of learning is intrinsically linked to early attachment experiences will be new to staff who trained before this knowledge existed. It may also be new to more recently qualified staff trained by trainers who qualified before current information is available.

The third strand of the training aims to address the 'three significant gaps in the current literature on classroom management' (Riley, 2010), these include;

- the effects of teachers' attachment style on the formation and maintenance of classroom and staffroom relationships
- the importance of attachment processes in scaffolding teachers' and students emotional responses to daily educational tasks and
- the degree of influence these factors have on teachers' classroom behaviour particularly management of student behaviour.

Delaney (2009) considers it essential that teachers acknowledge their own feelings and recognise that pupils' behaviours 'stir up strong feelings' (p53) in them. She also recognises the need for time and space to reflect on this phenomenon.

Austin (2010) describes a pilot scheme in primary school for children with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties, where such a space has been provided. Her research concludes that once provided, the opportunity becomes intrinsic to best practice and facilitates emotional well-being of staff.

The study evaluated the training programme with particular attention to the impact on trainees in three key areas:

- the ability to provide and facilitate better play experiences
- the ability to understand and respond to the behaviour of the child
- the ability to be aware of their own responses and reactions

Context

The training was developed at a time when school staff and other staff employed in CYPS are being asked to take more and more responsibility for addressing the mental health needs of children. An understanding of attachment theory the impact of adult-child relationships in schools, as well as the function of play in children's social and emotional lives are essential to addressing mental health needs in under thirteen's, the age group identified in the Targeted Mental Health in Schools Programme (DSCF, 2008; NICE, 2008).

Increasingly it is recognised that 'Mental health needs of children must be shared by the entire community' (Peabody, 2006, p20). Further training and understanding is required if these provisions, by agencies outside the Health Service, are to be effective. (Finney, 2006).

"Play is perhaps the most developmentally appropriate and powerful medium for young children to build adult-child attachment relationships, develop cause-effect thinking critical to impulse control, process stressful experiences, and learn social skills" (Chaloner, 2001, p372).

The role of play for supporting emotional growth, and the likelihood that a lack of free play leads to mental health difficulties, has been recognised (Slade, 1995; NUT, 2007). However a review of the Welsh Assembly Government Foundation Phase Pilots (Estyn, 2007) stated that teachers delivering the phase to three to seven year olds are struggling with how to balance free play and adult interventions. The recommendation is that teachers need further guidance in this area.

The attachment relationship is pivotal in creating secure bases in classrooms where children feel safe to explore and to grow (Chaloner, 2006; Geddes, 2006; Elkind, 2007). In Better Play training staff are introduced to 'attachment', its relevance to early childhood development, and to adult behaviours, responses and reactions to others in the workplace. The inclusion of theory gives school staff an opportunity to learn more about the basic underpinning science of learning (Klein, 1997, Zull, 2002; Gerhardt, 2004). Adult understanding of primary attachments and patterns

which then form in subsequent relationships (Klein, 1997; Waters, 2004) may mean new responses can be chosen, and habitual reactions recognised and acknowledged.

Consistent positive relationships with adults in schools are likely to create an environment where children will learn (Geddes, 2006; Elkind, 2007). The experience of such relationships can also support social and emotional development. For children who may have experienced challenging life events, or less than ideal home environments, Chaloner (2006, p2) states that 'establishing an attachment with a teacher (is) a primary healing component'.

A knowledge of, and belief in, attachment theory, helps school staff make sense of the world of each child. This demands an acknowledgement of the part each adult plays in each relationship.

"Schools can no longer keep up the pretence that relationships do not affect performance, either academic or professional...some teachers claim that their prime task is to organize their students' intellectual development, whereas others argue that the major source of difficulty in their work is the problem of relating to their students and their colleagues, and that once this has been sorted out the academic issues are relatively simple" (Hall & Hall, 1988 p1).

'School staff need to be self-aware, continually alert to the experience and impact of ethos, culture, group dynamics and individual relationships.' (LGIU/CSN; 2007, p13). Where, how and by whom school staff are taught to develop this self-awareness is difficult to assess. Such an attribute may be inherent, developed through years of experience or gained through training. Some literature alludes to the importance of such learning (Dreikurs, Grunwald & Pepper, 1971; Moustakas, 1973; Evelein, Korthagen & Brekelmans; 2008; Riley, 2010) but it is an area that warrants further development. Possibly initial professional training is not the place for practitioners to learn advanced skills such as this. Post-qualifying training for experienced practitioners provides a space for reflection on practice and of building on established skills.

When selecting an area of study 'researchers bring themselves, and their prior knowledge and personal and cultural histories, into the equation' (Etherington; 2004, p26). In order to set the

research in context it is important to acknowledge the bias, experience and interest of the researcher. 'Insider action research has its own dynamics which distinguish it from an external action researcher approach'. (Coghan, 2001, p674).

The researcher acknowledges that 'The topics we choose to research often have some personal significance for the researcher' (Etherington 2004 p42). The presence of personal interest or strong partiality is in itself not a reason to question the veracity or reliability of research. It is a common feature of action research, where the process of feedback during the research process influences practice directly.

