

**THE PLANNED  
ENVIRONMENT  
THERAPY  
TRUST**

(Registered Charity No. 248633)

*"Supporting, promoting, recording and  
valuing therapeutic work in caring and  
healing  
environments/communities/institutions..."*

**ARCHIVE AND  
STUDY CENTRE  
MAIN DESK**

**THE BARNS  
CONFERENCE  
CENTRE**

**Church Lane, Toddington, Cheltenham, GLOS. GL54 5DQ, United Kingdom  
Phone/FAX (UK): 01242 620125 / (Outside UK): 44 1242 620125**

**THE PLANNED ENVIRONMENT THERAPY TRUST  
ARCHIVE AND STUDY CENTRE**

*"A home for research and discussion about therapeutic community"*

**University of Reading  
Therapeutic Child Care Course**

**Dissertations in the Planned Environment Therapy  
Trust Archive and Study Centre**

---

**Dave Fernyhough**

**A WINNICOTTIAN APPROACH TO THE  
MANAGEMENT OF CHALLENGING  
BEHAVIOURS IN SCHOOLS:**

How applicable are the theories of “Holding” and the  
“Facilitating Environment” to the management of  
extreme and challenging behaviour in a large secondary  
school?

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MA in  
Therapeutic Child Care

**University of Reading**

September 2006

## **ABSTRACT**

This is a study of the impact of adapting D.W. Winnicott's theories on "Holding" and the "Facilitating Environment" to work with very challenging children in a large, troubled secondary school. The dissertation attempts to show that the creation of a school environment that allows for emotional holding and responds to the most extreme needs of these children, can allow both these children and those around them to engage more fully in accessing the educational opportunities available.

It is told from the perspective of a behaviour specialist, whose role and task changed during a period of great and troubling change for the whole school. As a result, the work explores both the theories utilised to aid the performance of this new task of managing the school environment, and the effect of their implementation on the professional, his colleagues and the children in his care.

A review and description of the salient points of Winnicott's ideas accompanies a review of relevant literature, in particular of that concerning challenging behaviour in schools. The body of the research is a reflective, participative account of how this work was carried out, and how it was received.

The dissertation points to how apt Winnicott's theories of Holding and The Facilitating Environment are in aiding the pedagogue in managing the chaos and anxiety generated by children unable to engage emotionally with the school environment.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The following have been invaluable in the completion of both this dissertation and the work that it describes:

The Head Teacher of the school, without whose desire to allow his staff to do what needs to be done I would not have engaged in the task at school.

The staff, both teaching and support, who have shared my approach and encouraged it to grow. I am indebted to certain staff who gave permission for their comments/ observations to be used within this work.

The staff and former colleagues on the Therapeutic Child Care course at Reading, in particular my tutor who has provided precious help and feedback whilst tolerating my approach to distance learning.

The many former colleagues whose input over the years in Therapeutic Communities and residential care has imbued a Winnicott receptive mindset in my approach to my work, particularly Mrs. Dockar-Drysdale and the staff of the Cotswold Community, and Mike Hines at Cumberlow.

My Behaviour Support Team for showing that the Winnicottian pre-occupation is effective if others use it as well.

To Stoops, our constable, who has shared my frustrations with inappropriately good humour.

My mother, who has allowed this work to take place both materially and emotionally.

My kids for their patience, and finally Lesley, whose support and technical know how saved me too many times.

## **CONTENTS**

<b>Chapter One.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>P. 6</b>
<b>Chapter Two.</b>	<b>METHOD OF STUDY</b>	<b>P.13</b>
<b>Chapter Three.</b>	<b>THEORY</b>	<b>P.16</b>
<b>Chapter Four.</b>	<b>REVIEW OF ASSOCIATED LITERATURE</b>	<b>P.28</b>
<b>Chapter Five.</b>	<b>APPLICATION TO PRACTICE</b>	<b>P.36</b>
<b>Chapter Six.</b>	<b>SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION</b>	<b>P.65</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>P.69</b>

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

I am currently employed as a behaviour specialist in a large split site secondary school in northwest England. The school sits in an area of high deprivation, and social exclusion, most of it consisting of large estates built to accommodate mid-twentieth century slum clearance from the urban heart of the county. The families that the schools' pupils come from often reflect the deprivation of the area. Drug and alcohol abuse, domestic abuse, depression and other mental health issues, are rife.

Unemployment is very high, in some cases three or four generations of a family have never held a full time job. A large minority of our students are from single parent families.

At the start of my research the school too reflected the social isolation of the local community. The school was a recent amalgamation of two very different high schools. The infrastructure of the school was poor, showing a lack of expenditure partly due to a plan to build a new single site school in the near future. Certainly one site was too small for the number of students now attending.

The amalgamation had been the catalyst for the school's severe downturn in both fortunes and performance. The parents and children of both former high schools had hotly resisted the amalgamation. They had chosen one school and now found

themselves attending the other. This anger permeated much of the new school, with many members of the community refusing to engage with a school that they had opposed.

The contrasting cultures of each school would make uncomfortable bedfellows. The teaching staff also was resistant to this move. Both in terms of the way they worked and how it would affect their positions and careers, the amalgamation was threatening. As they began in the newly created school the splitting in the staff teams was clear. Resistances grew, as former heads of department in one school were now assistants to the former Head of Department of the other. Perceived iniquities and prejudices began to severely compromise the good order of the school. This was not helped by the school sites being a good mile apart.

I took up employment as a Learning Mentor on the first day of the new school. My role was to work with a specific cohort of students who were failing in school due in large part to their behaviour problems. Many of these had Statements of Special Educational Needs, specifically “Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties.”

Within one year of the amalgamation the school was clearly in significant difficulties. The cultural resistances of the original schools had become the defining ethos of the school, both from students and staff. The levels of resentment were undermining the work of those who were trying to move the school forwards. The children resented no longer being in the school they had chosen, and the loss of teachers and systems they had previously valued. Many teachers resented teaching the students of the “other” school as they were used to contrasting expectations. The children were aware of the

resistance of these new teachers. Relationships throughout the school were poor and becoming poorer.

Soon the Head Teacher left, to be replaced by a new Head shortly before the schools OFSTED inspection. The school unsurprisingly failed this inspection, with the inspectors concluding that the school provided a very poor education for its students. The following inspections saw the school placed in Special Measures, and a freefall into even worse standards followed. Many teaching staff resented this Special Measures status, as it effectively was telling them they were poor teachers.

Unfortunately a number of good teachers had begun to perform poorly in this new structure. Staff morale was perilously low, and the school leadership that would be severely criticised in subsequent HMI inspections was unable to react effectively.

Within this tumult the needs of the children had become obscured. They were being marginalised, rather than being seen as the school and its teacher's priority.

Understandably the children responded and treated the school with the disdain it too frequently showed them. The teachers who were able and experienced were leaving the school in vast numbers and recruitment of new staff was difficult. Instead the students were being 'taught' by large numbers of supply staff. Even the better behaved students had begun to rebel at the lack of purpose their school days were having.

My work as a Learning Mentor in this school saw me increasingly taking on individual sessions with the school's most challenging students. These would be referred to me by Heads of Year to see if I could impact on their behaviour through a

number of therapeutic approaches. This group of students, mainly boys, reminded me of the children I had worked with in previous employment in Therapeutic Communities for Children and Adolescents.

*“ The defining characteristics of this group are threefold. The first is a seeming inability to tolerate the experience of being cared for in families in the community; this often associated with a history of neglect, abuse, or disruption in the biological family. The second is a resultant case complexity, as defined by factors such as duration of difficulties, range of needs, and degree of multi-service involvement; this is often associated with a high profile presentation and a variety of ‘ at risk’ behaviours in evidence. The last characteristic is the relevant absence of those resilience factors (e.g. peer group support, capacity to self-reflect, etc.) that would enable other children and young people in similar circumstances to survive.”*

*(Kasinski in Ward, Kasinski et al., 2003 p.45)*

Placed within the chaotic environment that the school had become, these children were proving wildly unmanageable. It was these children that I had been employed to work with in my original role as a Learning Mentor. This was intended to be via one to one meetings and small group work, with a cohort of around thirty students. I came quickly to the realisation that any gains I was making in my meetings with these children were being undone by leaving them to cope in the frantic, uncontained environment outside my office door. They would become overwhelmed, and escalate the disruption thereby dramatically unsettling and disrupting the school’s other

students. Too easily the extremes of behaviour on display became accepted as normal for the school. The other students frequently mirrored the uncontained acting out as it went largely unchecked by adults, creating a perilous school environment. I also soon realised that the adults in the school had, in the majority, abdicated their duties as adults. Being told they were poor teachers via a succession of inspections, constant monitoring, and poor support and supervision (an area highlighted in inspection reports) had left them too needy of help themselves to adequately meet the needs of large groups of challenging and highly needy children. In turn, the children sensing / seeing how unable the adults were to contain or address their needs became more angry, resentful and emotionally unheld.

It was clear that if I was to be effective in this environment, I had to work to change it. In order to do so it would be necessary to engage with the whole school community as an effective adult.

*“ The adult who is mature is able to identify with the environment, and to take part in the establishment, maintenance and alteration of the environment, and to make this identification without serious sacrifice of personal impulse.” (Winnicott, in Davis & Wallbridge, 1981, p.4.)*

My students could not learn to behave appropriately amid all this confusion. The school culture lacked all the prerequisites for them to grow, both as people and learners; safety, clear boundaries, and reliable adults.

I considered the suitable approaches to this issue, and found the theoretical framework and clarity of task I required in the work of D. W. Winnicott. His ideas of the Holding Relationship and the Facilitating Environment were ones I had encountered in Therapeutic Communities, and on the Therapeutic Child Care course at Reading University. They offered a structure and mind-set upon which I could ground my efforts to change the environment in which my group of challenging children would exist at school.

### **Aims of Study**

My intent in this study was to explore the applicability of these Winnicottian ideas within the context of my troubled workplace. In particular I wished to consider their benefits or shortcomings in my attempts to manage the extreme and challenging behaviours of the pupils I have described above. My Specific Research Question being

**“How applicable are Winnicott’s theories of the Holding Relationship and the Facilitating Environment to the management of extreme and challenging behaviour in a large secondary school”.**

I have used a qualitative study, focusing on a reflective, participatory investigation into work I was involved in. A broad examination of Winnicott’s work and associated literature, both regarding Winnicott’s theories and other contemporary applications in a school setting, has also been conducted and included.

