A Secure Base for Adult Learning: Attachment Theory and Adult Education

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Abstract

The attachment theory of John Bowlby has had an enduring impact on our understanding of child development. But these ideas are a neglected and forgotten discourse in adult education. In this paper concepts such as secure and insecure attachments, internal working models, and the strange situation along with the more contemporary concept of mind-mindedness are explored. The paper also explores the implications for how adults deal with new situations and new ideas; how adult learners and teachers are influenced by their own attachment styles and internal working models. These models are interpreted as strategies that adults employ for dealing with stress, anxiety, change and the challenges of teaching and learning. In addition, the implications of these concepts for understanding transformative learning are identified and changing internal working models is proposed as a form of transformative learning. This paper outlines Bowlby's main ideas, with a focus on recent research findings and, by extrapolation, reframes our current understanding of adult learning. The ideas presented here are not usually part of adult education debates but may provide useful insights for facilitators of adult learning and personal development.

Keywords: Attachment theory; Secure attachments; Internal working models; Secure base; Mind-mindedness; Transformation theory; Adult learning.

Introduction

Adult education has grown accustomed to a particular palette of debates including lifelong learning and more critical understandings of learning. These critical understandings involve a reinterpretation of the meaning of lifelong learning that, if they are to be of value, need to be combined, with "a critical

theory of society" (Murphy, 2001, p. 181). Neo-liberals and functionalists have colonised the lifelong learning debate with a fixation on technique, the economy and vocationalism (Welton, 1995). Even when the debate is more critical, as in Brookfield's (2005) work on critical theory and Tennant's (2006) psychology textbook, there is a missing dimension.

This paper claims that part of the missing dimension is filled by a critical investigation of John Bowlby's attachment theory. It may be because these ideas have a biological base or a psychoanalytical dimension that they have been ignored. In addition, more critical perspectives focus on how culture and society are reproduced through interpersonal relations and, in particular, through parenting and childrearing practices. Bowlby offers a theory that attempts to integrate biology, a psychoanalytic analysis of early childhood experiences and some aspects of socio-cultural reproduction. This paper aims to address some aspects of the missing body of knowledge and illustrate how attachment theory is of profound and neglected importance for understanding adult learning and teaching.

These ideas allow adult educators find a new set of ideas and vocabulary with which to describe practices in the classroom and in the process understand more thoroughly the issues that make teaching and learning exciting, challenging and always more complex than we might imagine. This paper outlines Bowlby's main ideas, with a focus on recent research findings and, by extrapolating from these ideas, reframes our current understandings of adult learning.

John Bowlby and Attachment Theory

John Bowlby's (1907-1991) work as a child psychiatrist with children from poor backgrounds convinced him that family life was important for their emotional development and that the separation of a young child from mother was detrimental to the child's development (Bowlby, 1951). Bowlby (1944), in trying to understand the causes of delinquency (a term widely used in 1944), the nature of the child's ties to mother (1958), the meaning of separation anxiety (1960a) and the significance of grief and mourning for young children (1960b), outlined a theory in three volumes of *Attachment & Loss* (1969; 1973; 1980). Mary Ainsworth and colleagues (1978) researched the stress resulting from the separation of child and mother, known as 'the strange situation.'

> Bowlby saw social deprivation as detrimental to the child's psychological
> development. This social concern runs through his work which found that;

early separations are recognised as inherently dangerous for children;…But his greatest influence is where we would wish it to be, on the social arrangements that are made for children…in hospitals, in nursery schools, in care and…at home.

(Gomez, 1997, p. 53)

However, this emphasis on poor family relationships is easily and incorrectly interpreted in terms of parental blame, often in relation to the mother. Feminists object that Bowlby is using biology to justify what is essentially a cultural product of our own 'patriarchal but father-absent' society (Holmes, 1993, p. 47). This division of labour fits modern society, leaving men free and women fettered. There is little doubt that Bowlby took a dim view of day-care and indeed of anything that kept a mother away from her infant. This lends fuel to the feminist critique. However, Bowlby was clear, even in early work that, "the role of a child's principal attachment-figure can be filled by others than the natural mother" and the view that only the natural mother could provide mothering he dismissed by saying, "no such views have been expressed by me" (1969, p. 303-304). Later research has concluded that it need not be the mother, it could be the father, who provides a secure bases for the child. If blame for the insecurity of the child is placed on the mother, this allows society to abdicate its responsibility for its role in shaping the child and also allows fathers to be absent.