It is important that the research design and the interpretation of findings are not biased. Quantitative measures should reduce the likelihood of subjective bias. Transparency of the researcher's outside role and interests are important, as are access to the full evidence and results. The willingness to engage in research on one's own work is also seen as a willingness or desire to be held accountable for their practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009).

This research project has been carried out by one of the creators of the programme. This duality of roles within the work could call into question the impartiality of the researcher, and consequently the veracity or quality of the findings. By contrast the value of this duplication of involvement means the researcher has an in-depth understanding of the area of research and is able to adapt the programme in future.

The likelihood that any recommendations for improving the programme are implemented is increased. It also means dual benefits are accrued, alongside the creation of new knowledge; sustained skills and practice have been developed in staff (Coghan & Brannick 2009, p4).

The trainers are both play therapists, with one holding a teaching qualification. Both work extensively in primary, secondary and special schools. One runs a consultancy service for school staff based on a model of Clinical Supervision.

The training programme that is the subject of this research has been used in England and Scotland and the evaluation of outcomes from comparable training groups may confirm or bring into question the findings. An adapted version of the training is on-going in Wales.

The study followed the four-day training of a group of twelve staff employed within Wigan Borough's Children and Young People's Services. The group were self-selected; responding to an invitation to staff working within schools and children's centres in the borough (appendix 2). The course is open to twelve members of staff and is over-subscribed, suggesting that local authority staff saw the relevance of the training to their developing practice.

The twelve applicants who attended the training were all female, from a variety of settings, including secondary and primary schools and children's centres. The training is open to all interested staff, and the make-up of the group reflects the gender ratio of teachers; one to twelve females for every male (Howson, 2006).

They were mainly single representatives from their workplace, with only two attendees working together. Their roles included school counselor, learning mentor, teacher, teaching assistant, manager, parent worker and support worker. Of the twelve trainees two were absent for more than one full day of the course and their responses are not included in the study.

Methodology

"Researchers seek to generate understanding in and through their practical activities and to produce outcomes that make a difference in the real world" (McLeod, 2001, p122).

The aim of this research project is indeed to carry out a programme of training in order to generate understanding of the training's impact; while at the same time developing understanding and skills in a group of staff who will then 'make a difference' to children in their workplaces.

The methodology of any research project must be appropriate to the aims and objectives of the study and to the context of the project. Creswell identifies five traditions of 'Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design (Creswell; 1998): Biography, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography and Case Study. In this piece the training programme being studied is measured over one group, suggesting this research could fall under the Case Study category. Creswell suggests the following four criteria that mark a project as a case study;

- identifying the 'case' for the study – in this instance the training group and its response to the training
- the 'case' being a "bounded system" – bounded by the time, circumscribed by the CWDC grant specifications, and the place, contained within the Wigan CYPS Education department (see section on context)
- extensive information through data collection to provide a detailed in-depth picture of the group response – collated through questionnaires, creative responses, and quantitative measures before, after and during the training
- considerable time spent describing the context and a detailed narrative of the period of study (p36-7).

Richardson and St Pierre's title, 'Writing - A Method of Inquiry' (2005), contends that the writing up of this project is also a valuable part of the research methodology. McNiff and Whitehead (2009) concur that writing is, of itself, part of the action of research. St. Pierre (2005 p967) stated 'for me, writing *is* thinking, writing *is* analysis, writing *is* indeed a seductive and tangled *method of discovery*' (authors italics).

Her exploration of writing as a facilitator to thought, a creator of space and the producer of 'strange and wonderful transitions from word to word, sentence to sentence, thought to unthought' suggests the inquiry continues, expands and reveals new insights, or indeed, findings, as the study is written about. The writing up then is part of the methodology of research for this case study.

The study planned to establish a baseline measurement of where the trainees saw themselves in terms of the main areas of theory and practice covered in the training. The questions consisted of a variety of formats and included a pre and post self evaluation where students were asked to score their knowledge and understanding on a scale of 1-10 (with one being the lowest and 10 being the highest).

The same questions were asked on completion of the four day training programme. Comparing the self-assessed scoring allowed for a measurement of change. It is hoped that this could offer a quantitative outcome, albeit of a qualitative and personal evaluation.

Inline with Creswell's (2005) definition of case study as a methodology of research, many other questions in the pre and post assessments (appendix three & four) were included in order to garner more extensive information. Alongside direct questions, the sheets include opportunity for further open-ended comments; while during the course creative activities were included that were opportunities to reflect on learning, and to share these reflections in the group (appendix five & six).

The standard course feedback sheets (appendix seven) were also completed and offer another source of information.

Ethical Considerations

As with any research or academic study, ethical considerations had to be addressed at the very outset. Compliance with the six key principles of ethical research from the Framework for Research Ethics of the Economic and Social Research Council (2010) give a sound underpinning to the initial assessment of approach and implementation. Schools and Education Authorities have not been at the forefront of developing and promoting clear-cut pathways for assessing the ethical soundness of research and reporting.