In exploring this issue I have documented the practical application of Winnicott's therapeutic approach applied to a larger community than is usually the case e.g. Therapeutic Communities for Children, Clinical settings etc. As well as informing the approach at my own school, it may be of use to other professionals, both teaching and support staff, who are tasked with managing extreme behaviour, in what are primarily learning focused cultures. This has a current relevance with schools throughout the country struggling to cope with these very behaviours, in children with high levels of emotional need.( c.f. Elton Report, 1989, Steer Report 2005). This is reflected in the growing range of approaches to extreme challenging behaviour being employed in mainstream schools currently, e.g. Brief Intervention Therapy, Nurture Groups, Solution Focused Therapies, B.E.S.T. Teams and the focus on Emotional Intelligence / literacy. My belief was that Winnicott's ideas of holding and facilitating environments could complement rather than compete with many of the above.

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHOD OF STUDY

I have conducted a qualitative study to examine this question. A qualitative study best allows the range of experiences and variables that colour any work with the extremes of behaviour to be explored. Indeed research within schools is increasingly taking on a qualitative approach due to the complexities a school environment offers.

*“ It has been our view for some time that the process of education, teaching and learning are so complex and multifaceted that to focus only upon cause and effect, products, outcomes, or correlations in research on schools is of limited value. The complexity of education demands the use of very many different research techniques and models. The most productive approach we believe is a qualitative one.”(Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989, p.25)*

I have used a variety of methods to conduct my investigation but have focused primarily on a REFLECTIVE, PARTICIPATIVE STUDY of work undertaken in the twelve month period in which my role changed from Learning Mentor to Director of Student Care. This is also the period in which the school saw its new head arrive. I have drawn on reflective analysis of my own notes and observations from the period

concerned, to describe and analyse events and situations encountered in executing my role. These were also a source of suitable material and vignettes.

Similarly I have used informal observations and comments from colleagues at the school about my work and its impact on them.

A participative approach in which “ the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people” (Cresswell, 1998,p.58) seemed a particularly apt method of study. My question hinged on my direct experience of impacting, or not, on a complex “group of people”. Winnicott’s theories demanded my immersion in this community. As such my experiences of it were as crucial as those around me

*“The researcher’s self is inevitably an integral part of the analysis and should be acknowledged as such...the use of self should not be regarded as a limitation to the research, but as a crucial resource.”( Denscombe, 1998, p.208).*

The strength of this approach is that it allowed me to match the emotional content of the question with the emotional content of the work, which is crucial. As Visser states;

*“ Research particularly has a tendency to seek evidence that focuses upon the identification of structures and systems, missing out on the part played by the external verities which sustain them” (Visser, in Clough et al, 2005, p.227).*

The possible weakness of the participative approach is that it relies on my interpretation of events in my workplace. The value of reflection, made possible by the keeping of a personal log of events, is that it allowed me to consider my

involvement outside the immediate emotive content, and to more fully analyse these events.

*“ The notion of reflection entails the idea that an individual can move up and beyond the immediate unique situation, usually defined in commonsense terms, to a more reflective one, looking again at a situation from a different perspective”. (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989, p.10).*

In exploring the effects of a theoretical approach I have drawn heavily on source material, i.e. the writings of Winnicott. In addition I have completed a literature search in order to better place this research in the existing cannon of work in both applying Winnicottian theories and in managing behaviour in schools.

### **Ethical Issues**

In documenting my research I have chosen to retain the anonymity of both the school and the L.E.A. The level of turmoil both organisations have been through and created would be better described by this. I hope to show that the theories under examination can aid many other schools and as such the identity of my school is irrelevant.

Similarly I have changed the names of any individuals mentioned therein.

I have sought and received the consent of the school’s head teacher, and of a number of colleagues whose comments and feedback I have used in this work. Their perspective was a vital part of the transition of my work in the school, and is I believe valid. The observations reported are their own.

I did not seek the consent of the students depicted in vignettes as the scenes depicted concentrate on the application of theory to a situation, rather than an examination of their personal cases.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORY**

#### **The Holding Relationship and the Facilitating Environment**

**“... if one accepts the idea of health as maturity at age, the emotional maturity of the individual cannot be achieved except in a setting in which the family has provided the bridge leading out of parental care ( or maternal care) right across into social provision.” (Winnicott, 1965,p.93)**

D.W. Winnicott, a British child psychoanalyst, described how the maturational process of an infant is predicated on the quality of “ the holding” that child experiences. Winnicott refers to holding as the “ the basis for what gradually becomes a self – experiencing being” (in *Mothers and Babies* 1987 written 1966). It is the process through which the mother supports the infant from absolute dependence to a state of being a “self”. Thus it allows the child to “ start to build an understanding of the extremely complex thing that is a relationship between two human beings.” (Davis and Wallbridge, 1981, p.99).

The holding at its most fundamental is the physical care and comfort offered by the mother. It is the way she manages the daily impingements upon the infant. Winnicott

describes the example of the mother responding to an unexpected call at the door; the way she ensures the baby's calm is unaffected through gentle handling and containment of her own anxiety in order protect his security

*“ over and over again a mother deals with her own moods, anxieties and excitements in her own private life, reserving for her baby what belongs to the baby”.*( Davis and Wallbridge, 1981,p.99).

The infant is at a stage where “ nothing has been separated out as not-me so there is not yet a ME”. (Winnicott,1965,p.17). They will discover this “ME” as a result of the holding provided by the mother. It comes at a time of complete dependence. The baby has no alternative but to rely totally on the mother. The mother responds intuitively to this dependence. She meets the baby's needs without him being able to communicate them to her. Her preoccupation with the baby allows her to understand him on a level deeper than any other. Through this process of meeting the child's most primitive needs the child may begin to discover the separation of the “me and not-me” mentioned earlier .The holding effectively offers ego-support.

Winnicott summarises the effect of holding as

*“ Protects from physiological insult.*

*Takes account of the infant's skin sensitivity – touch, temperature, auditory sensitivity, visual sensitivity, sensitivity to falling, and of the infant's lack of knowledge of the existence of anything other than the self.*

*It includes the whole routine of care throughout the day and night, and it is not the same with any two infants because it is part of the infant and no two infants are alike. Also it follows the minute day to day changes belonging to the infant's growth and development, both physical and psychological. (Winnicott 1965 p. 49).*

But it is the holding received at this most vulnerable time that most acutely impacts on the future emotional and mental health of the individual. At this time the child's environment is effectively its mother. In the baby's merged state, his whole experience of being is through his mother. If this holding is "good enough" (a realistic phrase Winnicott uses throughout his work to describe the acceptable ratio of successes and failures experienced by even the most determined of parents) the child will encounter an environment that "meets physiological needs. Here physiology and psychology have not yet become distinct, or are only in the process of doing so; and it is reliable. But ... is not mechanically reliable. It is reliable in a way that implies the mother's empathy.( Winnicott 1965 p.48).

Winnicott saw a child's emotional growth as a "gradual process towards independence, with dependence and even double dependence always reappearing"(1965, p.5.). Thus even after having "integrated" as an individual they still require the containment and security of being held. As the child's self or ego

becomes established the role of holding is to support the ego through periods of ‘disintegration’ and into ‘reintegration’. Holding as ego- support continues through the infant’s emotional maturity, through childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. Here we are less looking at the physical act of holding but the meeting of psychological need, the need to feel protected from the more complex impingements that growing up creates.

For this emotional maturation, or integration to occur fully and effectively, Winnicott states that an environment that both holds and develops the child must be present.

*“ He was convinced that there is an inherent drive or tendency to become one’s self and to relate as a unit to the other. But this tendency could only be actualized in the proper medium, a FACILITATING ENVIRONMENT. It is the interplay between the MATURATIONAL PROCESS and the facilitating environment that is of crucial concern...” (From, Smith et al, 1989, p.xvi).*

The facilitating environment allows the ‘ holding’ to be reliable, adaptive and secure. As we have seen initially the mother is the facilitating environment. Her preoccupation with the child creates the environment for him to first discover what is not him, and to therefore become aware of the drives that are his own (object relating). The facilitating environment at times protects, at others remedies, the affect of impingement on the child. Winnicott describes these impingements as psychic trauma, the places where ‘ the infant and the environment first come into contact’ (Davis and Wallbridge, 1981, p.43). The baby has its needs, impulses met by the

environment (mother) and experiences it effectively. Conversely the environment may act upon the child e.g. the child becomes uncomfortably cold, and the environment mother adapts by covering him with a blanket. Discomfort is not overwhelming, it gets made better. The environment is made predictable. The child thus is able to continue to relate to the world outside himself creatively.

The facilitating environment must, however consist of more than just the mother.

*“... at first it is the mother herself who is the facilitating environment. She needs support at this time, which is best given by the child’s father, her mother, the family, and the immediate social environment.” (Winnicott, 1965,p.85).*

The mother at this earliest stage is completely immersed in the care of her child. This has an effect on her own need to be held. She too needs looking after in order to carry out such a demanding role. Her worries, anxieties and the impingements of the environment on her own self, need managing in order to best avoid them impacting on the baby. Here is the broader implication for the holding environment. For the baby’s holding to be adequate so must that of the mother. When her own resilience to impingement and stress is exhausted the environment needs to respond to avoid the baby being entangled in mother’s distress. Winnicott sees the role of the father as pivotal in this protection.

*“... he is able to become ‘the protecting agent who frees the mother to devote herself to the baby’. This ‘protective covering’ supplied by the father is needed when the mother is ‘carrying, bearing and suckling his infant’ for she is thereby ‘saved from*

*having to turn outwards to deal with her surroundings at the time when she is wanting so much to turn inwards'. (in Davis and Wallbridge, op.cit p.129).*

As the child matures and the facilitating environment becomes more than mother, the father's contribution becomes broader and more symbolic. Winnicott points to a cultural and societal representation of the father as "the indestructible environment". The father is the first person who is separate from the mother-child merged environment. The father offers a new environment to explore through the stability he provides but also his difference from the mother.

