

# The effects of poor attachment, loss and trauma on learning and behaviour

Is it them or is it us? Recognising and breaking negative patterns of interaction

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# Behaviour which keeps us safe

‘A child’s current behaviour often reflects an essentially sane response to an untenable set of life circumstances.’

Bray 1997 (Quoted in Visser, J and Rayner, S (1999) Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties : A Reader. QEd.)



# Food for Thought

- 'It must be recognised that the area of pupil behaviour is highly emotive. It challenges teachers' sense of their own professional competence and both teachers' and parents' self-esteem. . . . emotions often get in the way of constructive planning. '
- Peter Gray and Sue Panter, Support for Learning, Vol 15, No 1.

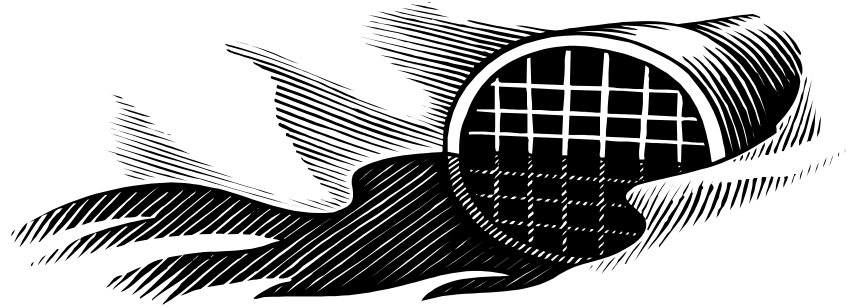
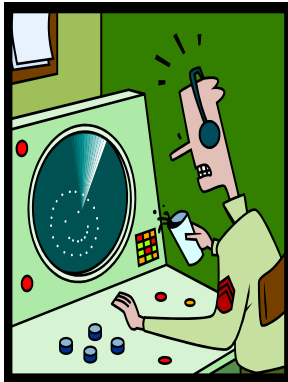
# What do you choose to pay attention to?

In your control?

Draining or energising?

Focus on highlights ?

»



# Unconscious Defence Mechanisms

- A sign that a child cannot manage their overwhelming feelings and have not had experience of an adult who can do that
- Can give us an indication of how a child is feeling
- Can be thought about and named if appropriate
- Can help us to feel better about ourselves and our actions
- **Tip** : Remember ‘ It’s not meant for me’

# Unconscious Defence Mechanisms

- **Barriers to protect the personality from fear of threat/anxiety and to keep this conflict from coming to the conscious level.**
- **Projection** – when we have unbearable, painful feelings we externalise them by pushing them out and trying to attribute them to others.

# Transference

- Where feelings and attitudes from a relationship with main carers in the past are 'transferred' and re-experienced in a later relationship, for example, a teacher.
- **Implications**
- A child's seeming inexplicable reaction to a member of staff may be triggered by who they are reminded of. We can be caught in the counter-transference.

# Counter-transference

Ever had the desire to adopt ....

- to murder ....
- to hit ....
- to rescue
- to give up
- to run away?



# Omnipotence

- The omnipotent self – the internal rescuer
- The wounded self – kept hidden from shame
- Hostage negotiation
- - How can I give up the self which protects me from humiliation and pain?
- David Taransaud You think I am evil. Worth Publishing



# Where do you learn this?

Some children's life experiences will have taught them other skills and other responses

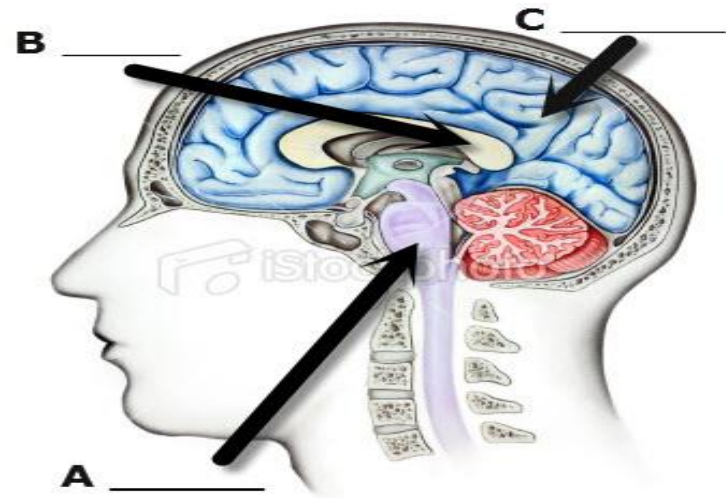
Some children's experiences of adults will have been very different to the nurturing environment which creates the conditions for learning

# Triune Brain

A = reptilian brain, brain stem

B = limbic system, mammalian brain

C = neo-cortex, cerebral cortex



What brain am I in when I

...am fighting ?

