

<b>Institution:</b> University of Chester		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 23 Education		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Creating change by raising the awareness and understanding of the emotional needs of children in school as explained by attachment theory		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2014 – 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Paul Moran	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Senior Lecturer	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 2008 – ongoing
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015 – 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		

### 1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Research undertaken by Professor Elizabeth Harlow has impacted upon the policies and practices in schools in England, as well as the universities, charities and local authorities that have helped to bring about the change. The research gave rise to the insight that school staff members were unaware of the principle that children's early relationships (attachments) impacted upon their ability to learn, or make the most of their educational opportunities. This insight was taken up by the charity the Alex Timpson Trust (ATT), which invested £1million in: raising awareness amongst school personnel; changing practices in schools; and campaigning to change teacher training. Across England and Scotland, this money has been spent on the creation of: a consultancy post for Professor Harlow; training materials and accessible books; informative events and artefacts; support for associated charities and third sector organisations; and an action research project. Ofsted and the Department for Education (DfE) have also been impacted, as have professionals, children and families, as schools have introduced change as a result of becoming 'attachment aware.'

### 2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The research underpinning this impact case study was commissioned by the two charities, Adoption Matters and Caritas Care, that were responsible for the creation of the Centre for Adoption Support (CfAS): a pioneering service that offers support to adoptive families. Funding for the CfAS had been secured from the National Prospectus Grants Programme (DfE 2012). The research aimed to understand the problems encountered by adoptive families and the quality of the services provided. Mixed data were gathered from: organisational managers; professionals; documents; and adoptive parents. The project began in January 2014 and concluded at the end of March 2015.

The research explored the challenges faced by adoptive parents and their appeal to the CfAS for help. Importantly, the research revealed that the CfAS service was particularly valued in relation to schools: adoptive parents seeking help, and motivated to get the best education for their children, had found it hard to convince school staff members that their child's biography and emotional needs should be taken into account. The school representatives who had been interviewed, said that teachers were not trained to understand how emotions might impact on the behaviour and performance of children in school. Social workers liaised with schools on behalf of families, and offered training on the needs of adopted (or previously looked after) children. This insight is articulated in outputs [1] and [3]. The value of attachment theory, in helping school staff members understand the ways in which emotional insecurity and anxiety impede learning, is articulated in [4]. The research insight appertained to adopted children who were more likely to have suffered abuse, neglect and loss, and were less likely to have benefitted from secure emotional attachments in their early years, which would have enabled them to make the most of their learning opportunities and cope in the school environment. Professor Harlow's publications, which draw attention to this insight, contribute to a growing body of literature on this topic. Attachment theory and the 'whole school approach' requires leaders to maintain structures, processes, policies, and create a warm socio-emotional climate that is inclusive, nurturing, safe, and calm. Building positive relationships with children and their parents, as well as understanding

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the meaning behind behaviours, is essential in enabling schools to function as a secure base for the ongoing development and learning of all children, not just the most vulnerable.

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

- 1) Harlow, E. Mitchell, A., Doherty, P. and Moran, P. (2015) Constructing and Delivering Services of Support: An Evaluation of the Northwest Post-placement Adoption Support Service. (2). Chester: University of Chester.
- 2) Harlow, E. (2017) 'Constructing the Social, Constructing Social Work' in Webb, S. A. (ed) Matters of Professional Identity and Social Work London: Routledge., pp. 62-75, ISBN 9781138234420.
- 3) Harlow, E. (2019a) Defining the Problem and Sourcing the Solution: a Reflection on Some of the Organisational, Professional and Emotional Complexities of Accessing Post-adoption Support, Journal of Social Work Practice, 33(3): 269-280, first published online: 16th May 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2018.1460588>
- 4) Harlow, E. (2019b) Attachment Theory: Developments, Debates and Recent Applications in Social Work, Social Care and Education, Journal of Social Work Practice. First published online in December. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2019.1700493>

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)**Impact by informing the direction of a new charity**