*"The father 'opens up a new world to the children' as they begin to understand and learn the details of his work, his interests and his views...If to the mother belongs 'the stability of the house' then to the father belongs 'the liveliness of the street'. (Davis & Wallridge, op.cit. p.130).*

The father continues to impact on the facilitating environment throughout the maturational process. Writing at a time when fathers were the thought of as the main breadwinners and most mothers did not work, Winnicott saw the fathers ongoing role as "moral support, to be the backing for her (the mother) authority, to be the human being who stands for the law and order which mother plants in the life of the child." (1964, p.115). The authority of the mother is not in question here, but Winnicott recognises the burden of "being the whole thing", of representing the love and the nurture as well as the keeper of boundaries and strictness. It is far better for the father to engage in this. He allows for the child's exploration of his own hate and rage, in a manner that will not destroy the immediate world of the child.

*“ Every now and again the child is going to hate someone, and if father is not there to tell him where to get off, he will hate his mother, and this will make him confused, because It is his mother that he loves most fundamentally” (Winnicott 1964, p.115).*

The next extension of the facilitating environment is the interaction of mother and father and child as the family. Not simply three individuals contributing to the child's welfare but actively engaged in a new dynamic. They establish a home, both physically and psychically. This home and family allows the child to make the progression that Winnicott argues is a biological imperative, from dependence to the independence that is the ultimate goal of the maturational process. It also best serves the need of the child to alternate between the two.

The family is the first ring of holding that is outside the mother. In time the rings ripple further to include siblings, grandparents and other relatives, close neighbours and friends and on to new environments such as nursery and school. However, the father and mother, and away from the family, each step giving increased freedom of ideas and of functioning.”(Winnicott1965, p.91). At the same time there is another “ tendency” which requires the ability to return to the relationship with the father and mother. Central to all this are the father and mother. The child fulfils what Winnicott calls “ the tendency in the individual to get away from the mother and away from and away from the father and mother and away from the family, each step giving increased freedom of ideas and functioning”(ibid, p.91). Winnicott draws a parallel with the émigré who still retains a strong relationship with the “home” country.

The family that is engaged in the healthy development of the child provides a steady progression of “defiant iconoclastic actions, each with the central figures... the parents or the mother... it will be seen that immense trouble is taken in the natural course of events by parents to maintain this series and to organize the graduation so that the sequence of the individual’s development is not broken.” (Ibid, p.93).

Thus, Winnicott describes the development of the factors needed for emotional growth from baby to adolescent. These were the theories I was mindful of as I set about modifying the school environment to meet the needs of the numerous students whose lives had manifestly lacked the holding, preoccupation, and structure discussed above.

#### **FAILURE OF HOLDING AND FACILITATING ENVIRONMENT**

Having established the requirements for emotional maturity and health to be reached, Winnicott looked at the effects of poor holding in a non- facilitative environment. He attributes a number of conditions to the failure of the environment to meet the baby’s/ child’s needs.

*“ Where there is inadequate environmental provision, and Winnicott is clear that this refers more to the in-tuneness of the mother than to the actual meeting of instinctual needs, a false self develops...Instead of the mother meeting the infant’s gesture or demand and making sense of it, the infant must meet the mothers gesture and make sense of it...Adults with a false self ...require constant environmental stimulation to feel alive” (Fromm & Smith op.cit, p.59).*

The role of the “false self” is to hide and protect the vulnerable “true self”. Due to the repeated failure of the mother/ environment to respond to the child, he must respond to her. Winnicott calls this “ compliance”. His needs, those of his true self, remain unmet. His false self does not seek the fulfilment of these needs, rather it responds to the demands of the environment. The false self has a “ need to collect impingements from external reality so that the living time of the individual can be filled by reactions to these impingements.” (Winnicott, 1965,p.150).

In extreme cases the false self and real self have a high degree of ‘split’. The false self is so prevalent that it becomes accepted as the true person. Winnicott uses the analogy of actors to describe this, contrasting the person who is an actor, but can function normally off stage, with the actor who can only act “ and who are completely at a loss when not in role, and when not being appreciated or applauded.”(ibid, p.150).

The common feature of the various conditions Winnicott associates with environmental failure is that of defence. The child did not discover the world and his place in it “ creatively”; rather it was by a series of impingements or traumas. The old taunt aimed at perceived ‘liberal do-gooders’ about believing criminality is the result of children “ falling of their potty” offers a useful example of this; a child who falls off his potty and is comforted and restored to his seat by an attentive mother will likely not fear this toileting experience, it has been made safe for him. However, the child who falls of the potty and is left, despite his cries and distress, by a distracted, or damaged mother, may well associate potty time with a lack of safety or concern. He will thus defend himself against that feeling. Mary Ainsworth (1977) noted from her research that the amount of crying done by babies of attentive mothers and inattentive

mothers was roughly even at three months, but at one year the less promptly attended children cried far more. These were babies whose mother did not respond promptly or adequately to their cries, and thus the world was felt as a less secure place.

*“..it is when things do not go well that the infant becomes aware, not of the failure of maternal care, but of the results, ..., of that failure; that is to say the infant becomes aware of reacting to some impingement. As a result of success in maternal care there is built up in the infant a continuity of being which is the basis of ego strength; whereas the result of each failure... is that the continuity of being is interrupted by reactions to the consequences of that failure with resultant ego-weakening.”*

*(Winnicott, 1965, p.52)*

These impingements, Winnicott suggests, act towards the annihilation of the personal being of the child. They occur before the infant has developed “ the mechanisms that make the unpredictable, predictable.”(Davis & Wallbridge, op cit, p.44). These impingements in an unpredictable and unheld world are felt as ‘unthinkable anxieties.’ The unintegrated ego of the infant does not have the competence to understand this impingement and is briefly overwhelmed by it. This annihilation / unthinkable anxiety is experienced as maybe falling, or going to pieces or total isolation born of a total inability to communicate. He points out that these are all defining characteristics of psychotic anxieties and schizophrenia. The child must defend himself against this. This is done at the most primitive level by the creation of chaos as disintegration.

*“ The term disintegration is used to describe a sophisticated defence... that is an active production of chaos in defence against disintegration in the absence of maternal ego-support, that is, against the unthinkable or archaic anxiety that results from failure of holding in the stage of absolute dependence.” (Winnicott, 1965,p.61).*

This theory of disintegration is a difficult one to comprehend at first reading. It is made slightly more manageable by the realisation that the chaos the baby produces may be as awful as the environmental trauma but is internal. The child has created it and so it lies within his area of omnipotence. It is made more manageable still if one considers the extreme and indeed chaotic reactions of children in this state of disintegration to seemingly small problems. By way of example I refer back to my time as a household manager in a large therapeutic community for children. The children went elsewhere for holiday periods, some home, others to foster care or other local institutions. One child in my house so feared the uncertainty of this transition and the separation from the environment that provided him with holding, that he would ‘ disintegrate’. Usually placid, he would become furiously aggressive and destructive. Hour after hour would be spent in total chaos, windows being smashed and him clearly falling to pieces. Often the result would be that he ended up in a perilous position, including perched on the gutter of a very high, very steep roof. He was terrified of the heights but it was a fear he had created, unlike the separation that his environment had imposed from without.

Failure of the facilitating environment, then, contributes to children having vast gaps in their emotional “ continuity of being”. They defend their vulnerable true self against the unthinkable anxiety that intrusion into these gaps creates. Chaos,

depression, restlessness, inability to relate to others except in a false way, dissociation etc., all have roots in the environmental failure. John Bowlby in his work on attachment developed many of Winnicott's ideas and concluded;

*“Yet there now seems little doubt that when infants and young children are the subjects of insensitive mothering, mixed perhaps with occasions of outright rejection, and later to separations and threats of separation the effects are deplorable. Such experiences greatly increase a child's fear of losing his mother, increase his demands for her presence and also his anger at her absences, and may also lead him to despair of ever having a secure and loving relationship with anyone.”*

*(Bowlby, 1988, p. 50)*

It was these theories that I would employ in my attempt to improve the school environment. I would attempt to adapt the ideas of holding and the facilitating environment to meet the needs of the significant number of students who had experienced the insecure or inattentive holding described, during their early and subsequent years.

## **Chapter Four**

### **REVIEW OF ASSOCIATED LITERATURE**

In searching the literature relevant to this inquiry I have focused on a consideration of where the application of Winnicott's work would fit in the existing work on behaviour management in schools. This has taken me to the following main areas of investigation;

- What is written about the application of Winnicott's theories to this concern already
- What similar approaches are currently being utilised in secondary education
- How appropriate is the focus of this dissertation to current concerns in British education

I will discuss briefly in this section the key literature contributing to these areas.

#### **EXISTING APPLICATIONS OF WINNICOTT**

The clearest and most common application of Winnicott is to be found in Therapeutic Communities for children and young adults. Barbara Dockar-Drysdale was possibly

the most important figure in this adaptation of Winnicott to the work of residential schools for very challenging children. Her work in setting up the Mulberry Bush school and as consultant at the Cotswold Community are discussed in books *The Provision of Primary Experience: Winnicottian work with Children and Adolescents*, (1990), and *Therapy and Consultation in Child Care* (1993). Dockar- Drysdale describes how environmental provision via the therapist allows the child to integrate. This provision involves meeting the child's most primitive needs with good experience in an environment of intense emotional holding.

*“ It is not enough to give emotionally deprived children good experience, we must also help them to keep good things inside them, or they will lose them once more.”*  
(Dockar- Drysdale 1990,p.99)

Ward, Kasinski et al., (2003) concisely document the Therapeutic Community use of Winnicott influenced ideas in *Therapeutic Communities for Children*. Though focused on residential treatment of children it offers many parallels to the experiences of our school. It also illustrates the practical application of the theories of Holding, and the Facilitating environment.

*“The provision of understanding and toleration but also firm boundaries as well as the establishment of the ability to communicate and relate”* (p.10)

*“ The sort of ‘ holding ’ that we are going to describe relates directly to what the paediatrician and psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott called the ‘Holding Environment”*

Beyond the Therapeutic Community literature there are few conscious proponents of Winnicott in education. One of the few, who clearly espouses Winnicott's worth in

the managing of behaviour in schools, is Paul Greenhalgh. In “ *Emotional Growth and Learning*” (1994) Greenhalgh puts emotional holding at the fore in work with challenging students. He writes of the value of creating a school environment that allows for emotional growth. He also considers the emotional impact of working with disturbed students on their teachers, and how they should be able to be held too. In a chapter headed ‘Emotional Holding’ Greenhalgh explores fully the work of Winnicott and its application to the school environment.

*“For children’s anxiety and disturbing feelings to be worked with effectively, both individual adults and the organisation of the school...as a whole should provide emotional holding.” (p.110)*

Gerda Hanko, (2002), looks at how supporting teachers to seek more therapeutic insights in interactions with children allows for “ Winnicott’s ‘ feeling thought about’ .”