Bowlby's attachment theory is based on a number of understandings. First, children in orphanages, who suffered from maternal deprivation, the absence of fathers and a family environment, were liable to negative cognitive and affective consequences. Second, in observing animal behaviour the developmental importance of 'imprinting' was established and this highlighted the importance of early contact between mother and infant in the animal world (Bowlby, 1969, pp. 184-190). The image of Konrad Lorenz (1952) being followed by a line of goslings who had 'imprinted' Lorenz as their surrogate parent comes to mind. These experiments show that early contact between mother and infant has important biological functions that contribute to the enhancement of psychological and social development. Both adults and children have inbuilt biological and evolutionary-based predispositions that contribute to the survival and development of the child (Bowlby, 1979, p. 37).

Attachment is an enduring tie with a person who provides security. Bowlby observed that the child's attachment figure provides a secure base from which

the infant can safely explore his/her environment and to which they can return if he/she experiences or perceives danger. The comforting actions of the carer provide security for the infant and interactions involving play, baby talk, making close eye contact and the excitement of these engagements are the initial ventures of the child into the world (Bowlby, 1969, p. 304).

Secure and Insecure Attachments

Children introject their experience of being cared for and as a result have a model of themselves as valued, have a greater sense of 'felt security' and more optimistic views of social relationships. Such children are **securely attached** (Bowlby, 1969, p. 339). The secure child is happy to explore his/her environment whether or not the carer is present. Though they might or might not cry when the carer leaves, they greet the returning carer positively and, even if upset, are easily comforted. This security is a result of the carer being sensitive and responsive to the needs of the child for security and sensitive/responsive to the child's signals. **Insecure attachments** have been categorised as avoidant, anxious and disorganised. These attachments are defensive strategies that are the child's attempt to maintain contact with inconsistent or rejecting carers.

The **anxious attached** child is preoccupied with the carer and reluctant to explore even in their presence. The carer of an anxious attached child (Bowlby, 1969, p. 338; 1973, p. 245) is more likely to be inconsistent in responses, insensitive to signals from the child, inept at engaging in physical contact and show little spontaneous affection. The **avoidant attached** child is usually unconcerned with either the presence or absence of the carer and does not express attachment needs so as to avoid the risk of being rejected. Avoidant attached children are more inclined to distance themselves cognitively from distress. The primary carer in this case may exhibit low levels of response to the distress of the child who is encouraged to get on with life and not make too many demands on the carer. In other instances, the carer may be uncomfortable with close contact or, even if the carer has positive feelings towards the child, these may be overshadowed by feelings of resentment or anger. Finally, the **disorganised attached** child (Main and Solomon, 1986) is associated with consistently inadequate care, a parent who is seriously depressed or who even subjects the child to maltreatment. In this case the child experiences the carer as frightening and as a result may be unable to maintain a consistent strategy for engaging in attachment behaviours.

Strange Situation

According to Ainsworth (1978), when the carer leaves the room or a stranger approaches, the child may experience separation anxiety. She used the **strange situation** as an analytical tool to assess attachment style and the quality of early attachments. Ainsworth's research provided empirical support for Bowlby's theory (1969; 1973). A secure child is likely to be upset when the carer leaves but will seek comfort from her when she returns. Insecure avoidant children on the other hand hardly notice the presence of their carer, show few overt signs of distress when they leave and mostly ignore the carer when they do return. The anxious child is often inconsolable when the carer leaves, and is not easily pacified on their return.