Everything that is done in schools seems to be monitored, evaluated, assessed and reported on, often being published in the press, online and in professional literature. Deciding which of this huge amount of information requires consent and assent from parents and children would be over-whelming. Now that Education comes under the wider umbrella of Children and Young People's Services there is increasing compliance between partners and Health Services have been pioneers in considering the need for research guidance.

Despite extensive attempts to find clear advice and lines of responsibility within the Local Authority Education Department no lead in this area is located.

The research mentor was able to signpost the bodies most able to offer information and eventually the regional area ReGroup Information Officer advised contact with the local Research and Development Manager who judged that the study would be 'noted' but required no further permission.

Without a clear organisational ethical framework imposed on a research project, it is beholden on the researcher to set the study within a context that fits accepted 'norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour' (Resnik 2009).

Resnik lists a number of features common to professional codes across the board: Honesty; Objectivity; Integrity; Carefulness; Openness; Respect for Intellectual Property; Confidentiality; Responsible Publication; Responsible Mentoring; Respect for colleagues; Social Responsibility; Non-Discrimination; Competence; Legality; Human Subjects Protection. All relevant areas within this list were given due consideration by the researcher when planning and carrying out this study.

No children were involved in the study and the trainee participants were fully informed of all aspects of the research, their permission was obtained to include their anonymised information, and they were informed of their right to withdraw at any subsequent stage of the process (appendix eight).

All participants gave their permission at the outset and no objections were raised. For some participants the need to comply or please may have influenced an individual's decision to take part in a study of this kind; and influence responses to questions posed by the researcher who is also the trainer (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002). Participants were asked to mark pre and post assessments in such a way that the researcher would be able to match the two responses while not identifying the participant. However it is recognised this would not illuminate the bias described by Donaldson & Grant-Vallone (ibid.).

Findings

The findings of the research project are both quantitative and qualitative. The core findings are the measurements of the responses to the questions related to knowledge and understanding of 'attachment', 'play' and 'self-awareness'.

Graph A (appendix nine) represents the trainee responses to the attachment related question:

What is the impact of the training on the trainees' ability to understand and respond to the behaviour of the child?

The overall scores demonstrate that the group felt they have increased their level of knowledge and understanding of attachment from an average score of 5.5 to 8.6 out of a possible 10. This suggests a movement from an average or adequate knowledge and understanding to a position of good or above average competence.

The individual scores are interesting; with nine trainees feeling they have gained in knowledge and understanding and one trainee recording a decreased score. It is hard to imagine this trainee felt the programme had taken away from her store of expertise, rather it may suggest that the training had made her question previously held views, and reassess her competence against a new awareness of the complexity of the area of study. One participant in a separate cohort gave a possible explanation of the increase in understanding after the Better Play training.

"While completing my degree in psychology I studied attachment and theories of attachment, but I felt this course linked attachment to the education of the child, which is very useful."

Graph B (appendix 10) represents the trainee responses to the play related question

What is the impact of the training on the trainees' ability to provide and facilitate better play experiences?

The overall scores demonstrate that the group feel they have increased their level of knowledge and understanding of play from an average score of 5.9 to 8.7 out of a possible 10. This again is a movement from an average or adequate knowledge and understanding to a position of good or above average competence in this area.

In an additional question (appendix three question five) this is confirmed as trainees described their level of understanding of play for the emotional well-being of the child as good (two trainees), fair (six trainees), or sketchy (two trainees); but after training felt their understanding had become good (nine trainees) or extensive (one trainee).

The perception of some staff that their knowledge in this important area is 'sketchy' confirms the trainers' belief that some staff have not had adequate training in this area. The work of Brown (2009), and Pellis & Pellis (2009) illustrate how this area is currently expanding. Learning how the latest research on play is 'venturing to the limits of neuroscience' (Pellis & Pellis, 2009) will constantly require continuing professional development.

The on-going nature of research and development means a good level of knowledge today could be fair or even sketchy tomorrow. So any assertion that there is a need for further staff training in the area of learning and child development is likely to be right.

Graph C (appendix 11) represents the trainee responses to the self-awareness related question:

What is the impact of the training on the trainees' ability to be aware of their own responses and reactions?

The overall scores demonstrate that the group feel they have increased their ability to be aware of their own responses and reactions from an average score of 6.4 to 8.8 out of a possible 10. This suggests that individuals in the group already saw themselves as self-aware to an extent that could be described as above average. Again the individual scores demonstrate that most participants measured their perception of change as positive, with an average growth of 2.4. One trainee's reflections showed no change, with four points being again the highest measurement of positive change.

As already acknowledged trainees self-report responses are to some extent biased in action research (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002). While post-training responses may be influenced by a desire to affirm or appease trainers, pre-training responses can be influenced by perceptions of being judged or assessed. This can increase scores through a desire to appear competent, or decrease scores through a desire to be typical or modest.

The questionnaires included further qualitative and quantitative measurements.

Responses were collated and give more of a 'detailed in-depth picture of the group response' (Creswell, 2005).