In *The Handbook of Emotional and Behavioural Disturbance*, (Clough, Garner et al, 2005) Tom Bowers whilst considering the change in how the emotional component in E.B.D. has been neglected since the 1950’s, reveals how influential Winnicottian thinking has been without actually referencing him. His statement “ *What happens in early life when we contact others emotions will affect our ability to integrate those emotions into our own thinking. That very difficulty in thinking about emotions will make it hard to develop a full and appropriate range of feelings*” (p.93) seems to echo the words of Winnicott nearly fifty years earlier.

## **CURRENT APPROACHES TO BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS**

There is a wealth of material on managing behaviour problems in schools, revealing the number of approaches being employed. A significant number of these are based on therapeutic, including psychodynamic, approaches. Derek Wright in *Management of Behaviour in Schools*, (in Varma 1993), states

*“ Teachers are not therapists, but their relationships with their students can have at times, if not most of the time, an element of the therapeutic for both” (p.4).*

In *Managing Difficult Children in School (1990)*, Lyndsey Stone looks at many of the opportunities to improve behaviour in a school by attending to the times and places that are largely unsupervised and therefore unhealthy.

*“ Many difficulties seem to occur when children are transferring from one lesson to another, from one member of staff to another...At such times the lines of responsibility for the child that are clearly laid down in normal circumstances are not in force...Attention needs to be paid to the supervision of children at such times to prevent problems from occurring.” (p.155).*

Carl Rogers's humanistic influence has had a significant impact on thinking in schools. His ideas are reflected in the work of writers such as Robert Fisher, *Teaching Children to Learn, 1995*, as he looks at the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of a school

*“ One consistent finding of research into effective schools is that “ ethos” is an important ingredient. Ethos is defined as the climate of a school and is expressed in the organisational conditions and web of personal relationships within the school” (p.150).*

In *“Understanding: a prerequisite to inclusion”* Cole et al,(1998), consider the factors that allowed pupils with EBD to be motivated and less likely to disrupt, and found that being kept under control from before the lesson starts, being allowed a limited and structured freedom within the class, being taught according to their abilities by an obvious authority on the subject and having their individual needs met were crucial. He also considered the physical environment around the child and the effect that seating arrangements, for example, can have on allowing good order to emerge in classes with EBD students.

## **CURRENT CONCERNS IN BRITISH SCHOOLS**

Much of the writing about the most challenging students in schools uses the Special Educational Need descriptor of them as having E.B.D. (Emotional, Behavioural Difficulties). Although this does imply a specific Statement of Special Educational

Needs, the ‘symptoms’ are among those shown by the students discussed in this dissertation. John Visser, from the University of Birmingham, is at the forefront of research and planning in this area and writes

“ ... The UK government is committed to an increased inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools...( DFEE) documents highlighted pupils with EBD as constituting a greater challenge for inclusion than all other areas of SEN”. (Paper presented at ISEC 2000).

Government reports from as far back as 1955’s Underwood Report, through The Elton Report in 1989 and on to the Ofsted Report of 2005, have all tried to address the issues presented by the most challenging students in British schools. In Underwood’s day (a contemporary of Winnicott) they were called “ maladjusted” and defined as showing “ *evidence of emotional instability or psychological disturbance and require special educational treatment in order to effect their personal, social, or educational readjustment*” (Ministry of Education, 1953, Part 3, 9g cited in Cole et al, 1998).

In the DES Circular 23/89 (DES, 1989) these children are now described as “ children who set up barriers between themselves and their learning environment through inappropriate, aggressive, bizarre, or withdrawn behaviour [they have] developed a range of strategies for dealing with day-to-day experiences that are inappropriate and impede normal personal and social development and make it difficult for them to learn” (in Visser, 2003, p.11).

By 2005’s OFSTED Report “ Managing Challenging Behaviour”, the Education system is still struggling to cope with “ the behaviour of some pupils...their behaviour troubles others, affects the climate of the learning community and disrupts their own

and others progress.” (p.3). This report is based on national evidence into the types of behaviour and responses seen across a range of educational settings. It points to the increased number of students being diagnosed as having Autistic Spectrum Disorders, described as “verbally and physically aggressive, disruptive, withdrawn or sexualised” (p.8). The definitions of what is challenging behaviour vary between establishment and agencies, but two main types of behaviour are agreed across the board

*“ ...Overtly aggressive behaviour: physical acts such as biting and pinching, throwing furniture and assaulting people. The second is aggression that is mainly verbal, for example, streams of abuse, temper tantrums, and invasion of personal space intending to be threatening. The second type includes behaviour which defies teachers’ authority in refusing to follow instructions.” (p.7).*

This definition of challenging behaviour is quite distinct from the acts described as “misbehaviour” in “Ofsted, The Annual Report of HM’s Chief Inspector of Schools 2003/2004” which include “incessant chatter, calling out, inattention, and other forms of nuisance that irritate staff and interrupt learning.”

The “Report of the Practitioners’ Group on School Behaviour and Discipline” Chair: Sir Alan Steer, October 2005, also considers behaviour in schools and has as its first recommendation that the “DFES should look separately at how to improve the quality of provision for those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) in particular the recruitment and retention of high quality staff and minimising bureaucracy.”

This review of literature allied to my research question suggests that there remains a limited awareness of Winnicottian thought in education circles, although the main adaptations remain in residential, therapeutic schools. In mainstream secondary education, there does seem to be an increased look towards psycho-dynamically influenced approaches, with some writers refocusing on the impact of a child's emotional life on their educational attainment and behaviour. Similarly the effect of the learning environment is a current concern, albeit mainly concerning the classroom environment rather than the whole school emotional environment.

The clearest result of my search comes from a consideration of the numerous national reports concerning what to do with / about the significant number of students who present challenging behaviours, particularly in a climate of educational inclusion. Although the names ascribed these children have changed, their impact and the questions they pose educators have remained largely unchanged from when Winnicott was writing in the fifties.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **APPLICATION TO PRACTICE**

#### **ADAPTING AND APPLYING THE THEORIES**

A knowledge of the students I was working with made it clear that they had suffered the kind of maternal and environmental failures mentioned in chapter two. The community they lived in is noted for its high levels of mental health problems, both diagnosed and undiagnosed. Many homes house four generations of people who had never held steady employment, leading to a dearth of expectation in many areas of the town. Depressive illnesses are particularly prevalent, and frequently are connected with drink and drug problems. Many children, maybe most, are from single parent homes. Fathers are frequently totally absent, unknown or in prison. This environment is facilitative of crime, aggression and ill health. Life in many homes is as bad or worse than this wider environment.

The children were coming into a school that rather than representing opportunity, growth and safety, frequently mirrored the chaos outside. Indeed so symbolic was the school of the lack of value the children and community felt, that the pedestrian entrance to it, the students' entrance (most staff drove from outside the area), was blocked by a three foot wide muddy puddle, and had been for years. Their first step into the school community made them dirty and wet.

The children felt unvalued as learners. The large number of children with milder behaviour problems felt un-boundaried, and the significant number who could have been described as un-integrated, felt overwhelmed. Consequently many spent more time running around the corridors, vandalising the flimsy fabric of the school and

fighting. Verbal abuse of staff was a norm, and behaviour in class was often as bad as on the corridors

As mentioned earlier, the staff no longer attended to the needs of the children, as they were too pre-occupied in managing their own. They were replicating the maternal failure experienced by many of our students. Consequently, the behaviour of this group worsened, in keeping with a false self-seeking out contact with the impingements of the environment. As a school we expected them to be able to behave appropriately to their age, instead they behaved appropriately to their emotional maturity. In trying to manage their behaviour reactively, through sanctions and exclusions, we merely compounded and mirrored their lack of effective holding. They were expressing a very clear need for ‘holding together, but the expression was so strong that the school was unable to respond and so had no recourse but to punish

In my one to one sessions as a learning mentor, I offered either a brief respite from this or a continuation. In the first scenario the children had a period of time with someone they came to see as benign, and able to give them time away from the chaos and disintegration outside my office. In the second I would be expected, as an agent of the school, to address their atrocious behaviour from some earlier point in the day or week Either circumstance involved me acting away from the failing environment I would be returning them to once the bell went.

On return they would quickly be subsumed into the disrupted culture of the school and their behaviour would continue to flounder. As they did so the children around them would also react to the lack of containment and structure. Even otherwise very

well behaved students began to act out their frustrations with the clearly “ not good-enough” adults.

*“ Human beings tend to be very receptive to an atmosphere, and respond often unthinkingly but emotionally and unconsciously to it.” (Hinshelwood, 2000,p.9)*

I was aware that on the occasions I had happened to be near where one of my cohorts was acting out, and could respond, I could have a clearly beneficial effect on the situation. The child welcomed my ability to make it manageable, and understandable, and the teacher valued the ego-support offered at a time of stress. I could affect the environment by being involved with at a more tangible level.

Therefore, in order to meet my task in working with these children (improving their behaviour), I would need to work with the environment that compounded the lack of concern that had been their experience from infancy.

*“ Only in a climate of affective stability can maturational processes flourish”.*  
*(Jacoby, 1990, p.61)*

However, a 750 pupil school site, covering a lot of area, and staffed by nearly one hundred adults is a big and complex environment to impact on. Certainly I had no seniority in my post to affect it legislatively as it were, nor by leadership. Learning mentors in the school were managed by a senior teacher, and seen clearly as part of the student support and special needs provision. I had a reasonable standing in the teaching staff because of my ability to manage some of the more challenging students,

which allowed me to overarch some of the traditional teacher/support staff barriers that occur in schools regarding role and status. I also had a reputation among the students as being “okay”, due to the relationships I had developed with my behavioural group. The rest of the students held these as culture carriers, unaware of how completely they were unable to do more than react to the culture.

*“ While the features of an individual culture are carried by the individual members, they cannot be reduced to individual psychology; they exist within the reality of the whole organisation. The individual, however, has his or her own objectives, conscious and unconscious for taking part in it.” (Hinshelwood, 2000, p.8)*

Holding would be the key element in my attempts to alter the school environment that so harshly impacted on my group of students. They needed to feel held for more than one hour a week. I also clearly needed to be at the children’s point of breakdown on a regular basis if this was to take place.