Internal Working Models

Attachment operates by each child developing an internal representation of their experience of relationships, an **internal working model** of social relating. Like an architect's model, it represents the individual's perception of the world of relationships and guides social interactions (Bowlby, 1969, p. 80; 1973, p. 237). A securely attached child will have internal working models that see the world as a safe place and themselves as responsive, caring and reliable. An insecurely attached child is more likely to be cautious towards others and see themselves as less worthy of attention and love (Holmes, 1993, p. 79).

Although internal working models can be revised in the light of experience, they are not always, or indeed easily, accessible to conscious examination and change, because they are laid down unconsciously in early life (Bowlby, 1973, p. 367). Parents' relationships with their children are influenced by their own internal working models and, in this way, working models are transmitted across generations (Bowlby, 1969, p. 348).

Mind-mindedness

Recent research has developed the important concept of **mind-mindedness** to describe the ability of a parent to understand and respond not only to the infant's feelings but also to their thinking (Meins et al., 2002). Carers' "proclivity to comment appropriately on their infants' mental states and processes" is related in research to secure attachments (Meins et al., 2001, p. 637). Mind-mindedness is an indicator of a relationship that is more likely to produce secure attachments. Mind-mindedness reframes Bowlby's concept of maternal sensitivity and involves the carer being "willing to change her focus of attention in response to cues from

the infant" (Meins et al., 2001, p. 638). Later, I will suggest that mind-mindedness may be important in creating a secure base for adult learning.

It is important to state that it is too easy to use attachment theory to unfairly blame the mother who in many cases is the primary care-giver and no amount of changing the language in a politically correct manner will disguise the reality that it is often the mother who is the main attachment figure and what she does and how she reproduces attachment styles is a crucial factor in how a child develops. But it is also the case that the resources that some mothers bring to parenting compromise the attachments they would like to forge. In current thinking, as outlined in this article, the omni-presence of the mother is not the important factor but the availability to the child, from extended family or elsewhere, of someone who could, with consistency, attend to their perceptions of fear, experiences of loss and anxiety as they commence their exploration of the world. Though some quotations from Bowlby identify the mother as the primary attachment figure, all recent research points to the central role of the primary carer, whether man or woman, parent or not who performs the role of providing a secure base for the child.
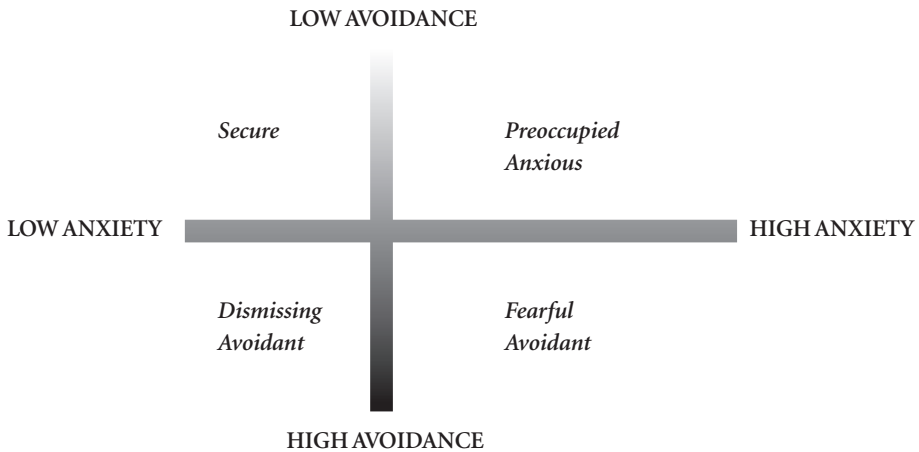
Attachment and Adult Learning

Based on attachment theory and on recent research, important implications for understanding adult learning and teaching can be extrapolated. These involve two areas. Firstly, there are the learning insights and implications of the concepts outlined – attachment style, the strange situation, internal working models, the secure base and mind-mindedness. Secondly, these concepts have implications for our understanding of adult learning and here I specifically engage with Mezirow's theory of transformative learning.

