

UNDERSTANDING  
ATTACHMENT  
AND  
THE RELEVANCE TO  
STUDENT LEARNING


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# ATTACHMENT BASICS

BOLBY'S ATTACHMENT  
INFANT ATTACHMENT STYLES



“Attachment is a deep enduring affectionate bond that connects one person to another [Attachment Figure (AF)] across time and space”.

(Bowlby, 1969)



# INFANT ATTACHMENT STYLES

Attachment style	History with caregiver	Infant's strategy when upset
<b>Secure</b>	Caregiver consistently, warmly responds when infant is upset	Cries; infant knows that caregiver will soothe
<b>Anxious-Avoidant</b>	Caregiver does not respond in emotionally warm way when infant is upset	Infant has learned not to cry to get needs met
<b>Anxious-Ambivalent</b>	Caregiver inconsistently responds when infant is upset	Infant cries (and is difficult to soothe) in an effort to stay in caregiver's direct attention
<b>Disorganized</b>	Caregiving is frightening/traumatic	Infant has no clear strategy when upset

# ATTACHMENT INFLUENCE ON RELATIONSHIPS



ATTACHMENT STYLE CARRIES THROUGHOUT LIFE AFTER 12 MONTHS OF AGE

*Are Teachers Attachment Figures?*

*YES!*

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*How does it look ?*

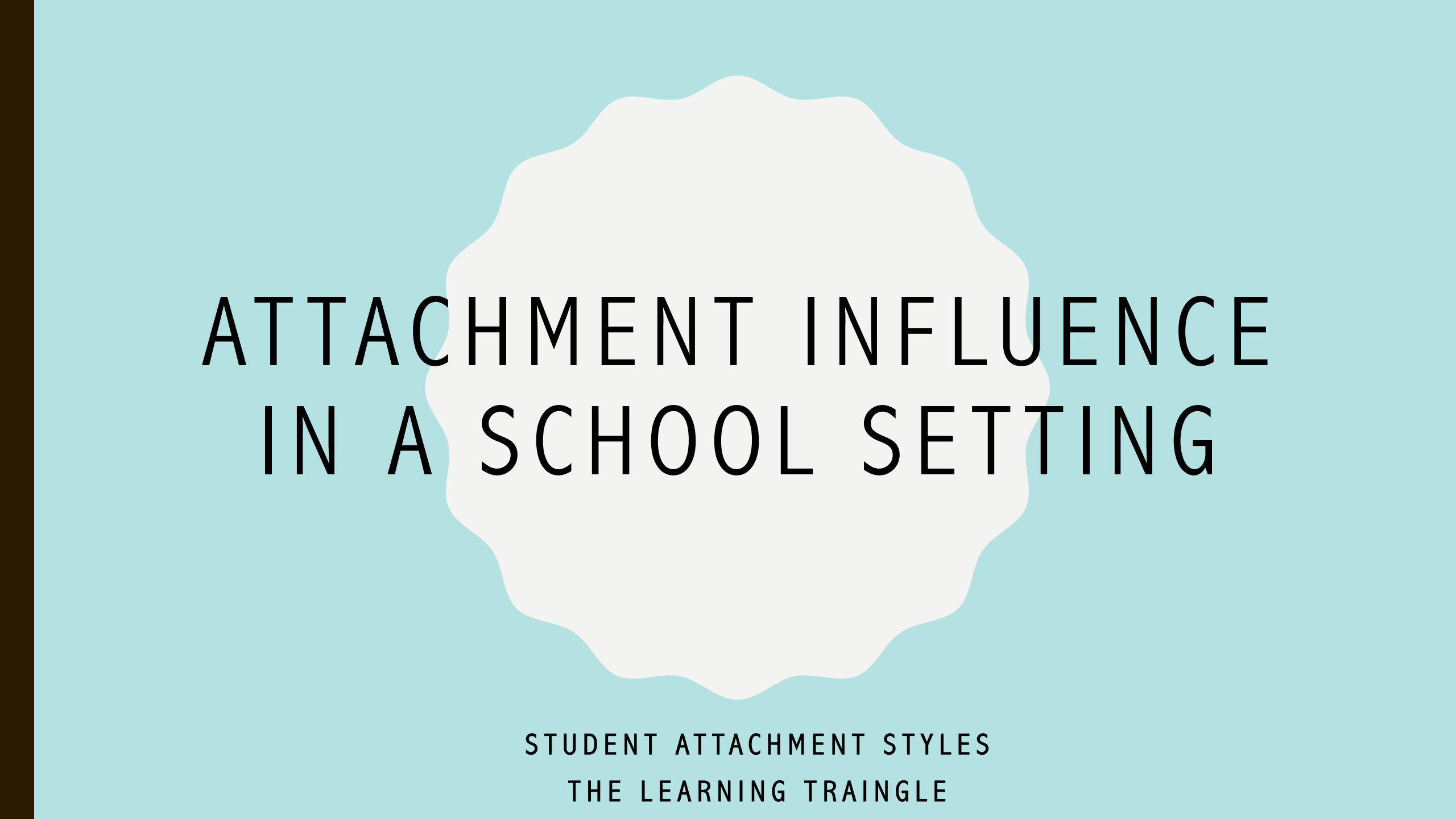
*Teacher-Student Relationships*



“Children form attachments to significant adults other than their parents”.


(Bolby, 1984)





# ATTACHMENT INFLUENCE IN A SCHOOL SETTING

STUDENT ATTACHMENT STYLES  
THE LEARNING TRIANGLE



“.....research tells us [that] a close and significant relationship in early infancy is a crucial factor in shaping a pupil response to learning”.

(Geddes, 2006)



# STUDENT ATTACHMENT STYLES

CHARACTERISTICS IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