In 2015, the research insight described above was brought to the attention of Sir John Timpson CBE when Professor Harlow sent him the final report (Harlow et al. 2015, research reference [1]). Sir John identified with the distress of the adoptive parents and the significance of the theme concerning children's emotional needs in school. Sir John said *"...In 2015 Professor Elizabeth Harlow sent me her research report. As an adoptive parent myself, I could understand the struggle that was described by the interviewees in her study. I could also see that school staff in particular did not understand attachment theory and the emotional needs of children. I could see that this might be another area in which I could 'spread the word' [about attachment theory]...[2]* Following consultation with Professor Harlow and other experts, Sir John committed the first five years of his new children's charity (the Alex Timpson Trust) to promoting the awareness of attachment theory amongst school personnel, which in turn would change practice in schools, and ultimately promote change in initial teacher training [1]. The charity invested approximately £1 million in this initiative. Founded in 2017, the Alex Timpson Trust (ATT) (Charity Commission number 1174698) harnesses the fundraising potential of Timpson's commercial outlets. Income for the financial year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 was £998.5k. The research insight, and the stated impact goals, further implicated universities, third sector organisations and local authorities. These implications and impacts will be described below.

**Impact on charities and third sector organisations that furthered attachment awareness in schools**

Sir John offered patronage, and the ATT provided funding, to organisations that would support schools to effect change informed by attachment theory. These include: Nurture UK; Scottish Attachment in Action [3] and most importantly the Attachment Research Community (ARC), which was launched in 2017 (charity commission number 1172378) with the help of the ATT. [4]

Eight training organisations, as well as ARC, Nurture UK and Adoption Matters/CfAS (the charity that funded the underpinning research), were promoted in advertising materials that were written and circulated by the ATT, and representatives were invited to participate in networking events (see below). As a direct response to the research insight, Adoption Matters has developed its strategy and service offering, with 90 courses on attachment and trauma having since been delivered in schools and colleges [5]. The Chief Executive Officer of Adoption Matters said *"The research conducted by Professor Harlow and colleagues at the University of Chester has helped us develop our direction of travel within CFAS and has resulted in many new and ongoing initiatives in the area of attachment and the development of attachment aware schools".* [5]

Furthermore, Professor Harlow has continued to advise and shape the organisation as she has been recruited onto the Board of Trustees of the charity Adoption Matters.

### **Impact by the creation of a new post, artefacts, and events for the purpose of raising the awareness of attachment theory in schools**

*Funding of a knowledge transfer post at the University of Chester (£90,000 from 2017 to 2022):* In order to raise the awareness of attachment theory in schools, the ATT has awarded Professor Harlow a knowledge transfer contract for one day per week for five years. In keeping with this consultancy role, and in order to help shape the work of the new charity, she was also recruited onto the Board of Trustees of the charity the ATT.

#### *Production of accessible publications:*

In order to promote the application of attachment theory in schools, accessible publications were produced. These were:

- Timpson, J. (2016) *Looking After Looked After Children* Timpson Ltd: Manchester. This book, which illustrates the principles of attachment theory and their relevance to children in the school environment, is available either free (or a charitable donation) in Timpson's 2,122 commercial outlets across the UK, or free in bulk by order from Timpson House.
- Timpson, J. (2018) *A Guide to Attachment Awareness in Schools*. This publication contained adverts for the above charities and relevant training organisations.
- Harlow, E. (2018) Attachment Theory and Schools, *Headteacher Update*, Spring, 1, January, pp. 38-39. This publication contained adverts for the above charities and relevant training organisations.
- Harlow, E. (2020) Attachment Theory and Children's Learning in School, *Headteacher Update*, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020.