...am angry or sad?

...am analysing the best thing to do?

# Types of activities

- Jigsaws
- Matching pairs/pelmanism
- Games for empathy e.g guess about me
- Joining things up with a line
- Putting in order/sequencing
- Finding things e.g Find Wally, spot the item
- Stories which allow all feelings e.g Where the Wild Things Are
- Films with good/bad in one character eg. Incredible Hulk
- Activities with frames, enclosed eg. Word snake
- Boxes – to contain

# Classroom management

- Breathing - low, slow breathing is calming. Be aware if you are holding your breath in confrontations - breathe! Notice if child is holding their breath.
- Separate description of behaviour from interpretation of it. Comment on the behaviour not the person. 'When you look out of the window when I am giving instructions, it makes me think you are not listening'
- Describe what is happening for the child so they can learn to recognise and regulate
- Give positive reinforcement for good behaviour, particularly if the student has just been misbehaving. Take care to notice when they are NOT doing the inappropriate behaviour and find a time to praise them for that. Take opportunities to develop rapport e.g. personal chat, remember something about them
- Acknowledge the positive intention behind a behaviour e.g. give misbehaving student a job so they are involved. State it 'You can be very funny and witty without needing to be rude and put people down.'

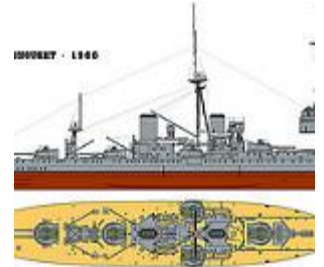
# Classroom management

- Use the language of 'need' rather than obligation. 'You don't need to be like that in here'.
- Focus and comment on pupils who are doing what is required. 'This table is ready, great.'
- Discuss with a student if necessary the best placed to sit eg if hypervigilant – where can I see everyone?
- Build in perceived choices where possible . 'OK, you can do this alone or in a pair'
- Distract, deflect at the point of conflict. Ignore secondary behaviour e.g sighing
- Recognise and try to break patterns

# Classroom management

- Tell students what you want them to do, not what they shouldn't do
- Be aware of the state you are creating, walking around when asking for quiet can create the opposite state.
- Give instructions on a need to know basis, demo and visual. Avoid use of sequencers e.g. Before.. Give actions words last.
- Think about how you are standing. Freeze body when giving instructions, weight evenly distributed, toes forward for getting attention.
- Be consistent with your use of space. A place at the front where everyone can see for instructions, another spot for discipline to create spatial anchors

# Activities



- Develop activities which allow recognition and acceptance of negative feelings e.g competitive games such as hangman, battleships, teach children how to win and lose safely.
- Use creative activities and metaphor to help pupils explore feelings in a safe, 'contained' way e.g stories, drawings, modelling, games, videos, soaps. Comment in a the third person, indirect way. Stories and TV which allow all feelings e.g Where the Wild Things Are, Soaps
- Films and stories with good/bad in one character eg. The Hulk and Superhero/villain eg Spiderman





# Want to know more?

- Marie Delaney
- The Learning Harbour, Crosshaven, Co Cork, Ireland
- Email : thelearningharbour@gmail.com
- Teaching the Unteachable, October 2008, Worth Publishing
- What can I do with the kid who....2010. Worth publishing.
- Attachment for Teachers 2018. Worth Publishing
- Into the Classroom : Special Educational Needs. OUP
- Heather Geddes 'Attachment in the Classroom : A practical guide for teachers'. Worth Publishing
- [www.worthpublishing.com](http://www.worthpublishing.com)
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- [www.caspari.org.uk](http://www.caspari.org.uk)
- [www.teachingenglish.org.uk/webinars](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/webinars)