Attachment Theory & the Teacher-Student Relationship

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Attachment Behavioural System

Protest (related to separation anxiety)
Despair (related to grief and mourning)
Detachment (related to defense)

The Four Attachment Styles

What do they look like?
What do they feel like?
How can we work with them?
How do they affect students?
How do they affect teachers?
How do they affect parents?
How do they affect staff relationships?

Secure

a healthy and balanced view of self and others
a sense of their own “worthiness (loveability)” and expect others to be “accepting and responsive”
more curious than their insecurely attached counterparts

Dismissing

obsessively or compulsively self-reliant
less in touch with their feelings about relationships than others
seen by others as remote and unavailable emotionally
Don’t deal with loss well. Hard to teach them subtraction and division
Preoccupied

less worthy than the secure person, but retains a positive view of others

accept themselves only if they are accepted by a trusted and valued ‘other’.

Therefore they become preoccupied with gaining the acceptance of others.

This creates a problem because their experience has taught them not to trust others.

Therefore they become preoccupied with gaining the acceptance of others so that they might feel good about themselves. This lowers their curiosity about the world around them as they must remain focussed on the opinions of others. It is a confused state often leading to anger and controlling behaviours directed toward the very people they seek care from because they find it difficult to distinguish genuine responses from others

excessive dependency in continually feeling let down and disappointment as well as a fear of rejection and abandonment

Worse yet, the relationship itself is a prominent source of the very distress it fails to regulate.

Coping by coercive behavior intended to elicit responsiveness from the attachment figure inevitably promotes rejection and escalates fears of abandonment.

Fearful

tend to feel both unworthy of love and carry a negative expectation of others’ opinion of them.

protect themselves from these painful feelings by avoiding close contact, for their experience tells them that close contact will bring the rejection they fear.

They consider others to be untrustworthy and/or rejecting. Yet they want the approval of others: a constant dilemma for the fearful individual
A It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don’t worry about being alone or having others not accept me.

B I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.

C I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don’t value me as much as I value them.

D I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me.

Begin with the end in mind

☑ You are teaching for the children of the children you teach.
☑ Knowledge doesn’t keep any better than fish: you have to keep throwing your line in and bring the knowledge to life.
☑ The only subject for education is life in all its manifestations.

What does this mean for you?

☑ As a teacher/trusted adult you need a secure base

☑ Take a minute or two to write down who you rely on when the chips are down

☑ Personally

☑ Professionally

☑ How can you build stronger relationships with that person / these people?

☑ Who would you like to have as a secure base?
How can you make that happen?

**What does this mean for working with children?**

Students will look to you to provide a secure base for them

How can you provide a secure base for others?

Be predictable, consistent and flexible enough to meet people where they are and in context

When you are with others be available

Emotionally and empathically as well as professionally

Be true to your own needs while acknowledging the needs of others

**The Secure-base**

Students and parents will feel secure with you when they *feel*

You are listening to them

You are trying to make sense of what they are saying at a level below the words they use.

You may not be correct, however it is the fact that you are really trying that counts here.

(Mentalization/reflective function)

Students feel secure with others when they *feel*

You are encouraging others to be the “best that they can be”

You always aim at the best outcome for everybody, even if that involves difficult decisions

This demonstrates your fairness, moral authority and transformational leadership qualities

Modelling the behaviour you would like to encourage in others
You accept the vulnerability of others and treat it with respect. After all that’s the way you hope to be treated

**The Secure-base**

Students feel secure with others when they *feel*

- You accept the fact that you, like they, will sometimes be wrong
- And can learn from the experience
- You can laugh at yourself when appropriate

**What does this mean for staff?**

Staff will look to you to provide a secure base for them

- How can you provide a secure base for others?
  - Be predictable, consistent and flexible enough to meet people where they are and in context
  - When you are with others be available
    - Emotionally and empathically as well as professionally
  - Be true to your own needs while acknowledging the needs of others