At the outset the group were asked about reasons for attending the course and on completion they were asked if the course had met their initial expectations (appendix 15 & 16).

The most popular reasons for attending were;

- felt it might help me in the workplace
- wanted to increase my understanding of children
- wanted to learn more about play

The areas that were highlighted on completion as being most beneficial were;

- will help me in my workplace
- have learned more about play
- has increased my understanding of myself

It seems that the course met expectations on increasing knowledge and understanding of play and on increasing knowledge and skills for the workplace. Interestingly, trainees overwhelmingly found the course increased their understanding of themselves, even more than their understanding of the children.

These findings were underlined by trainees when offered an opportunity to record 'Any other comments about the training'. The comments add depth and texture to the information in the numerical scales. Typical responses, characteristic of the whole include:

"I found it relevant to current clients."

"A positive impact on my work and on my understanding of myself & others."

"I learned that play can be very powerful."

"The training has highlighted the many elements (of play) and has given me opportunity to reflect on my skills."

"I came to this course expecting to learn play 'techniques' but have come away with a greater understanding of myself."

"I've also looked at my own feelings and reactions and have been really surprised at these."

Implications for practice

It feels as though the findings merit further development and dissemination of the work. The impact represented by quantitative measurements and represented in graph form report a positive

impact in all three areas. The comments from trainees suggest that the opportunity for personal development and learning may be an opportunity particular to this training.

Further research which follows trainees back in into their workplace settings could support the findings. Some measurement of the quality of play experiences delivered pre and post training would be the next step in the research of this area of study.

If this study were to be replicated, the researcher would recommend prior to the training, an observation exercise that is videoed and assessed for certain key areas is carried out. This could provide base-line data to measure change after training.

Two further areas for research would be to replicate the study using an independent researcher, in order to add weight to any findings; and the researcher to consider when the training would be most helpful i.e. as part of initial training or after some time working as a practitioner.

An important consideration of the training and a valuable addition to current CPD, would be to reflect on how the project could be replicated.

Conclusion

The research covered a four-day training programme for staff within Children and Young Peoples Services, all based in schools or in Family and Child-Care centres. The course covers the areas of attachment theory, the provision of free play and the need for self-awareness and reflective practice from staff.

The study set out to research how the Better Play training programme impacted on the trainees' ability to provide and facilitate better play experiences; understand and respond to the behaviour of the child; and be aware of their own responses and reactions. It used both qualitative and quantitative methods to create a picture of the trainees' experience.

The findings demonstrate learning in the three prescribed areas. This suggests that experienced staff within Children and Young People Services who participate in the Better Play training programme learn new knowledge and skills likely to increase their ability to; provide and facilitate better play experiences; understand and respond to the behaviour of the child; and be aware of their own responses and reactions

The research findings support the aims of the project, to both 'generate understanding ...and to produce outcomes that make a difference in the real world' (McLeod, 2001, p122).

"Everyone in CYPS should, at some time, do this training."

(Trainee comment from post assessment sheet)

Play provision is enhanced by better knowledge and understanding of play, better knowledge and understanding of attachment theory, but most of all through the adult's increased understanding of herself (Woolf & Austin, 2008). The study has highlighted the need for further research following how trainees use new skills and knowledge in practice.

The researcher stated her particular interest in the impact of the training on the trainee's personal as well as professional development. Several trainees expressed a similar experience to that reported by one:

"Out of all the training I have undertaken this is one of the most important because I have looked at myself."

Appendices

Better Play in schools . Better Playtimes. Everyone Playing in Class. Consultancy Supervision

Better Play in schools and Early Years settings

Through play a child makes sense of their world. Adults can help or hinder this process. Cognitive, social and emotional development, occur when the child feels safe, and when optimal play experiences are provided by skilled professionals.

CaRe-Northwest provides training to school staff working in Early Years and Key stages 1, 2 and 3.

Better Play in Schools enhances provision wherever children have opportunities for free play, whether in class, at playtimes or after school clubs.

The training will increase staff knowledge, understanding, awareness and confidence for working with play. The model benefits all children and is being used by practitioners in a variety of settings with a wide range of pupils.

Better Play in schools enhances the developmental, therapeutic and educative potential of play. The training has elements of both theory and practice, giving staff new insight into adult-child interactions and relationships, and the role of the adult when providing free play. Understanding how to respond to the child is a key element of the training, and the skills learned will become part of the trainees daily interactions with children.

Better Play Training enables staff to develop a broad skill base for providing play through school and child-care provisions and select the play intervention best suited to the needs of their work environment.

The Better Play Training is a four day programme for staff in schools or child-care settings who provides free play for children from 3 to 13. The training provides the basis for increased understanding of primary relationships and how these impact on the classroom setting; of how play can be used both for learning and for developing emotional well-being. The training looks at the following:

How the child's attachment system affects exploration and learning.

How the adult's attachment system affects responses.

How play develops, the nature of free play, how to provide resources.

How to communicate through play and how to respond appropriately.

How to better understand symbolism and themes in play.

On completion of the foundation training the attendee will be ready to implement and monitor Better Play within their work setting.