*“ The treatment of severely emotionally deprived children must take place in the context of what is happening in this place at this moment with this person (because unintegrated children have no realization of past or future). It is useless to confront a delinquent, for example in retrospect; one must be there in the situation, anticipating acting out by the provision of communication... what is necessary is that the people in the place should have or gain the necessary skills and insight to carry out the work themselves. (Dockar- Drysdale, 1993,p.117)*

In order to begin to shape the environment of the school in such a way as to have it meet the emotional needs of my students I had to be where they were, and not in my office. Thus, the first stage of applying Winnicott's theories on holding and facilitating growth would be to view the school as my client, rather than my actual client group. If the theory was effective, I should be able to ameliorate the group's behaviour by managing the school environment they functioned(or failed to function ) in. To do this I would direct my attention firstly to where the breakdowns occurred, the 'hotspots' as a colleague described them. These were always places that adults tended not to visit in the course of their day. Sometimes it was because they were out of the way corners of school. Other times they were areas that the adults knew were troublesome and chose not to visit out of feelings of anxiety and helplessness. They didn't want to confront the behaviour in those areas because they did not believe they would be able to impact on it effectively.

The observation of the way teachers resisted the need to confront difficult situations involving difficult children drew to my attention one area of the facilitating environment that was not functioning - the adults themselves. It should be noted that not all the school's adults were shackled with this " collusive anxiety". Throughout the school were islands of functioning. There were some excellent teachers providing not only good lessons but also safe, contained, held environments in which the children could function both academically and emotionally. However, their impact tended to stop at their classroom door (just as mine had at my office's) and they were becoming increasingly demoralised by the effect the general disruption of the school was having on their teaching. These teachers were falling prey to the lack of holding of the school community despite being sound, effective and mature adults.

*“ The quality of the holding environment on staff is the main determinant of the quality of the holding environment that they can provide for clients” (Ward, 1998.p.52)*

The adults in the school would need to be supported if they, as the most potentially effective contributor to the environment, were to function as the holders. They first of all needed to realise or rediscover the commitment to the children that had brought them here in the first place. A continually changing expectation of how other authorities (School Inspectors, changing head teachers and heads of department) thought lessons should be delivered, whilst being observed, was clearly affecting a number of teachers. For some this had confused their role, rather than seeing the task as being that of helping the children to learn, they had been cowed into a stance that might be summarised as ‘ never let a child get in the way of a good lesson plan’ . The hopelessness of this situation reflected itself in the fact that inspectors continued to condemn these lessons as no learning was occurring despite the amount of teaching. Certainly the school was for many children and staff alike a place where education was done to the students not with them.

Winnicott’s theories would entail taking this mass of failed and failing holding and attempting to create sufficient areas of ‘ good enough’ provision to allow the environment to function as a facilitator of growth (emotional and learning).

*“ Maturation processes depend for their becoming actual in the child, and actual at the appropriate moments, on good enough environmental provision”. (Winnicott, 1984,p.96)*

## FACILITATING THE FACILITATOR

My first couple of months (the summer term) working outside the office proved quite successful. My student cohort were more contained as they came to accept that I would be nearby should they get into difficulty. The teachers seemed pleased to see me outside their classrooms and I became a common sight in the un-held areas of the school. A growing number of teachers would ask me into their classes to help with chaotic situations. I believe that chaos is a fair description of scenarios in which neither side (teacher or class) is in control of their impact on the situation. The children look to the teacher and the teacher does not know where to look, so merely reacts to the impingement they experience. The more effective teachers said how they were enjoying being disturbed by other classes less. My approach at this time focused very much on the physical act of being around and about.

As was becoming commonplace the school gained a new, permanent Head-Teacher the following term. This Head spoke of the school as a “learning community”, and was himself committed to being ‘ around and about’. He recognised the value of adults being visible around school and soon made contact with me about the highly

visible work I was doing (one staff member observed that the “boss” and I were the only ones who did anything in the school – untrue but telling of their need to feel looked after). He changed my role in school to better allow me to pursue this approach, effectively making the environment my official remit (including the wider environment represented by the parents for whom I was first port of call). He gave me an office at the very front of school. He also crucially understood the idea of managing the environment, once describing my role (before he changed it) to a visitor as “mentoring the whole school”.

Another important character in allowing me the space to enact my adaptation of Winnicott’s approach was the school’s new on-site police officer. As I will describe later, the formation and maintenance of boundaries became a crucial part of my role, and the Police officer was a strategic ally in this work. Not as a threatening authority but as an upholder of the community’s safety. He was also a great source of holding for me given his slightly removed position and perspective at times when I was too immersed in the environment to make sense of it.

The following observations are drawn from this starting point. The school has become familiar with my presence on the corridors and some students and staff have come to find ways of using this presence. The school has a forward-looking, long-term Head teacher who is aware of my approach, and there is a stronger support structure being formed. Also, the level of support with their teaching that the teachers are receiving is improved and enabling.

## SYMBOLIC HOLDING IN ESTABLISHING A FACILITATING ENVIRONMENT

The earlier observation by a teacher that the Head and I were the only ones who did anything in the school made clear the value of the facilitators to be seen holding the community. The teacher involved was experienced, sound and had never needed or asked for my involvement. Her lessons, although sometimes quite rigid and directed, held the students and they achieved reasonable results (particularly for our school). However, leaders of the school being seen to look after it held meaning for her. Despite her own ability to contain the children in her classes the impact of the uncontained environment outside her room affected her, she too needed to feel held. She could be seen to represent the “good- enough” mother at a point where her facilitating environment is failing.

*“Continuity, or rather the illusion of continuity- can only be achieved if there are supporters for providers, and providers for consumers...Mothers with infants need just this kind of support, and if they fail to obtain it from the environment they will not be able to provide for their babies” (Dockar-Drysdale, 1990, p.54).*

In order to create in the school this sense that they were being looked after, my visibility would need to be enhanced and poignant – where would I be, when and why?

Firstly I began the day an hour before school started. Even at this time there were staff in school before me preparing for their day, but very few. Thus any staff needing to think about certain students they would encounter during the coming day had the

opportunity to liaise with me. Though never advertised, this option for teachers was, and is well used. The position of my office at the front of school allowed me to leave my door open and the teachers to pop in. Their anxieties generally concerned the children who had been in my Learning Mentor cohort. They were seeking two things; affirmation that progress could be made with these children and the security that came from knowing someone else knew they were trying. They rarely asked how to work with them, nor for me to get involved in this work. Rather they often knew what to do, but needed the infrequently heard reassurance that they could succeed in doing so. My role in this process was not to impart expertise (in many cases I think they were better able to help the child than I) but to represent the school's belief and support in their efforts.

After this initial start to the day, I would go to the school's front gate and welcome staff and students into school. The head responded immediately to my observation that our childrens' first step into the school community was a muddy one, and the symbolic lack of care this represented, and had it immediately filled in. A very quick, cheap but meaningful job. Similarly we had decided to use only one entrance and exit to the school, allowing better order and management of a large group of students. Thus I was in a position to be seen by every member of the school community as they entered school. The position of our school entrance is such that I can be seen by the wider community as well. In such a position my presence could be seen as having only one purpose, the welfare of our community. I am able to keep watch over the students as they negotiate a quite tricky road crossing, or to chat with parents who have a query or concern as they drop their child off, or to act as a safe place for the

more vulnerable student who is nervous of his peers and needs support before school starts i.e. negotiating the risk posed by unstructured time on the school yard.

There is though a second purpose that my presence there can have. Therapeutic Communities for children have been some of the better adaptors of Winnicott's approach ( c.f. Mulberry Bush, under Barbara Dockar – Drysdale, and The Cotswold Community under Richard Balbernie), and a constituent part of their therapeutic approach is the “morning meeting”. Similarly Adrian Ward, formerly of the M.A. in Therapeutic Child Care at Reading, argues that a morning meeting is an effective adjunct to learning environments.

*“... we can best engage people in their learning if we engage directly with them as people, and since it involves the use of daily meetings between staff and students, it is a method which has strong parallels with one aspect of therapeutic community practice...there is a real risk that scarce training time will be under- utilised if teaching does not actually 'reach' the students because they are pre-occupied with other concerns.” (Ward, 1996, p.267).*

A morning meeting for seven hundred children would be impractical especially given the timetable constraints in the school community. However being in a position to be the first to greet each student and member of staff as they left the local community and entered ours allowed me to pick up on which individuals might need support or involvement later in the day. Our students arrive with a host of concerns at least the parallel of those mentioned above. Thus the child whose normal response to my “good morning” is a slightly embarrassed murmur, but today tells me to “fuck off you

dickhead” would attract my attention as one who needs to be held by the school as something is clearly amiss and needs communicating. I would not necessarily be the one to do this but am able to find and brief the appropriate individual.

The range of issues that our children arrive at school carrying, but unable to express are bewildering. A typical week saw a depressed father destroy his daughter’s bedroom with a baseball bat whilst she lay in it. A fourteen-year-old boy’s mother had died the previous day but no-one had informed school, and the front door of another child had been smashed down that morning at 6 a.m. by the police looking for her alleged gun selling father.

Each child had still come to school but lacked the confidence in adults as interested or potent people to approach them. We found out through the quality of their responses at the start of the day to a simple “ good morning”. This phrase is symbolic of our care and is chosen because of its benign formality. A simple ‘hiya’ or ‘hello’ requires no response. In an area like ours they are such frequent and often meaningless phrases that they hold no weight. Our children would rarely hear a ‘good morning’ outside school. Thus it signifies their arrival at a different kind of environment and of our valuing of them. It allows them into the world of the adults who teach them, as that is the way they often greet each other (in the formal school environment where teachers will address each other as Mr. Smith and Mrs. Jones, sir and miss, even in the staff room ). Interestingly the children have taken to replying in the same way when greeted in the morning. The more challenging but improving students will often initiate it, proffering a cheery, or weary “ morning Dave” as they pass.

The school playground is another place where it was possible to provide a concrete contribution to the holding of the students, whilst also offering a symbolic confirmation of this. I undertook to “cover” every break and lunchtime on the yard. This entailed supervising this area during this period to ensure the welfare of the students. Due to the climate of this particular area of the northwest, being “outside” was not a well-attended duty (duties are voluntary). However, from my role as first port of call for parents I was clear that the yard was seen as unsafe, and the scene of much bullying, extortion and drug selling. Some students had also established a thriving cigarette selling business, which caused all manner of problems. These students were seen as the real authority on what had been a haphazardly supervised area of the school. The other students could not feel adequately looked after by the adults, if the adult authority was to be so clearly ignored by a large and delinquent group.