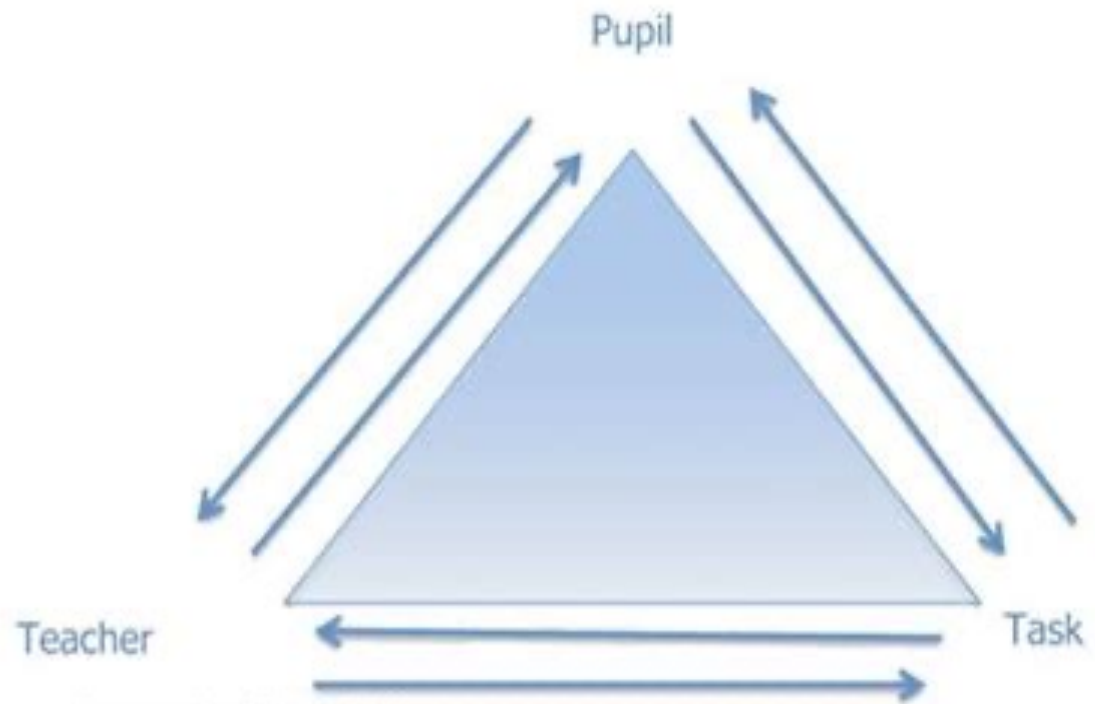
ATTACHEMENT STYLE	STUDENT RESPONSE TO SCHOOL SETTING
<p>Secure</p> <p>(Student positively relates to teacher and task)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates cognitive flexibility</li> <li>• Receptive and can relate to the teacher</li> <li>• Co-operative and collaborative with classmates</li> <li>• Independ and positive self-esteem</li> </ul>
<p>Anxious-Avoidant</p> <p>(Student directs focus towards task and not teacher)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indifference to uncertainty in new situations.</li> <li>• Denial of need for support and help</li> <li>• Student believes ignored by teacher</li> <li>• Student believes teacher is imbued with negative expectations</li> <li>• Sensitivity to proximity to teacher</li> <li>• Anger expressed towards objects of other students</li> <li>• Lower self-esteem</li> </ul>
<p>Anxious-Ambivalent</p> <p>(Student directs focus to relationship with the teacher and not task)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High level of anxiety and uncertainty</li> <li>• Need to hold teacher's attention</li> <li>• Dependence on teacher to engage in task</li> <li>• Express hostility towards the teacher when frustrated</li> </ul>
<p>Disorganized</p> <p>(Student perceives teacher and task as threatening)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intense anxiety</li> <li>• Highly vigilant</li> <li>• Focused on environment</li> <li>• Great difficulty with trust and authority</li> <li>• Reject instruction from the teacher</li> <li>• Unable to accept teacher knows more</li> <li>• Sensitive to feedback that is negative in nature</li> <li>• Insensitive to others</li> <li>• Significant difficulty with unstructured settings</li> </ul>