#### *Information sharing and networking events:* There were four main events:

- In 2018, together with the virtual school headteacher (VSH) for Greater Manchester, Sir John hosted two symposia. Attendees included: 28 VSHs; 3 chief executive officers of children's charities; 6 directors of attachment training organisations; a headteacher; and 2 regional representatives of Ofsted. [6]
- In March 2019, the conference 'Navigating Adoption Support' was mounted by Professor Harlow in partnership with the charity Adoption Matters/CfAS. Addressing the topic of attachment theory in school, there were 100 (approx.) delegates including adopted adults, adoptive parents, school personnel, academics, and social workers [7]. Feedback was positive, with indication that the content could inform changes in practice.
- In October 2019, the ATT funded the network organisation Scottish Attachment in Action to mount a promotional event in Glasgow which was attended by approximately 50 professionals, including educational psychologists.

#### *Creating information and training materials:*

- Webinars on the topic of attachment theory in school have been created and are available on the website of the Rees Centre, Oxford University (see below).
- The ATT funded the recording of Dan Hughes, an international expert on attachment theory. This artefact was made available for a fee via the website of the Scottish Attachment In Action with 70 recordings having been sold. [3] The fees benefitted Scottish Attachment in Action.
- On the initiative of Professor Harlow, the ATT also funded Professor Schofield from the University of East Anglia (UEA) to create and pilot on-line training materials for use in schools. These are now globally available for free from the UEA website (Secure Base in School) [9].

#### *Action research:*

In 2017, the ATT commissioned the Rees Centre at the University of Oxford to undertake an action research project. The project, costing £750,000 concludes in 2022 [8]. Professor Harlow chairs

the Advisory Group for this project, with representatives from Ofsted and the DfE attending the Group. The aim is to influence initial teacher training and the auditing of schools.

### **Impact by raising awareness and taking action**

#### *Creating change through the consumption of awareness raising artefacts:*

Awareness is raised (thus impact occurs) when the above recording, publications, webinars and presentations are 'consumed' by professionals, parents, carers and children. *Headteacher Update* is sent to 25,000 primary schools in the UK. In addition, the two articles published by Professor Harlow have been viewed on-line in total of 7,755 times. To date, 9,682 of Sir John's books have been distributed. Written feedback confirms that they are provided in training events and have been made available: in staff rooms (Cambs and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust; Manchester Secondary Pupil Referral Unit); to children (Manchester Pupil Referral Unit); to parents/carers in a reception waiting area (Stockport); to school staff (Leeds City Council; Southampton City Council); to carers via social workers (Stockport); in nurseries (Stockport); to potential foster carers and adopters (charity based in Leith); to looked after children and foster carers (The Children's Family Trust, Yorkshire Office); to family support workers (Carshalton); and to Designated Safeguarding Leads (Nottingham City Council) [10].

#### *Creating change in schools by means of the ARC:*

ARC (as described above) is a member organisation which helps schools to implement 'attachment and trauma aware practice'. This is enabled by means of resources and guidance available on the website, and circulated via newsletters, regional workshops, and an annual conference. For example, an audit tool has been created that a school can use to assess its own performance in relation to good practice (see below). Each year the ATT prize is awarded to two primary schools and two secondary schools assessed as demonstrating the best 'attachment aware' practice. By June 2019, 485 schools had invested in membership of ARC [4]. The leaders of ARC, together with a representative of the National Association of Virtual School Heads, are currently campaigning to include content on child development (in particular attachment theory) in initial teacher training. Professor Harlow is a member of the campaign group.

#### *Creating change by training on the application of attachment theory in school:*

This has been facilitated by the ATT directly and indirectly. Organisations supported by the ATT have delivered training into schools across England. As a result of piloting the online training materials funded by the ATT, Norfolk County Council has commissioned training from the UEA [9]. The action research project at the Rees Centre has given rise to training on attachment theory in 262 schools. These schools are located in Birmingham, Coventry, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Kirklees, North Yorkshire, Oxfordshire, Rochdale, Southampton, Shropshire, St Helens, Stockport, Stockton, Sutton, Torbay, Trafford, Warwickshire, and West Sussex [8]. Continuing professional development training on children's attachment and trauma has been delivered to 980 participants by the University of Chester [11].