Attachment Styles and Adult Learning

One's attachment style plays an important role in how one reacts to the interpersonal engagements that are involved in all classroom and other encounters between students and teachers. Forming a circle of participants is one of the predictable and most frequently used configurations when adult learners meet. This encourages participation, allows all members see each other and makes concrete the democratic ideals that inform so much of our field of practice. But the student's attachment style will strongly influence how each responds to this structure. Securely attached students are more likely to welcome the circle arrangement. But students with insecure attachment styles may have increased

levels of anxiety to such an extent that they may struggle to overcome that anxiety or opt out as a strategy for avoiding the stress of such situations.

Figure 1: Adult attachment format (adapted from Shaver & Frawley, 2004)

LOW AVOIDANCE

Secure

Preoccupied
Anxious

LOW ANXIETY   HIGH ANXIETY

Dismissing
Avoidant

Fearful
Avoidant

HIGH AVOIDANCE

Adult educators have many experiences with students who have well-established strategies for engaging or not engaging with programmes and learning opportunities. The work of Daloz on mentoring is positive about the possibilities offered by mentoring and he is also aware that some may not be easily supported. For example, the aptly titled article 'Gladys who refused to grow' (Daloz, 1988) shows that every learner may not be in a position to avail of the mentor's support. In any classroom of adults or in a mentoring situation it is useful to understand that one's attachment style enhances or hinders, frees or constrains one to learn and engage with the opportunities provided.

Hazan (1990, p. 2) and others (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Frawley, Weller & Brennan, 2000) in recent research have classified adult attachment along two axes, one of high/low anxiety and the other of high/low avoidance (See Figure 1). Low avoidance and low anxiety indicate a secure attachment and the other three possibilities are dismissing avoidant, fearful avoidant and preoccupied anxious attachments. Goleman's popular work on *Social Intelligence* acknowledges the importance of a secure base for human relationships and devotes a chapter to attachment theory (2006, pp. 162-172). In researching the connection between attachment and adult relationships Goleman (2006, p. 194) found that the secure adult is confident of a

partner's love and regularly turns to the partner for support, especially when upset. Secure adults have internalised 'rules' and strategies that allow them be aware of when they are distressed and when to actively seek comfort from others. They are also able to engage with emotions, neither fearing them nor avoiding them and, moreover, not preoccupied with them (Goleman, 2006, p. 194). Students with secure attachments will be better able to cope with and embrace new experiences, new ideas and even the learning supports offered. Secure attachment style is a positive indicator of success at reaching one's learning goals. Insecure adults who are anxious tend to be preoccupied with the anxiety brought on by new experiences. They are more likely to be overwhelmed with feelings of loss, they are more likely to be disoriented and unable to avail of support from colleagues or teachers. Anxious attached students are likely to worry and tend to be unable to turn off the worry (Goleman, 2006, p. 196).

A note of warning is appropriate here. The claim is not being made that these extrapolations from Bowlby completely explain all barriers and resistance to learning. Other emotional, cognitive and social issues may also contribute as structural constraints continue to block engagement with learning. One's prior education experiences, especially schooling, as well as social class and gender contribute to a more rounded understanding of the barriers to learning.

In an adult education setting it is reasonable to extrapolate from these findings that secure individuals are optimistic about coping with stress, likely to relate better to others, have greater capacity for concentration and cooperation and are more confident and resilient. They can express emotions openly and appropriately, acknowledge and control the physiological signs of anger (Belsky, 2002). Secure individuals appraise stressful situations as less threatening than do those who are less secure (Belsky, 2002, p. 167). They are optimistic about their ability to cope and are more likely to seek support as a strategy for regulating their feelings. They are more open to compromise in resolving conflict and openly discuss problems. Secure adults integrate cognitive and emotional responses and are not dominated by one or the other. They may be in fact the kind of adult student that takes to learning relatively easily and enrols without great anxiety.