Better Playtimes training provides a child centred model for staff who are interested in holding special playtimes with an individual child. It is a two day training available for anyone trained in Better Play. Special play sessions offer a space for the child to explore their world through play supported by an attuned companion. Sessions usually take place on a weekly basis throughout the term time. Better Playtime Training offers an opportunity to understand:

How to provide structured play sessions

How to implement and monitor sessions

How to appropriately record sessions

How to engage effectively in consultancy supervision

Everyone Playing in Class (EPIC) training provides a group work model for experienced play practitioners. Trainees need to have completed Better Play and Better Playtimes training, and to have used the interventions in their workplace settings. This training provides an opportunity to understand:

How groups operate

How to co-facilitate a group

How to structure and implement group sessions

How rights and responsibilities operate in the group settings

NB: Better Playtimes and EPIC require ongoing Consultative Supervision.

Children and Young People's Services

Executive Director: Nick Hudson



Please ask for: Steve Walker
Extension: 86130
Direct line: 01942 486130
Date: 1st September 2009

Better Play in Schools

Dear Colleague

CYPS is offering a four day training programme for professionals working with children aged 3 to 13 which will explore how play can be used both for learning and developing emotional well-being. The training will be of interest and value for anyone supporting children with:

- Cognitive difficulties
- Emotional difficulties
- Physical difficulties
- Social difficulties
- Difficult life-experiences

Participant must be able to attend all four days of the training

The training will take place on:

Thursday October 8th & Friday October 9th
Thursday October 15th & Friday October 16th 2009
at Room 4 Conference Venue, Golborne

The training is free to staff working in Wigan LA schools/settings as the course is being funded by the Children's Workforce Development Council as part of a Practitioner Led Research project. The course will be led by Della Austin and Alison Woolf who are both play therapists and have experience of training school staff across the age-range throughout the United Kingdom. Della provides Consultancy Supervision for staff at Willow Grove School and Alison is the play therapist at Willow Grove School. For more details see attached flyer on page 3 of this document.

Better Playtimes Training Pre Assessment

1. Why did you come on this course?

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Manager told me to | <input type="checkbox"/> | Career Development | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Wanted to learn more about attachment | <input type="checkbox"/> | Wanted to learn more about play | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Felt it might help me in my work place | <input type="checkbox"/> | Had a particular child in mind | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Wanted to increase my understanding of children | <input type="checkbox"/> | Wanted to increase my understanding of myself | <input type="checkbox"/> |

2. Which of the following are indicators of a child having had poor attachment experiences in early infancy? Tick any that you feel are indicators.

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Avoids adult contact | <input type="checkbox"/> | Seeks adult contact | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Good problem solving skills | <input type="checkbox"/> | Poor problem solving skills | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Very independent | <input type="checkbox"/> | Very dependent | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Avoids difficult tasks or risk taking | <input type="checkbox"/> | Attempts any task provided and takes inappropriate risks | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Good understanding of cause & effect and of consequences of actions | <input type="checkbox"/> | Poor understanding of cause & effect and of consequences of actions | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. Which of the following areas of the adult's work with children may be influenced by the adult's experiences in early infancy?

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Ability to maintain limits & boundaries | <input type="checkbox"/> | Ability to support the child to develop independence | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ability to respond to the child's need for comfort and support | <input type="checkbox"/> | Need for control and order | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Choosing to work with children with additional or special needs | <input type="checkbox"/> | Desire to rescue and 'mend' people | <input type="checkbox"/> |

4. How important do you think play is for a child to explore his/her experiences and feelings?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Not at all | not very | important | very important | vital |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Better Playtimes Training Post Assessment

1. Has this course met your initial expectations?

Manager will be satisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>	Helped Career Development	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have learned more about attachment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have learned more about play	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will help me in my work place	<input type="checkbox"/>	Will help me with a particular child	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has increased my understanding of children	<input type="checkbox"/>	Has increased my understanding of myself	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Which of the following are indicators of a child having had poor attachment experiences in early infancy? Tick any that you feel are indicators.

Avoids adult contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	Seeks adult contact	<input type="checkbox"/>
Good problem solving skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	Poor problem solving skills	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very independent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very dependent	<input type="checkbox"/>
Avoids difficult tasks or risk taking	<input type="checkbox"/>	Attempts any task provided and takes inappropriate risks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Good understanding of cause & effect and of consequences of actions	<input type="checkbox"/>	Poor understanding of cause & effect and of consequences of actions	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Which of the following areas of the adult's work with children may be influenced by the adult's experiences in early infancy?

Ability to maintain limits & boundaries	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ability to support the child to develop independence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ability to respond to the child's need for comfort and support	<input type="checkbox"/>	Need for control and order	<input type="checkbox"/>
Choosing to work with children with additional or special needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	Desire to rescue and 'mend' people	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. How important do you think play is for a child to explore his/her experiences and feelings?

Not at all	not very	important	very important	vital
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Wigan Council, Children and Young People's Services, .
Phone: 01942 486130
Email: s.walker@wigan.gov.uk

Group poem Friday October 16th 2009

*And the time together was coming to an end
I feel I have grown as a person over the week!*

Music is my soul.