## ATTACHMENT STYLES IN SCHOOL SETTING

(Geddes, 2006)

# THE LEARNING TRIANGLE

STUDENT • TEACHER • TASK



Source : Geddes (2006)

## THE LEARNING TRIANGLE

ATTACHMENT STYLE	STUDENT RESPONSE TO TASK	SILLS & DIFFICULTIES
Secure  (Student positively relates to teacher and task)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receptive and can relate to the teacher</li> <li>• Co-operative and collaborative with classmates</li> <li>• Independent and positive self-esteem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work independently</li> <li>• Ability to ask for help</li> <li>• Capacity to handle uncertainty</li> <li>• Capacity to tolerate frustration</li> <li>• Demonstrates cognitive flexibility</li> </ul>
Anxious-Avoidant  (Student directs focus towards task and not teacher)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to be autonomous and independent of teacher</li> <li>• Hostility towards teacher is directed towards task</li> <li>• Task operates as an emotional safety barrier between the student and the teacher</li> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited use of creativity</li> <li>• Likely to be underachieving</li> <li>• Limited use of language</li> </ul>
Anxious-Ambivalent  (Student directs focus to relationship with the teacher) and not task)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for teacher attention to complete task</li> <li>• High level of anxiety and uncertainty.</li> <li>• Unable to focus on task for fear of losing teacher's attention</li> <li>• Low-self-esteem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Likely to be underachieving</li> <li>• Well developed Expressive language but not consistent with levels of achievement</li> <li>• Difficulties with numeracy</li> </ul>
Disorganized  (Student perceives teacher and task as threatening)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intense anxiety</li> <li>• Controlling behavior</li> <li>• Great difficulty with trust</li> <li>• Sensitive to feedback that is negative in nature</li> <li>• Insensitive to others</li> <li>• Significant difficulty with unstructured settings</li> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Likely to be underachieving</li> <li>• Seem unimaginative and uncreative</li> <li>• Difficulty with conceptual thought</li> <li>• Seem to be a very immature stage of learning</li> </ul>

# ATTACHMENT STYLES STUDENT RESPONSE TO TASK

(Geddes, 2006)