By being a consistent and non-collusive presence on the yard I was able to discomfort the delinquent activity enough for it to be interrupted. This group actually seemed to respond well to my interventions. At times our interactions were quite playful. The group rather than becoming angry, would chat and joke. They were responding to an adult not avoiding them, thus providing some hope perhaps.

The other students were aware that the erstwhile power holders on the yard were being managed and that the adults were in charge as they should be. I am not naïve or arrogant enough to delude myself into thinking that all undesirable activity had ceased, but the children saw and expected it to be challenged when seen. The yard became a safe place to be at break and lunch simply because it was a held

environment. If a student needed protecting they knew and could rely on that protection being outside.

Just as I had in the mornings I saw the children out of school at the end of day. The on-site police officer and head teacher would join me as we facilitated the safe transition from school to the local community. Again we were available for parents, or to support students expecting trouble at the end of the day. This was usually in the form of attacks for issues that had occurred during the school day, mainly as a result of events outside school. We were able through our presence and pre-occupation to show our care right through the school day. This simple symbol of concern and commitment grew as the head teacher asked all teachers to accompany their classes to the gates at the end of the day. The result would be thirty plus adults seeing the children out of school and waiting at the gates. This was a clear step forwards in the adults and the school taking responsibility for what happens in that community.

*“For childrens’ anxiety and disturbing feelings to be worked with effectively, both individual adults and the organisation of the school ... as a whole should provide emotional holding” (Greenhalgh, 1994, p.110).*

## BOUNDARIES AND MANAGEMENT AS HOLDING

A crucial concern in trying to help a collusive, vulnerable school environment to change to the point where it can facilitate the children’s growth, is how might one contain the severe disruption the failing environment allows and provokes in some children.

*“Damaged children have a terrifying capacity to disturb and violate, so adults who have their charge must be courageous in the exercise of adult power.” (Beedell, speech presented 1986).*

A clear contributor to the school’s history of behaviour problems was the inconsistent use of adult authority in managing these behaviours. Again there were some staff who did so very ably, but others offered our most disturbed children a perplexing variety of responses to their acting out. These ranged from overly reactive, punitive acts to teachers believing that if you ignored what the child was doing they would stop. It was not unknown for a teacher to be seen delivering a lesson from the front of the class using the whiteboard, whilst behind them not a single student was paying any attention. They were talking, using their mobile phones or ipods, or even fighting and vandalising the class. The teacher did not feel able to address or contain what was happening so deludedly carried on with what they did know, the lesson they had planned. At the other extreme were the teachers whose response to the entrance of a student who had been troublesome the time before would be to scream “ get out and don’t set foot in my class again”. Although given the devastating behaviour our students were capable of one might empathise with the sentiment, the result was another case of a child not being offered the opportunity to attempt to rectify mistakes, or for some children to realise that this is actually possible.

Amid this inconsistent and unpredictable response of the environment to the childrens disturbance, they would become more difficult to manage. The vacillating between permissive and punitive responses confused the more un-integrated students immensely. Their internal ability to manage their disturbance was slight, but the

environment that was meant to facilitate the learning and development of this was too confused and inconsistent to make sense of.

A student who had been in my old mentor group, Max, most clearly illustrated how this inconsistency of boundaries was affecting our students. Max came from one of the towns more infamous families. The area does not suffer from a particular gang problem, more this type of difficulty emanates from very clannish family groups. His sisters had passed through the school causing a lot of difficulty and he felt the expectation from all concerned to do the same. He was known for high levels of violence to other students and very aggressive and abusive behaviour to staff. He was very guarded in any interactions with adults and clearly expected little from them.

My earlier work with him had convinced me that he actually wanted secure attention from them but had no experience of this being forthcoming. Instead adults withdrew at being subjected to his often-atrocious behaviour. Max was a key case in my realisation that 'in office' meetings would not adequately serve the needs of my students. In meetings with me, when I was robust enough to avoid the demands of others that I somehow make him amend for his latest outburst, I would allow him to simply draw. He would lie on the floor of my office and draw pictures of animals from a book. The animals intrigued him as his experience of the world outside the area had been very small, and as such he had never seen many of these animals in real life e.g. swans, sheep. He was keen for me to have these pictures and to put them on my wall. After a while he would ask my colleague who shared the office if she would like a picture. Soon he began to write stories from the same prone position. These were always about little boys who were looking for something and imperilled by

doing so. Again the pictures were for me to look after, he would refuse to take them home to show his dad. After our meeting he would go to classes and become embroiled in the mayhem and disturbance. My room was an environment that allowed him to discover some of the early life experience he had missed. Once outside the office Max had to return to the defences that he had created around his fragile self. My working outside the office allowed him the knowledge that when he got into difficulty, which he invariably did, there would be someone nearby to look after him. However I needed to make sure Max knew I was not on his side when he abused the teachers in such manner. He would become furious at me and storm off around school. He had been made to think, which for Max was so much worse than being sanctioned. He expected and knew how to manage punishment. Thinking meant he had to look at his own vulnerability and neediness. Eventually he would find me and ask for a drink of his water (I always kept a bottle of water in my new office for him to have a sip from at times of distress – he never took more than a couple of sips).

Max needed this looking after he didn't expect. On occasion Max would come across a teacher he felt might be able to offer him something. Often this was an English teacher, (he might build on the one area he knew he could get praise for, his stories). However before he could entrust them with his inner world he needed to know they were able to hold onto it. As a result he would torment the teachers involved, bringing them to breaking point. More than once a teacher would scream at me “ get him away from me!”

*“In destructiveness... the child is seeking that amount of environmental stability which will stand the strain resulting from impulse behaviour. This is a search for an*

*environmental provision that has been lost, a human attitude which, because it can be relied on, gives freedom to the individual to move and to act and to get excited.”*

*(Winnicott, 1984., p.125).*

Max at this point was still unable to apologise for anything. It was not a word he used nor one I think he understood. I do not know at what point in his harassment of these teachers he would come to the realisation that they might be worth taking a chance, but he would relent. They had maintained their boundaries against a brutal onslaught but still had accepted him back into their classes. At no point had they colluded with him, but they had not rejected him either. Managing this rejection had been a massive task. I would advise the teachers throughout Max's testing that there was a child worth persevering with. Somewhere in them they too must have felt there was more to him than a little monster hell bent on destroying their lessons.

When he trusted the benign nature of their boundaries and authority he would enthrall them. Instead of notes requesting my immediate help with Max, he would be sent with exemplary work for me to see. One English teacher, a newcomer to the profession with a clear emotional investment in the progress and well being of her students, had moved from a stand point that Max was evil and had to be removed, to delight at his efforts. He, now, was childishly keen to please and to learn. She regularly expressed her gratitude that I had encouraged her to persevere with Max, but it had been the strength of her boundaries whilst she persevered that had made Max's engaging with her possible. Similarly, when I was at the stage of withdrawing him from lessons after his outbursts, if I had merely tried to placate or calm him he would not have

gained. Through his anger being confronted and made safe, he could better explore the opportunities to learn, in every sense of the word.

#### WINNICOTT'S IDEA OF THE FATHER IN HOLDING AND FACILITATING

My role became increasingly one of supporting the boundaries within the school. The teachers were becoming increasingly engaged in boundary setting, with varying efficacy and motivation. In general I saw this as a sign that the new Head teacher had succeeded in enlivening the staff, and that they were showing signs of believing that the school (by which they often meant the students) could change. Often their attempts to enforce boundaries were too rigid or too unsure, but they were acting as adults. Again there had always been teachers who could and did effectively and benignly adhere to the boundaries, and these adults were able to consolidate their skills. I was being asked almost constantly to assist teachers in setting these boundaries, a process facilitated by the introduction of a “walky talky” system where by staff members could request help of myself or the senior manager on – call. Many staff members would specify they wanted my help, rather than the on-call staff. I do not believe that this was because they saw me as more able than the on-call provider (I was all too clearly not at times). Rather, through discussion and comments, I deduced that it was because they knew I was always there, available. The on-call staff changed lesson to lesson, but my presence on the school corridors was a constant and the staff valued that constant. They also put importance on the consistency of response that this allowed. In later months, the school employed another specialist with a child mental health background, to carry out similar duties on the upper school site. The teaching staff used him in a similar way, thereby lending support to the

theory that it was not solely about my skills but about the way the support or “holding” was perceived, and needed.

Effectively I and later we, had taken on the role of the father in Winnicott’s facilitating environment. Our job had become enabling the teacher (mother) to hold the children. We would arrive as requested or just drop in, at times when the ability of the teacher to contain the difficulties created by the more challenging children were proving overwhelming. We could support the teacher through this by calming the class to restore the order that was so vital to the creation of a learning environment, removing (briefly) the offending student, and allowing the teacher to regain composure and control. Within this process teachers commented on how valuable our immediate acceptance of their position had been. In the past they had been questioned in front of the class about possible errors they might have made, as senior staff attempted to mollify an irate student. We began from the standpoint that for whatever reason, the child was acting terribly and that must stop.

*“ In full blown delinquency it is difficult for us as observers, because what meets us is the child’s acute need for the strict father, who will protect mother when she is found. The strict father that the child evokes may also be loving, but he must first be strict and strong. Only when the strict and strong father figure is in evidence can the child regain his primitive love impulses, his sense of guilt, and his wish to mend.”*

*(Winnicott, 1964, p.229).*

Once the child knew that we would not collude in justifying their behaviour but would work with them to understand what had gone wrong, for both them and the teacher,

we would usually be able to place the child back in class. This could only work if the teacher trusted the work we had done with the child to fix the situation. If this was the case they would quietly invite the student back into class, happy that steps had been taken. Their authority remained intact with both the student and the rest of the class. If this trust was not present the teacher would too often still feel the need to punish or confront the child, leading to a further incident. The response of most teachers and students to our interventions lead us to believe they were happy with what we had done. Upon returning a child to class we would stress, with the teacher present, the appropriateness of the teacher challenging what the child had done. Winnicott cites a case of boy whose real father would “ take the boys side against the mother whenever the mother has had to be firm” (1965, p.124). The boy shows real progress once father leaves and mum’s male relatives are more involved. “ He obviously likes it when these men are in support of the mother, instead of supporting him against the mother.”