I love my boys so much.

*'Mummy, why is the sky blue?' asked a little boy
It's a beautiful day, but it's now time to go home.*

*Happiness is the greatest gift that I possess.
My family is important to me but I also have good
friends & colleagues.*

Mother Earth is gorgeous.

I would like to make a difference.

*I have enjoyed looking at the art work; but am fighting
the urge to space it out.*

*The sun is shining & making us smile.
And that was just how it needed to be.*

Evaluation of Better Playtimes Training

October 2009

Which aspects of the training did you enjoy?

Which aspects of the training did you find useful?

What are the things you have learned that you will use in your workplace?

Have you learned anything about yourself?

Are there any insights that will change the way you:

- A) Assess children
- B) Think about how children experience things
- C) Respond to children
- D) Think about how you experience your work

How did you find the course?

	excellent	good	average	poor
presenters				
theory				
practice				
resources				

How could the training be improved for future groups?

Better Play Training Wigan October 2009

The Better Play training held on the 8th, 9th, 15th & 16th of October 2009 for those working in the Children and Young People's Services will be evaluated for a PLR project within the Children's Workforce Development Council.

All trainees are asked to complete pre-training and post-training questionnaires as well as our standard evaluation form. Information from these forms will be used in the research.

Examples of trainees experiences & contributions may be included in the research.

All material will be anonymous and any identifying features will be changed. No names of trainees or of children in their workplaces will be used. No workplaces will be named but examples of types of settings will be included.

The research will be available on the CWDC website and may be submitted to a relevant professional journal.

Alison Woolf can be contacted at Willow Grove school for further information.



CWDC question for PLR October 2009

An evaluation of the Better Play Training programme:

What is the impact of the training on the trainees' ability to:

Provide and facilitate better play experiences?

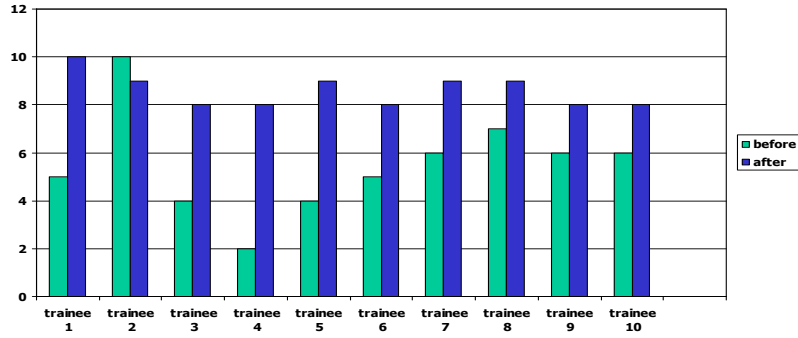
Understand and respond to the behaviour of the child?

Be aware of their own responses and reactions?

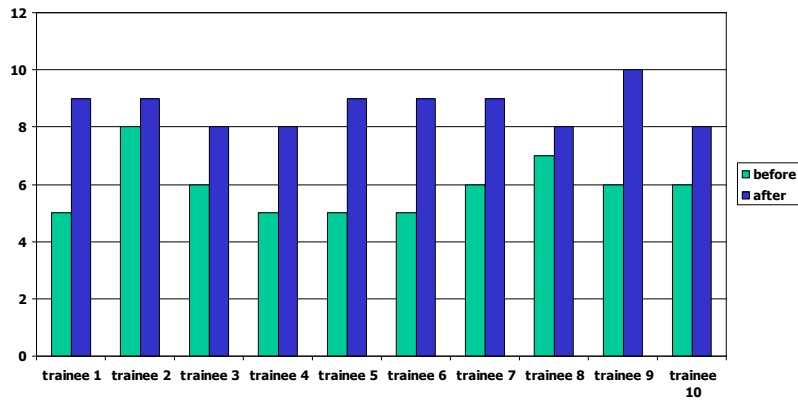
I consent to take part in the research detailed above.

I understand I can withdraw from the research at any time.

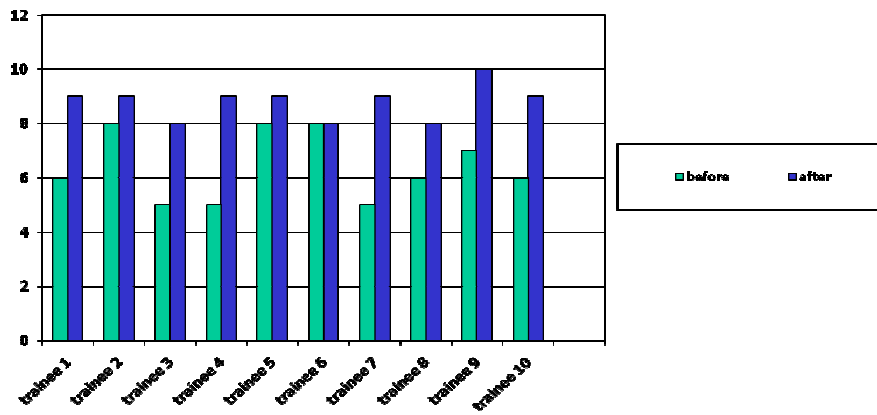
Level of understanding of 'Attachment' before & after Better Play training October 2009