# SECURE

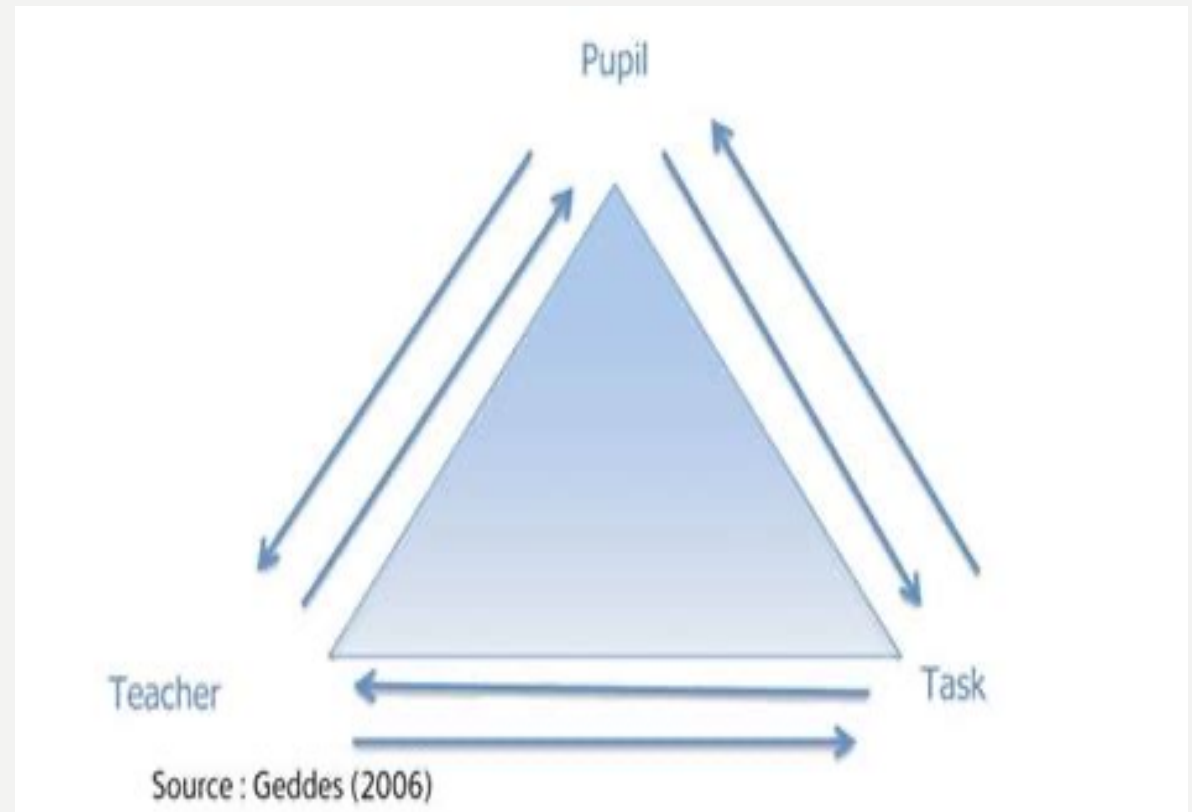
(STUDENT POSITIVELY RELATES TO TEACHER AND TASK)

## STUDENT RESPONSE TO TASK

- Receptive and can relate to the teacher
- Co-operative and collaborative with classmates
- Independent and positive self-esteem

## SILLS & DIFFICULTIES

- Work independently
- Ability to ask for help
- Capacity to handle uncertainty
- Capacity to tolerate frustration
- Demonstrates cognitive flexibility





# ANXIOUS-AVOIDANT

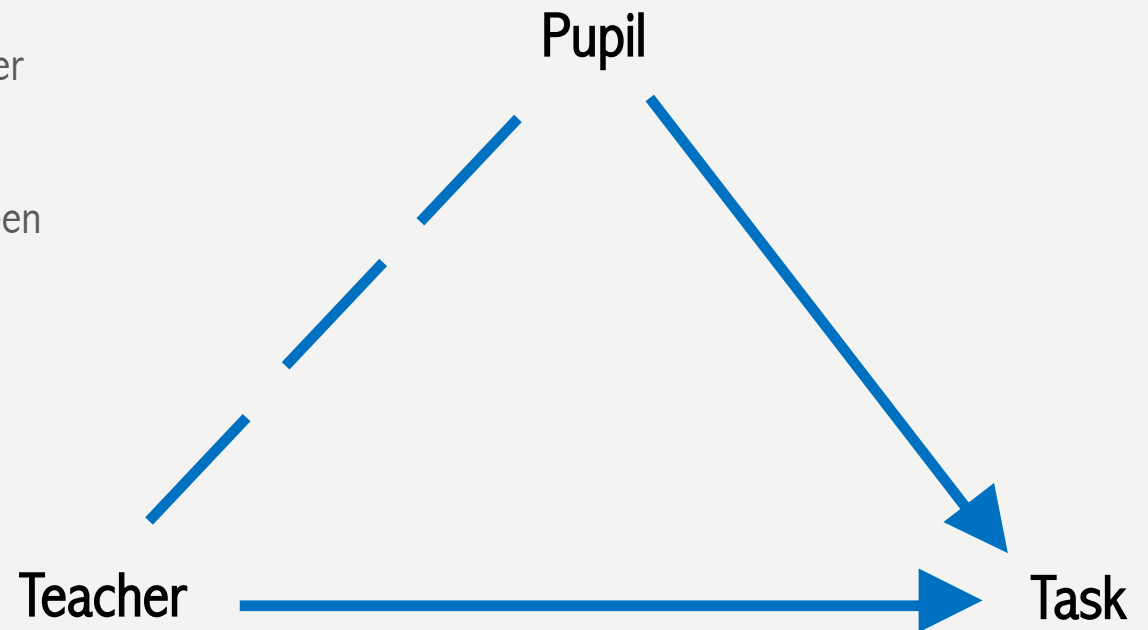
(STUDENT DIRECTS FOCUS TOWARDS TASK AND NOT TEACHER)