Often the child would have to work through their anger and rage with us. At these times we would be subjected to a torrent of ferocious hatred. The child would quite ably hold us temporarily responsible for all that assailed them, we were the school, the teacher, the classmates and the family all rolled into one object of hatred. Here again we were acting as the Winnicottian father, representing the indestructible environment. The father’s role allows for destructiveness in the child, through their holding they make it safe to be destructive as there is now something indestructible to kick against. By surviving their aggression, and not retaliating, we make their aggression “ something that can be ‘encompassed’ and not something that can be ‘retained only in the form of a liability to persecution,’”(Davis and Wallbridge, p.72).

*“ Furthermore, the survival of the person who has been destroyed means that this person can, with safety be hated, repudiated and rebelled against, which all the while leads to a strengthening of their being loved, accepted and relied upon.” (Davis and Wallbridge, p.72).*

### **THE ANTI-SOCIAL TENDENCY, NUISANCE AND HOPE**

Once the mother figure (teacher) felt held, as a result of the facilitating environment being operative, it became far clearer who were the children in school we most needed to support. Previously in the maelstrom of disruption it had been a difficult task to ascertain where the chaos emanated from. The corridors and classrooms would have so many children disrupting that it seemed at times that the whole school was unintegrated (which at an organisational level it may well have been). However, most of the children were simply reasonably healthy individuals who had become lost in the chaos around them, or disaffected by the lack of adult remedial action. These students were the ones who once the environment was acted on became happy to engage with the school. These were the ones who inspired the Head to say from early on “ our young are with us”. By which he meant they were keen to be taken in and to learn.

As these students responded to our holding, the more difficult individuals became more visible. Not through any escalation of their behaviour but because there were less individuals causing the severe disruption now. These students, also, were “with us”. They needed us more acutely perhaps than the ones who were visibly engaging with the school.

Our most disruptive and aggressive children had been among our best attenders. They rarely miss a day's school but rarely enjoy a day's schooling. Instead they turn their day at school into a day of anger, distress, aggression and delinquency. They are confrontational with staff, intimidating to many of their peers, and destructive to the school environment. These students display what Winnicott calls "the anti-social tendency". This is characterized by the child's aggressive and destructive ideas being made unsafe by the loss of 'the indestructible environment'. The child is left with the control of these emotions and therefore never reaches the stage of coming to terms with them. They are not to be explored and thus made safe, because they are too frightening in the anxiety they cause. Similarly the child can make no provision for guilt.

*"When there is an anti-social tendency there has been a true deprivation; that is to say there has been a loss of something good that has been positive in the child's experience up to a certain date, and that has been withdrawn; the withdrawal has extended over a period of time longer than that over which the child can keep the memory alive." (Winnicott, 1984,p.124).*

This occurs at a stage where the child is able to identify the loss or disintegration as being of the environment not of themselves; external not internal. This leads to "the urge to seek for a cure by new environment provision" (1984,p.129). School offers these children an environment in which to seek that new provision.

*“ There are those whose homes are less secure, who come to school not so much to learn as to find ‘ a home from home’- they seek a stable emotional situation in which they can exercise their own emotional liability... a group that can be tested out as to it’s ability to withstand aggression and to tolerate aggressive ideas.( Winnicott, 1964.p.208)*

The child therefore, seeking an environment that will make amends for the failure that went before, acts on the environment in such a way as to provoke it into a remedy. Within our school we saw many of these demands of the environment. Until we shored up our levels of holding and safety for all members of our community, we were insufficiently able to meet these demands. However, with our less damaged students now more held in lessons and around school generally, we could better meet the needs of the ‘anti-social tendency’.

A key element of the anti-social tendency is that it is hopeful. The child knows that the failure was not of his own creation but from the environment, and so is actively looking for it to be made better. Thus destructiveness, stealing, lying, aggression and cruelty all indicate a child trying to “ get behind the moment of deprivation, and so undo the fear of the unthinkable anxiety or confusion” (Winnicott, 1967, in Davis and Wallbridge, p.80). Winnicott highlights the essential nature of the ‘ nuisance value’ in this process. Through being a nuisance the child compels the environment to “ hate him for it, if need be – and giving the child time to become loveable again. In Winnicott’s view the object becomes real by being hated; we can only love real people, or discover people to be real, when they have withstood our hatred. Nuisance

is the nice word for the hateful exchange that a relationship can survive, and by surviving can become resilient rather than merely wishful.”(Phillips, 2004 p.?).

One child (whom I will call Declan) who joined our school this year epitomised this ‘nuisance value’.

The school had, as part of its ongoing and newfound awareness of students needs, created a small class for first year students who came from primary school having been identified as likely to struggle in a large school environment. The class ran on similar lines to a primary school “nurture group”(Bennathan, 1997). In many ways it represented another strand of holding and thinking about the environment in school.

Declan was placed in this group as a matter of urgency. It was clear to all that his time in secondary school would be a difficult one, and would require special provision.

Declan came from a chaotic family, beset with drug and mental health problems from the most outlying and dysfunctional estate in the town.

Declan’s relationship with the world around him, adults, children and structures, reminded me of a quotation from Irish rugby international Keith Wood, when asked to describe the tactics of his club, Munster; “all out pandemonium based on demented harassment of anything that moves”. Declan was a child who was determined that the environment should provide for him. Though settled in the small “transition class” he frequently demanded through his extreme behaviour more than it could provide. His destructiveness and abusive behaviour played their part, but it was through his aggressive behaviour to those around him that we were able to best access his needs. He frequently would outrage those around him. This would result in classmates and other students becoming aggressive towards him, making school, the way to and from

school, and indeed life on his estate unsafe. Declan sought environmental provision in being kept safe. He could not tell us that he was at risk, nor could he apologise to those he had so deeply offended- these were skills currently beyond him. Instead he would force us to manage him.

*“ The anti-social tendency is characterised by an element in it which compels the environment to be important. ”(Winnicott.1984,p.125).*

In one particular case, Declan had assaulted the younger cousin of one of the area's more notorious families and consequently faced reprisals from not just them but everyone associated or wishing to be associated, with them. This had happened the night before, outside school, and Declan did not, or could not, tell any adult in school. Instead he arrived very early at school, thereby avoiding attack en-route. On arriving at school he waited with me at the school gates. In order to ensure my engagement with him he then proceeded to hurl abuse at the many individuals who pass those gates each morning. Students coming into school were insulted, the driving skills of members of the public driving past were condemned and teachers arriving for work were told where to go. All the time I was struggling blindly to find a way to stop him. Each attempt merely escalated his behaviour. Soon my therapeutic mindset gave way to frustrated threats, and a deep-seated desire that he should just go away. As the start of school neared he became less troublesome and came happily with me as I took him to his teacher (the transition class had the same staff team all day) and informed her of what a pain he had been.

Declan blighted the rest of my day. His frequent trips to the toilet always seemed to involve him causing a disturbance on a corridor near to where I was. My walky-talky seemed only able to announce his name, and at lunch and break he repeated his tirade at others from close by me. I meanwhile continued my futile attempts to understand what was happening, increasingly moving into thinking at what point would I have enough against Declan for an exclusion. Even my increasingly loud attempts to be the stern father were seeming pointless.

As home time finally came around I expected to be able to say good-bye to Declan and his nuisance. Declan had other ideas and repeated his morning behaviour. However I was now the recipient of most of the abuse as I stood at the school gates again. Declan would not go home, instead he was abusing me and more worryingly running in front of the traffic. I was in a situation where as a responsible adult I could not leave him unattended. Thus, an hour later Declan and I was still there. Other staff had attempted to help but Declan had driven them away with the seeming insanity of his actions. As a key component of my approach is to provide a symbolic presence until all children have left, these staff quite understandably thought I would deal with it. I was as witless as them in this situation. I had no idea why Declan had chosen or been driven to torture me throughout the day and was only still involved because of the theoretical expectation that this interaction held some meaning for him.

*“ The understanding that the anti-social act is an expression of hope is vital in the treatment of children who show the anti-social tendency. Over and over again one sees the moment of hope wasted, or withered, because of mismanagement or intolerance” (Winnicott, 1984,p.123).*

The day was given meaning when Declan calmed down and asked me if there was anyone left in school. There clearly was not, they had all quite rightly gone home. Declan wanted to make sure there was no one around who could “ jump him”. He had been fearful all day of attack and had used me as protection. Allowing his vulnerable, fearful self to be exposed would be annihilating for one with such an un-integrated personality so he had hidden it behind the aggressive and abusive behaviour of that day. He had used his nuisance value to push me to the edge of hatred but also to become focused on him. Unwittingly I had met his need, received his anger and anxiety and in so doing had survived them ( just). I had acted as he had hoped I might.

*“ In the hopeful moment the child:*

*Perceives a new setting that has some elements of reliability.*

*Experiences a drive that could be called object seeking.*

*Recognises the fact that ruthlessness is about to become a feature and so*

*Stirs up the immediate environment in an effort to make it alert to danger, and organised to tolerate nuisance.*

*If the situation holds, the environment must be tested and retested in it’s capacity to stand the aggression, to prevent or repair the destruction, to tolerate the nuisance, to recognise the positive element in the anti-social tendency, to provide and preserve the object that is to be found”. (Winnicott, 1984, p.129)*

Declan and I now understood each other. I knew why he had been so demanding, and he knew he could rely on me. We could then meet his need for safety in an organised, (more Dave friendly) way. I liaised with his teacher and we organised different

provision throughout the day, including an earlier home time. Declan was thus able to relax and work well until his next emergency.

The cases of Max and Declan are by no means unique in our school. There are numerous other cases each week where I am called upon to make sense of a child's distress and disruption. Often the behaviour reflecting the child's unexpressed need is bewildering and infuriating. In most cases the child is seeking firstly holding, emotionally and on rare occasions physically, and secondly to find a way beyond their anxiety. An understanding of Winnicott allows me to tolerate and manage much of the behaviour that they display and meet these needs. My colleague on the upper school site succinctly expressed the value that our theoretical base confers on our work when he said "often the teachers think I'm just using my personality to manage a kid, chatting and joking, but they don't realise how much I'm thinking about what I'm doing".