Level of understanding of 'Play' before & after Better Play training October 2009



Level of self-awareness before & after Better Play training October 2009



Better Playtimes Training Pre Assessment amalgamated comments

1. Why did you come on this course?

Manager told me to	1	Career Development	5
Wanted to learn more about attachment	5	Wanted to learn more about play	7
Felt it might help me in my work place	8	Had a particular child in mind	4
Wanted to increase my understanding of children	8	Wanted to increase my understanding of myself	3

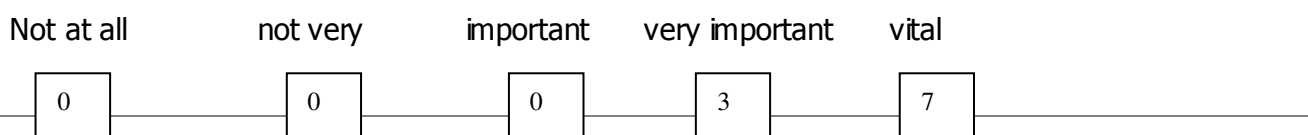
2. Which of the following are indicators of a child having had poor attachment experiences in early infancy? Tick any that you feel are indicators.

Avoids adult contact	4	Seeks adult contact	7
Good problem solving skills	0	Poor problem solving skills	6
Very independent	3	Very dependent	3
Avoids difficult tasks or risk taking	3	Attempts any task provided and takes inappropriate risks	4
Good understanding of cause & effect and of consequences of actions	0	Poor understanding of cause & effect and of consequences of actions	9

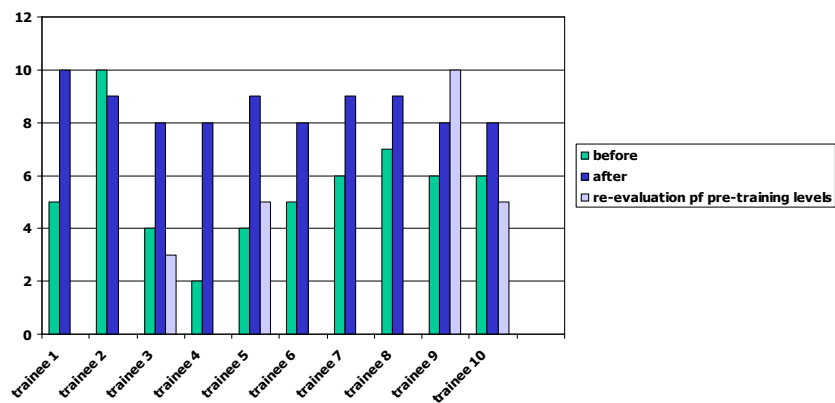
3. Which of the following areas of the adult's work with children may be influenced by the adult's experiences in early infancy?

Ability to maintain limits & boundaries	6	Ability to support the child to develop independence	6
Ability to respond to the child's need for comfort and support	10	Need for control and order	4
Choosing to work with children with additional or special needs	4	Desire to rescue and 'mend' people	4

4. How important do you think play is for a child to explore his/her experiences and feelings?



Level of understanding of 'Attachment' before & after Better Play training October 2009



Better Playtimes Training Post Assessment amalgamated comments

1. Has this course met your initial expectations?

Manager will be satisfied	2	Helped Career Development	7
Have learned more about attachment	9	Have learned more about play	10
Will help me in my work place	10	Will help me with a particular child	6
Has increased my understanding of children	9	Has increased my understanding of myself	10

2. Which of the following are indicators of a child having had poor attachment experiences in early infancy? Tick any that you feel are indicators.

Avoids adult contact	10	Seeks adult contact	8
Good problem solving skills	3	Poor problem solving skills	10
Very independent	7	Very dependent	7
Avoids difficult tasks or risk taking	7	Attempts any task provided and takes inappropriate risks	7
Good understanding of cause & effect and of consequences of actions	3	Poor understanding of cause & effect and of consequences of actions	9

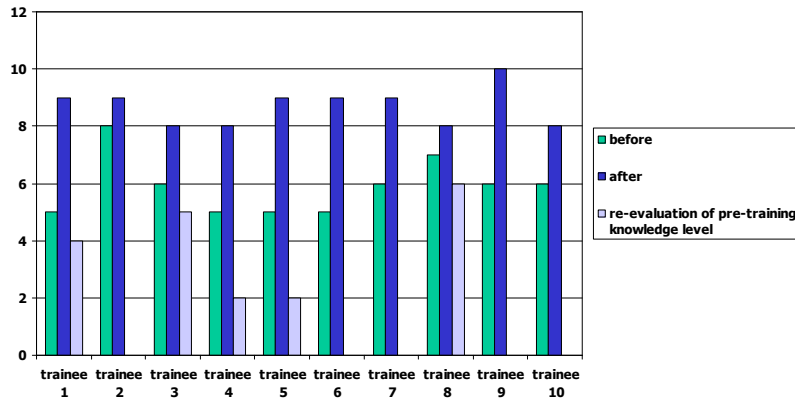
3. Which of the following areas of the adult's work with children may be influenced by the adult's experiences in early infancy?