The anxious or preoccupied adult is less confident of a partner's love and support and when they do turn to their partner for support they tend to be dissatisfied with the response. People who grow up in an unsupportive environment may not be confident that a caregiver is ever truly available and dependable. The

anxious attached adult finds emotions bubbling up irrepressibly and experiences a need to discuss these preoccupations (Goleman, 2006, p. 194). In the classroom an adult may appear to be preoccupied with the emotional aspect of their experiences and unable to move to more task oriented activities. Anxious individuals focus on their own distress and adopt coping strategies that exacerbate distress rather than reduce it. The anxiety experienced by some adults on returning to education may be increased due to their anxious attachment style. Interventions or activities of the tutor may be seen as useful, particularly if they address the anxiety induced by this strange situation. The role of the tutor is clearly one of building a secure and safe space in which the anxiety is addressed and a secure base created.

Avoidant individuals distance themselves cognitively and in their behavior from the source of stress (Belsky, 2002, p. 167). An avoidant adult has strategies aimed at minimizing the experience of stress and projects those weaknesses onto others (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2004, p. 33-34). Those with an avoidant style overly rely on cognitive factors, may ignore or deny emotional reactions such as anxiety or fear and may not be able to turn on the worrying brain signals (Feeney & Noller, 1996, p. 105). This is in contrast to those with anxious attachments who focus on the emotional dimensions of experience rather than the cognitive.

In relationships, the avoidant dismissive adult may lack confidence in their partner, but instead of worrying they avoid others and rely on themselves. When upset they are more likely to stay alone (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). They are uncomfortable with intimacy, lack confidence and maintain psychological distance from significant others. They may find intense emotions unpleasant and avoid emotional situations, expressions of emotion or locations where emotional aspects of work or relationships are expressed or explored. In adult education such students may become isolated and unable to join the emotionally supportive study groups that sometimes form on courses. Avoidant students may be more difficult to recruit to classes and as a result neither look for support nor accept it as easily as the securely attached.

Whether students are secure or insecure, this will impact on their feelings, attitudes, and behaviour and how they react to the learning situation. This adds an additional dimension to our understanding of the adult learner. Avoidant adults are less likely to seek support, are less satisfied with the support available and mistrust those who offer support. An awareness by the tutor or organis-

er that supports which reach out to potentially isolated students may provide some of the structure required to assist the student experience security.

Adults with high anxiety and high avoidance may be least able to engage in new situations and may have strategies that lead to a perception that their style is disorganised attachment. The disorganised adult has a strong desire to approach others for support, a fear of being hurt or rejected, and avoids potentially supportive adults. They are likely not to have any strategy for maintaining proximity to someone who may offer care and support and, in more extreme cases, serious problems with intimacy are likely (Main and Hesse, 1990). Issues of motivation will be influenced by this attachment style. It is more likely that this attachment style will be encountered among 'the hardest to reach' learning communities, for example prisoners. Tutors with experience in these situations have methodologies for working with students or young adults whose attachment styles are disorganised. Tutors who work with young people from chaotic family/community backgrounds are our best guides about how to cope in the classroom with students whose attachments are disorganised. These groups provide a particular challenge for educators as a tutor's ability to provide a secure base is also dependent on the attachment style of the tutor or the insights required to create and sustain a secure environment. Further research needs to be done by adult educators to explore the implications of these ideas for our understanding and practice of teaching and learning.

A secure attachment facilitates optimal motivation for achieving one's goals because it enables individuals to view achievement in positive terms and to fully focus on effective ways of reaching goals (Eliot and Reis, 2003, p. 328). In contrast, anxious attachments undermine motivation and achievement because it leads to viewing tasks less positively. Insecure attachments produce a defensive focus on avoiding negative outcomes. In sum, the result of research in this area by Eliot and Reis (2003) supports the general view that secure attachments in adulthood assist in achieving one's goals and insecure attachments interfere with exploration and in achieving one's goals by evoking avoidance or anxiety. A secure attachment may allow students to focus directly on the challenges of the task, and immerse themselves in the activity, free from concerns about the broader implications of success or failure. But anxious attachments are likely to heighten fear about the implications of failure for the individual involved, leading them to focus primarily on avoiding failure (Eliot and Reis, 2003, p. 328). This adds a new dimension to our understanding of adult motivation to learn.

There is little research on this issue in adult education and this may be a fruitful area for further elaborating our understanding of adult learning motivation.