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has been a reflective investigation into how adapting specific therapeutic ideas can aid what Visser calls the “Pedagogues... those whose role is to be concerned ‘for the physical, emotional, and educational well being of the child’ (Cole, 1997)” (in Clough, et al, 2005, p.227). Moreover it is an investigation into whether those ideas can allow the children who have troubled British education from the Underwood Report in 1955 to the Steer Report in 2005, to function more healthily in our schools. The drive towards the Inclusion of students with EBD, and away from specialist units, means that more and more adults are being called upon to manage an increasing number of very difficult children. Accordingly they will bring more and more approaches to this problem,

*“ Approaches in and of themselves do not make the difference when working with pupils with EBD. Pedagogues make the difference; the approaches support or hinder the process.”(Visser, in Clough et al, 2005, p.239)*

As the ‘pedagogue’ in question I have found the theories of holding and the facilitating environment invaluable in allowing me to contribute to the rescue of a school community and it’s members. In particular it has allowed me to help the school hold onto many of it’s most challenging children.

Key to the successful adaptation of Winnicott’s ideas is the need for presence, to show the community that they are being held, both in form and in mind. This is not the only approach to school discipline that suggests high staff presence around school,

but it does differ in that the reasoning goes beyond management i.e. trouble won't happen here because I'm here. Winnicott's theory allows the adult concerned to be aware of themselves as more than security guard, they take on, wittingly or not, the mantle of 'father'. My Head Teacher often refers to me as the "*pater familias*" when introducing me to visitors, "the one who looks after us". This has come about because the thinking inherent in the Winnicottian model encourages the adult to engage more deeply, more emotionally. They become available for the anti-social tendency, and aware of the child's disintegration. Rather than be on hand to stop behaviour, the adult engaged in facilitating the environment to meet the child's needs are there to allow it, but to do so in a way that helps it to stop

*" In such an environment there is trust and reliability, and the adults have the capacity to hold the anxieties aroused in themselves, are clear about boundary setting, consistently communicate a sense of belief in the children, and organise the environment to respond to individual capacities for autonomy" (Greenhalgh, 1994 p.156).*

I have been fortunate to work in a school that has come to allow me operate within such parameters, and has been highly supportive in so doing. I discovered early on that an approach people don't understand can quickly become one they are suspicious of, particularly if it involves dealing with a child who has just abused them.

*" Possibly if society's revenge feelings were fully conscious society could stand the treatment of the offender as ill" (Winnicott, 1984,p.203)*

The fact this was possible is largely due to the efficacy of Winnicott's approach and to a Head Teacher who understood the role of what Dockar- Drysdale calls the "therapist" and Visser the "pedagogue".

This same support was vital in helping me manage the often extreme emotional impact of this work. A number of colleagues, attuned to my task and its impact, would allow me to vent MY frustrations and anger. However, the clarity of the task, despite its breadth, that of Holding the school, was the greatest support. As described in the vignette of Declan, knowing a situation has purpose allows one to stay in that situation until it is resolved, even if one does not yet know that purpose.

I now manage a team in school with the same remit as I had. On both sites there is a corridor-based worker, plus two staff running an internal isolation unit. These staff have been employed due to their ability to work "emotionally intelligently", i.e. to have the ability to survive and add meaning to our children's most extreme moments of panic and rage

"Those who are concerned with management of anti-social children are not school teachers who add a dash of human understanding here and there; they are in fact group psychotherapists who add a dash of teaching." (*Winnicott, 1984,p.189*).

### **Broader Applications and Implications**

We have been approached by a school in circumstances similar to how ours were, to discuss our methods. They have been impressed by how our most difficult students are able, in the main, to progress. The school is now a place where they are helped to

do so. The contact from the other school was a direct consequence of a recommendation by a member of staff at my school, who had informed the deputy head of this school that ours had an approach that really worked. The comments made during his visit and his request for further advice and support I believe indicate that there is a need and worth for the approach documented herein to aid other schools and professionals. The adaptation of Winnicottian ideas involves a very simple approach to complex circumstances, i.e. high levels of pre-occupation to meet high levels of need. Interestingly, upon his departure from a tour of our school the visiting professional thanked me. Having been given a concise description of the work of my team and I, and the thinking behind it, his comment was “ thanks for not throwing loads of theory at me”.

The school has now emerged from special measures and continues to improve the quality of education it offers its students. In many ways it functions as a disciplined, calm learning environment. The standard of teaching is now good, as is the behaviour and attitude of the pupils according to our final inspection. However we are reminded every time we relax our pre-occupation with the facilitating environment that our children in many cases thrive through the quality of holding they are receiving.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barrett, M. and Trevitt, J. ( 1991) “Attachment Behaviour and the Schoolchild: An introduction to Educational Therapy” London: Routledge
- Bennathon, M. (1997) “Effective Intervention in Primary Schools” London: David Fulton
- Beedell, C. (1986) “ the Mulberry Bush School: An outline of the work of the school” taken from the presentation of the founder Mrs. B.E. Dockar-Drysdale for an honorary M.A.
- Bettleheim, B. (1950) “Love is not enough: The treatment of emotionally disturbed children” Glencoe: Free Press
- Bowlby, J. (1969) “Attachment and Loss” Middlesex: Penguin
- Bowlby, J. (1988) “ A Secure Base” London: Routledge
- Clough, P., Garner, P., Pardeck, J.T., and Yuen, F. (2005) “ The Handbook of Emotional and Behavioural Disturbance” London: Sage
- Cole, T (1998) “ Understanding: a prerequisite to Inclusion” in Tilstone, C., Florian, L. and Rose, R. (1998) “ Promoting Inclusive Education” London: Routledge
- Cresswell, J.W. (1998) “Qualitative Enquiry and Research Design: choosing among five traditions” California: Sage
- Davis, M. and Wallbridge, D. (1981) “Boundary and Space: an introduction to the work of D.W. Winnicott” London and New York: Bruner, Mazel, Karnac
- Denscombe, M. (1998) “The Good Research Guide” Buckingham: O.U.Press
- DES (Department of Education and Science) (1989) “ Discipline in Schools: The Elton Report” London: HMSO
- DfES (Department for Education and Science) (2005) “ Learning Behaviour: The report of the Practitioners Group on School Behaviour and Discipline. Chair, Sir Alan Steer” London: HMSO
- Dockar-Drysdale, B. (1990) “ The Provision of Primary Experience: Winnicottian work with children and adolescents” London: Free Association Press
- Estevez, E., Musitsu, G., and Herrera, J. (2005) “The Influence of Violent Behaviour and Victimization at School on Psychological Distress: the role of parents and teachers” Adolescence Vol.40, no. 157, Spring 2005. Ed. Kroll, W.
- Dockar-Drysdale, B. (1993) “ Therapy and Consultation in Childcare” London: Free Association Books

- Fisher, R. (1995) “Teaching Children to Learn” Cheltenham: Nelson Thomas
- Fromm, M.G., and Smith, M.L. (1989) “The Facilitating Environment: clinical applications of Winnicott’s theory” Madison: International Universities Press
- Galloway, D. and Goodwin, C.( 1987) “ The Education of Disturbing Children” London: Longman
- Greenhalgh, P. (1994) “Emotional Growth and Learning” London and New York: Routledge
- Hanko, G. (2002) “ Making Psychodynamic Insights Available to Teachers a an Integral part of their Professional Task” Psychodynamic Practice, Vol. 1.8, no. 3, pp. 375 – 389
- Hitchcock, G. and Hughes, D. (1989) “Research and the Teacher: a qualitative introduction to school based research” London and New York: Routledge Falmer
- Hinshelwood, R.D. (2000) “Observing Organisations: Anxiety, Defence, and Culture in Healthcare” London: Routledge
- Holt, J. (1964) “ How Children Fail” New York: Pitman
- Holt, J. (1965) “ How Children Learn” New York: Pitman
- Jacoby, M. (1990) “Individuation and Narcissism: The Psychology of Self in Jung and Kohut” London and New York: Routledge
- Laosa, L.M. and Sigel, I.E. (1982) “Families as Learning Environments for Children” New York: Plenum
- Lawrence, J., Steed, D., and Young P. (1984) “ Disruptive Children, Disrupted Schools” Kent: Croon Helm
- OFSTED (2004) “ Annual Report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector for Schools: Standards and Quality in Education, 2003/4” London: OFSTED
- OFSTED (2005) “ Managing Challenging Behaviours” London: OFSTED
- Phillips, A. (2004) “ Nuisance Value” The Threepenny Review”, Fall 2004
- Rogers, B. (2000) “ Management: a Whole-school Approach” London: Paul Chapman
- Shea, T.M. (1978) “ Teaching Children and Youth with Behaviour Disorders” St. Louis: C.V. Mosby
- Stone, L. (1990) “ Managing Difficult Children in Schools” Simon and Schuster Education

- Underwood Report (1995) "Report of the Committee on Maladjusted Children"  
London: HMSO
- Varma, V.P. (1993) "Management of Behaviour in Schools" London: Longman
- Visser, J. (2000) "What Schools Need for EBD Pupils to be Included", paper  
presented at ISEC 2000
- Visser, J. (2003) "A study of Children and Young People who present Challenging  
Behaviours" University of Birmingham
- Ward, A. (1996) "Meeting to Learn and Learning to Meet: The use of staff – student  
meetings on a training programme" *Therapeutic Communities*, Vol. 17, no. 4, pp 265-  
279
- Ward, A., Kasinski K., Pooley J., and Worthington, A. (2003) "Therapeutic  
communities for Children" London: Jessica Kingsley
- Winnicott, D.W. (1964) "The Child, the Family, and the Outside World" London;  
Penguin
- Winnicott, D.W. (1965) "The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating  
Environment" London: Hogarth Press
- Winnicott, D.W. (1965) "The Family and Individual Development" London:  
Tavistock
- Winnicott, D.W. (1975) "Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis"  
London: Hogarth
- Winnicott, D.W. (1984) "Deprivation and Delinquency" London: Tavistock
- Winnicott, D.W. (1986) "Home is Where We Start From" London: Penguin

---

# University of Reading Therapeutic Child Care Course

Dissertations in the Planned Environment Therapy  
Trust Archive and Study Centre

---

Planned Environment Therapy Trust Archive and  
Study Centre  
MAIN DESK

Association of  
Therapeutic  
Communities

PLANNED  
ENVIRONMENT  
THERAPY TRUST

Charterhouse Group

Therapeutic  
Community Open  
Forum



RadioTC  
International

Church Lane, Toddington, Cheltenham, GLOS. GL54 5DQ, United Kingdom  
Phone/FAX (UK): 01242 620125 / (Outside UK): 44 1242 620125