Ability to maintain limits & boundaries	10	Ability to support the child to develop independence	10
Ability to respond to the child's need for comfort and support	10	Need for control and order	9
Choosing to work with children with additional or special needs	9	Desire to rescue and 'mend' people	10

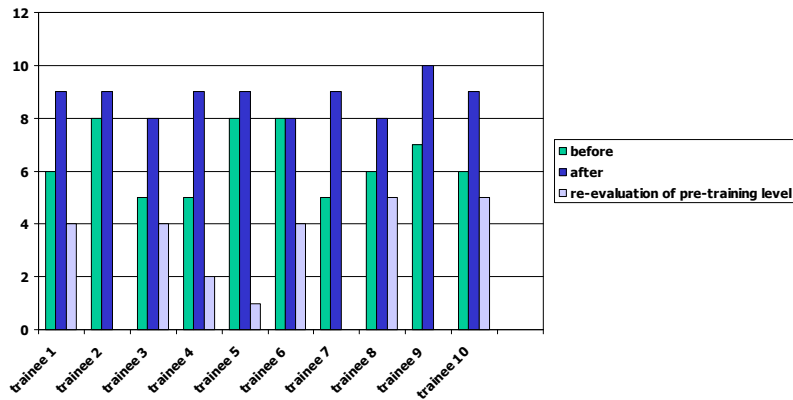
4. How important do you think play is for a child to explore his/her experiences and feelings?

Not at all	not very	important	very important	vital
□	□	□	1	9

Level of understanding of 'Play' before & after Better Play training
October 2009



Level of self-awareness before & after Better Play training October
2009



Better Playtimes Training Pre Assessment amalgamated comments

1. Why did you come on this course?

Manager told me to	1	Career Development	5
Wanted to learn more about attachment	5	Wanted to learn more about play	7
Felt it might help me in my work place	8	Had a particular child in mind	4
Wanted to increase my understanding of children	8	Wanted to increase my understanding of myself	3

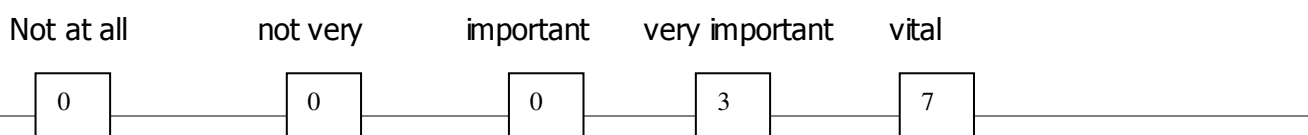
2. Which of the following are indicators of a child having had poor attachment experiences in early infancy? Tick any that you feel are indicators.

Avoids adult contact	4	Seeks adult contact	7
Good problem solving skills	0	Poor problem solving skills	6
Very independent	3	Very dependent	3
Avoids difficult tasks or risk taking	3	Attempts any task provided and takes inappropriate risks	4
Good understanding of cause & effect and of consequences of actions	0	Poor understanding of cause & effect and of consequences of actions	9

3. Which of the following areas of the adult's work with children may be influenced by the adult's experiences in early infancy?

Ability to maintain limits & boundaries	6	Ability to support the child to develop independence	6
Ability to respond to the child's need for comfort and support	10	Need for control and order	4
Choosing to work with children with additional or special needs	4	Desire to rescue and 'mend' people	4

4. How important do you think play is for a child to explore his/her experiences and feelings?



Better Playtimes Training Post Assessment amalgamated comments

1. Has this course met your initial expectations?

Manager will be satisfied	2	Helped Career Development	7
Have learned more about attachment	9	Have learned more about play	10
Will help me in my work place	10	Will help me with a particular child	6
Has increased my understanding of children	9	Has increased my understanding of myself	10

2. Which of the following are indicators of a child having had poor attachment experiences in early infancy? Tick any that you feel are indicators.

Avoids adult contact	10	Seeks adult contact	8
Good problem solving skills	3	Poor problem solving skills	10
Very independent	7	Very dependent	7
Avoids difficult tasks or risk taking	7	Attempts any task provided and takes inappropriate risks	7
Good understanding of cause & effect and of consequences of actions	3	Poor understanding of cause & effect and of consequences of actions	9

3. Which of the following areas of the adult's work with children may be influenced by the adult's experiences in early infancy?

Ability to maintain limits & boundaries	10	Ability to support the child to develop independence	10
Ability to respond to the child's need for comfort and support	10	Need for control and order	9
Choosing to work with children with additional or special needs	9	Desire to rescue and 'mend' people	10

4. How important do you think play is for a child to explore his/her experiences and feelings?

Not at all	not very	important	very important	vital
□	□	□	1	9

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