## STUDENT RESPONSE TO TASK

- Need to be autonomous and independent of teacher
- Hostility towards teacher is directed towards task
- Task operates as an emotional safety barrier between the student and the teacher
- Low self-esteem

## SILLS & DIFFICULTIES

- Limited use of creativity
- Likely to be underachieving
- Limited use of language



# ANXIOUS-AMBIVALENT

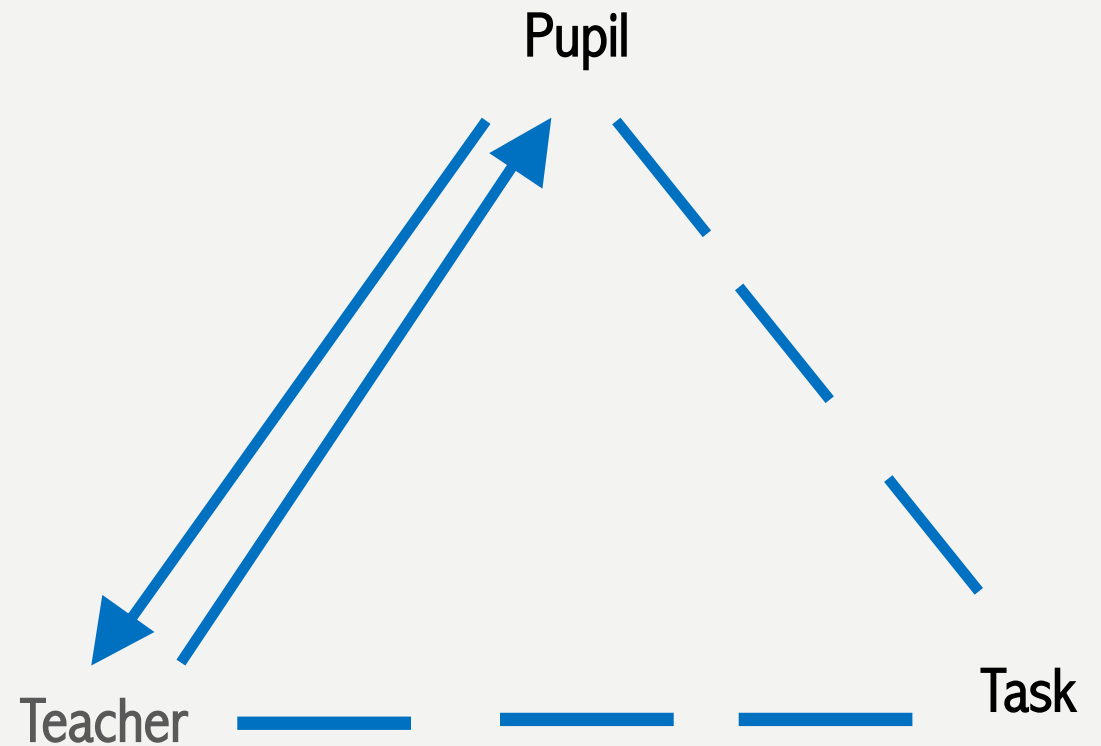
(STUDENT DIRECTS FOCUS TO RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TEACHER)  
AND NOT TASK)

## STUDENT RESPONSE TO TASK

- Need for teacher attention to complete task
- High level of anxiety and uncertainty.
- Unable to focus on task for fear of losing teacher's attention
- Low-self-esteem

## SILLS & DIFFICULTIES

- Likely to be underachieving
- Well developed Expressive language but not consistent with levels of achievement
- Difficulties with numeracy