#### *Creating change in two urban regions: the case studies of Leeds and Manchester*

Using 'Touchbase', one of the organisations promoted by the ATT, Leeds City Council has rolled out training on attachment theory across the authority. Forty schools were enrolled as members of the ARC and Sir John's books were being distributed. These practices were part of an overarching ambition to make Leeds a 'child friendly' city. As Chair of the National Association of Virtual School Headteachers, the VSH of Leeds City Council confirmed that attachment theory and relationship-based approaches were influencing children's services across England [12]. Resources from Sir John and the ATT were made available to the VSH in Greater Manchester in order that schools might become 'attachment aware' and change implemented accordingly. These resources included: membership of ARC, use of the audit tool described above, a budget for the purchase of books, copies of Sir John's books, a budget for training on attachment theory, and participation in a regional conference. Whilst noting that attachment theory was only one influence, four headteachers described to Professor Harlow the ways in which their schools had changed. A summary of the ways in which the schools had changed has been published in Harlow, E. (2020) *Attachment Theory and Children's Learning in School, Headteacher Update*, June. Changes



occurred in relation to: mission statements, values and school culture; policies and procedures; knowledge skills and the abilities of staff; and the roles and tasks of staff. For example, there has been a shift away from a policy of behaviour modification to relationship-based engagement: instead of punishing unwanted behaviours, effort is made to understand and respond to the child's underlying emotions. In addition to engaging with parents, children are listened to and all measures are considered in light of the question 'what would this feel like for a child?' Overall, there has been an effort to create a school environment that is calm and predictable, hence the potential for anxiety is reduced. Individual support for pupils has been provided and the emphasis has been on the creation of a respectful environment for all.

*Creating change: some examples from practitioners*

Written feedback to the ATT administrator also confirms that change is taking place in schools:

**Virtual School Headteacher, Shropshire:** *Through the Alex Timpson Trust we will be rolling out whole school training and network meetings for schools to look at practical strategies to support teachers. (...) We look after them so they can look after our children.*

**Virtual School Headteacher, Southampton:** *[Following training, staff] realised that it is not just about looked after children and it has really made them think about the importance of relationship-based learning.*

**Headteacher, Rochdale:** *We have trained all our staff on attachment and have now put in place targeted interventions for our vulnerable children.*

**Deputy Headteacher, Watford:** *We are at the beginning of our journey to become attachment aware but are very committed to continue along the way. All our staff, not just the teachers have received attachment awareness training (...) We employ a TA who has a focus on Social, Emotional and Mental Health and from April 2019 we will be employing a 1:1 teacher to work with our most vulnerable students. This will include the CLA [Children Looked After], the children adopted from care, care leavers and those on a special guardianship order. (...) It is too soon to measure the impact on our young people but the staff are really onboard.*

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

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- 1) The website of the Alex Timpson Trust <https://www.timpson-group.co.uk/alex-timpson-trust/>
- 2) Written testimonial provided by the Chair of the Timpson Group
- 3) Corroboration can be provided by the Chair of Scottish Attachment in Action (included as corroborating contact)
- 4) Written testimonial provided by a trustee of the Attachment Research Community
- 5) Written testimonial provided by the CEO of Adoption Matters
- 6) Corroboration can be provided by the Chair of the Timpson Group (included as corroborating contact)
- 7) Adoption Matters Achievement Report 2018-19
- 8) The website of the Department of Education, University of Oxford  
<http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/the-alex-timpson-attachment-and-trauma-programme-in-schools/>
- 9) Written testimonial provided by Professor of Child and Family Social Work, University of East Anglia
- 10) Written feedback gathered via email by the administrator of the Alex Timpson Trust
- 11) Written testimonial provided by Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education and Children's Services, University of Chester
- 12) Notes of meetings with VSH for Leeds City Council and Chair of the National Association of Virtual School Headteachers.