# DISORGANIZED

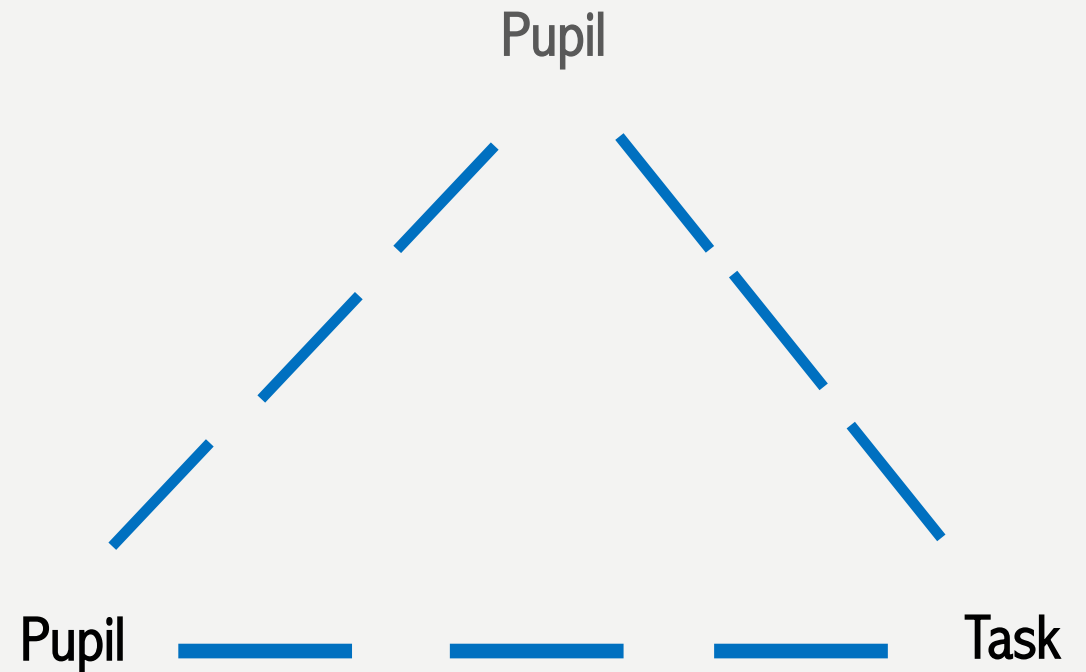
(STUDENT PERCEIVES TEACHER AND TASK AS THREATENING)

## STUDENT RESPONSE TO TASK

- Intense anxiety
- Controlling behavior
- Great difficulty with trust
- Sensitive to feedback that is negative in nature
- Insensitive to others
- Significant difficulty with unstructured settings
- Low self-esteem

## SILLS & DIFFICULTIES

- Likely to be underachieving
- Seem unimaginative and uncreative
- Difficulty with conceptual thought
- Seem to be a very immature stage of learning






# TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

A SIGNIFICANT IMPORTANCE



WHY DO TEACHER-STUDENT  
RELATIONSHIPS MATTER?



Bolby shares...“perhaps there is no other nonfamilial adult that is more significant in a child’s life than his or her teacher”.


(Riley, 2011, p. 29)

# TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

## 3 Basic Dimensions

1. Closeness (I share affectionate, warm relationship with this student)
2. Conflict (This student and I always seems to be struggling)
3. Overdependence (This student asks for my help when it really isn't needed)

(Pianta, 2001)



Secure teacher-student relationship “is characterized as a trust, feeling in tune with the student, and perceptions that the student feels safe with the teacher, the student would seek help, and the teacher could console the student”.

Dependent teacher-student relationship “is characterized by teacher perception that the student is constantly seeking help or reassurance and reacting negatively to separation from the teacher”.

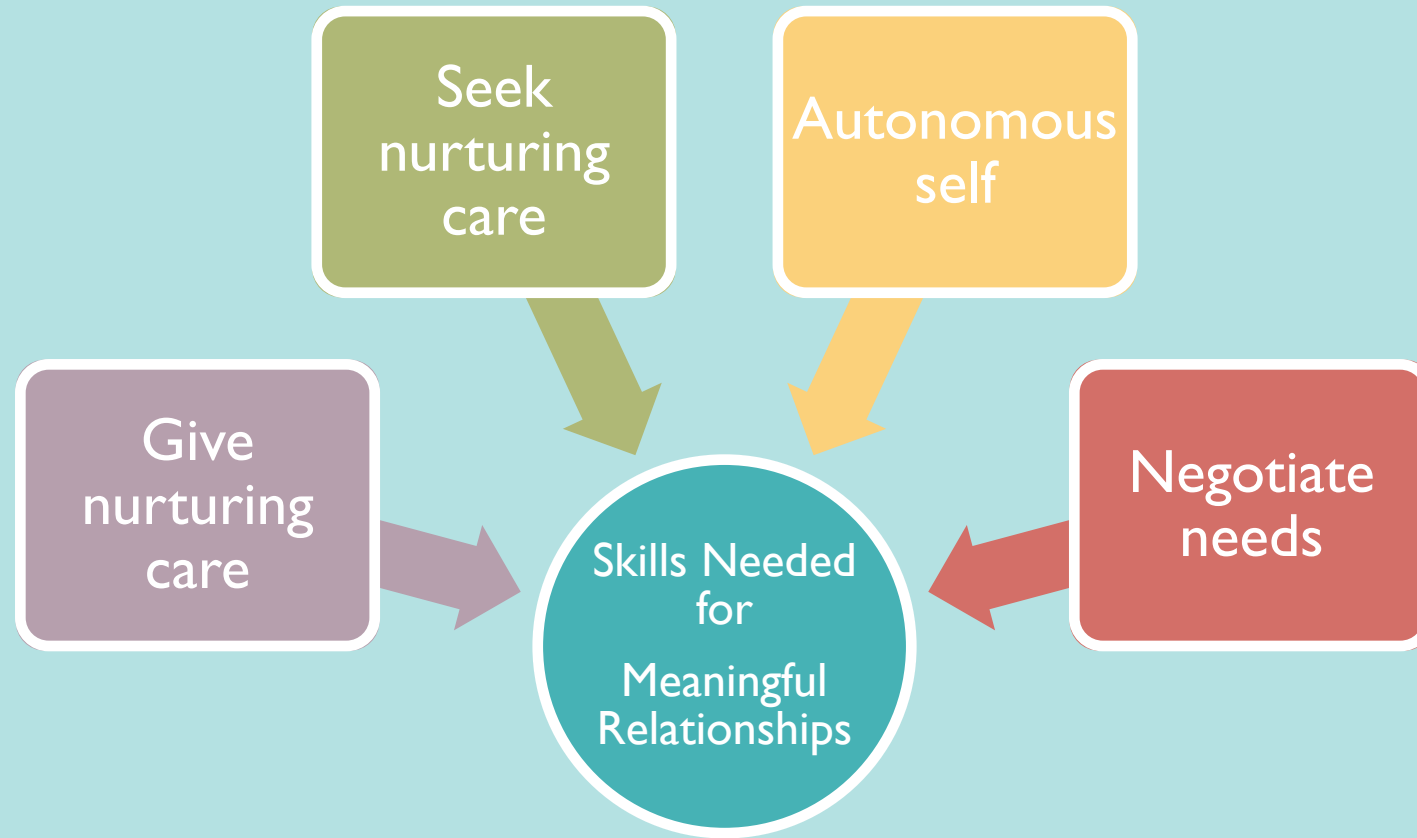
(Pianta and Nimetz, 1991, p. 384 and 385)



# ATTACHMENT-BASED INTERVENTIONS

MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS  
TEACHER RESPONSE & INTERVENTION TO STUDENT ATTACHMENT STYLE  
PROSOCIAL CLASSROOMS

# TEACHING MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS



STUDENT ATTACHEMENT STYLE	TEACHER RESPONSE & INTERVENTION
<p>Secure</p> <p>(Student positively relates to teacher and task)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensitivity to student's uncertainty</li> <li>• Facilitate interest and engagement</li> <li>• Listen and respond to student needs and ideas</li> </ul>
<p>Anxious-Avoidant</p> <p>(Student directs focus towards task and not teacher)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a task to bridge and connect with the student</li> <li>• Sensitivity and mindfulness to proximity between student and teacher</li> <li>• Pairs or small groups to moderate intensity of proximity</li> <li>• Establish a predictable environment</li> <li>• Concrete and structured tasks</li> </ul>
<p>Anxious-Ambivalent</p> <p>(Student directs focus to relationship with the teacher and not task)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differentiation of task with small, sequential steps and turn-taking</li> <li>• Use of timer</li> <li>• Use of transitional object</li> <li>• Positive, explicit feedback</li> <li>• Provide responsibility of task ("Job")</li> </ul>
<p>Disorganized</p> <p>(Student perceives teacher and task as threatening)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish felt safety</li> <li>• Establish a predictable environment</li> <li>• Establish clear expectations and outcomes</li> <li>• Identify a clear and consistent way of responding to student</li> <li>• Is secure and non-reactive with behavior becomes high dysregulated</li> </ul>

## TEACHER RESPONSES & INTERVENTION TO STUDENT ATTACHMENT STYLE

(Geddes, 2006)

Sensitive, Warm, and Respectful

Well Prepared & High Expectations

Present, Responsive and Supportive

Promote prosocial behavior among students

Discipline with explanation, positive emotional tone and respect

Provide attention to difficult relationships (relationship-specific interventions)

Reflective Thinkers

Self-attuned and Self-assured

# SECURE TEACHER ATTACHMENT

(BERGIN & BERGIN, 2009)

FOR A STUDENT TO TRUST YOU TO MEET HIS NEEDS, YOU MUST BE CONFIDENT IN YOUR ABILITY TO MEET YOUR OWN NEEDS.



# ATTACHMENT ASSESSMENT IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

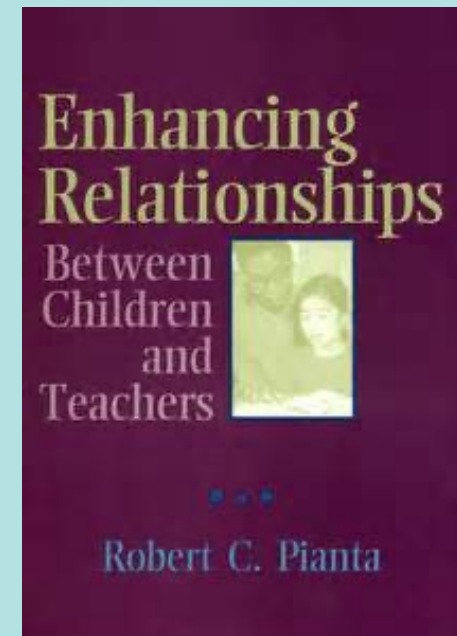
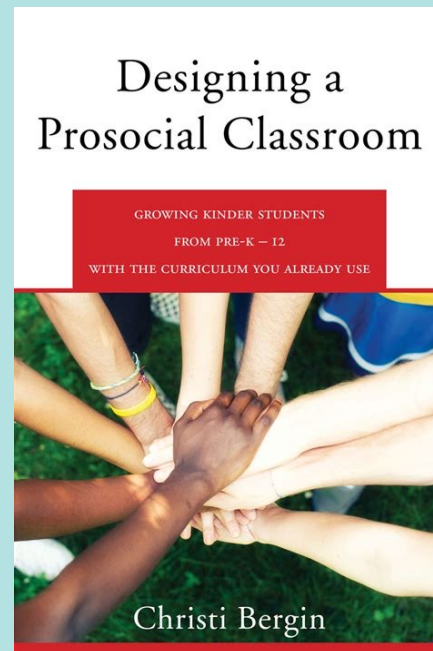
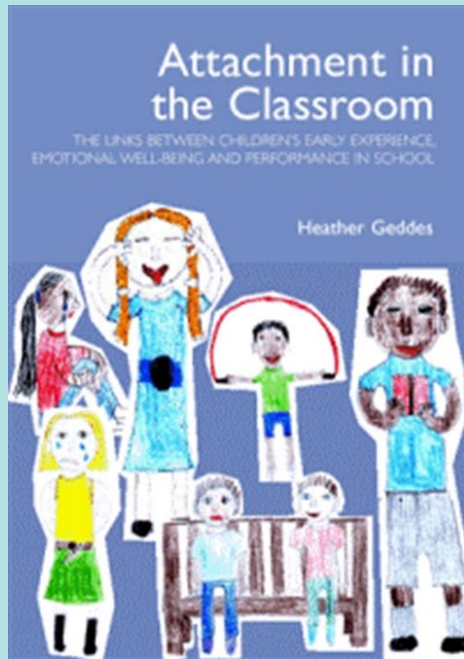
TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

# ATTACHMENT ASSESSMENT

## TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

- Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS)  
(Pianta, 1992)
- Student Interview Questions (Bergin, 2018, p. 122)

# SOME RESOURCES



# QUESTIONS

THANK YOU!

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