The strange situation is not only a reality that brings to the fore one's attachment style, it is also a necessary precondition for learning. A teacher of adults has traditionally been described as one who initiates wonder (Aristotle), creates perplexity (Dewey) or makes the familiar strange in the words of Maxine Greene (1973). Adult education provides 'strange situations' for students when a student joins a course or programme for the first time or when they explore new ideas and new knowledge. A number of such experiences in adult education bring to the fore one's attachment style. This is understandable as much of the discourse in our discipline centres around the anxiety of 'going back to school' and the low self-confidence a student often feels on joining a new learning group for the first time. In addition, these ideas of Bowlby also prompt us to see that all new ideas, new points of view, new learning can have the same impact, even if the student has successfully navigated their way into the classroom. The ability of a student to cope with new knowledge is hugely influenced by their strategies for coping with the strange situations provided by new knowledge. New knowledge is a strange situation that triggers attachment behaviours. Our ability to 'go it alone' or be a self-directed learner may also be influenced by our attachment style as a preference for a particular way of learning is likely to be consistent with one's attachment style.

Adult education precipitates 'strange situations' or experiences that perplex, disorient, or make the learner curious. What happens is most interesting, if we accept the insights of Bowlby. These situations induce a sense of loss, a realisation that meanings that were previously taken for granted become open for discussion, debate, examination, scrutiny and change. Students are likely to think, feel, act and make meanings in ways that are consistent with their attachment style and internal working models. The work of Bowlby places this in a firm theoretical context, helps us understand the psychological dynamics of a classroom and suggests possible solutions and strategies for assisting those who find themselves disoriented in a strange situation. The ability to provide a secure base, so crucial for working with insecure adults, is foundational for working with all students.

The anxious attached are more likely to react to disorientation with high levels of anxiety that preoccupies their attention and is a further barrier to learning.

The avoidant attached are probably more difficult to encourage into a learning situation as their style is to hide or not present, not because of anxiety, but because they avoid issues that threaten their security. Those who are both anxious and avoidant will be more difficult to work with as their reaction to doubt or dilemmas is to be both preoccupied with anxiety and with avoiding engagement. These insights may be hugely significant in thinking through strategies for engaging with 'hard to reach' learners. Many attempts to contact adult learners from any sector of society automatically appeal to the securely attached. To attract others, adult educators are required to address the issues that lie behind either avoidant or anxious adult learners. Internal working models affect our cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses to others in family, work and indeed in all communications. They affect how data is evaluated, experienced, accepted, rejected or ignored in all communications. They influence the thoughts we have, what we remember, what we consider important and how we interpret and make sense of events. Internal working models also influence emotional response patterns (Alexander, 1992). These insights from attachment theory research lead us to understand how students bring internal frames of reference with them that may help or hinder learning and the theory suggests ways of overcoming these constraints.

Hazan's (1990, p. 1) research shows that adults find a safe haven in their relationships to which they retreat from the difficulties of life and a secure base from which to explore the world. People construct intimate relationships that reflect their attachment style and internal working models. According to Bowlby (1979, p. 135):

> There is a strong causal relationship between an individual's experiences with his parents and his later capacity to make affectional bonds, and that certain common variations in that capacity, manifesting themselves in marital problems and trouble with children as well as in neurotic symptoms and personality disorders, can be attributed to certain common variations in the ways that parents perform their roles.

The effects of attachment patterns on relationships, work performance and even on transition to college are important according to Hazan (1990, p. 3). As there is no discussion of these ideas in adult education we miss the opportunity to ask whether and to what extent relationships between teacher and student (including among students and among staff) reflect each participant's attach-

ment style and internal working models. This allows us extrapolate from the research findings in other disciplines and identify the creation of a secure base as a prerequisite for supporting adult learners whose attachments may be less secure than they might want them to be.

Bowlby (1988, p. 138) described the role of the therapist as providing the patient with a secure base from which the past may be explored. Their role is to assist the patient in exploring ways that clients engage in relations with significant others. They explore ways in which the patient-therapist relationship itself is likely to be influenced by the expectations of how an attachment figure feels and behaves towards one another that are in turn an expression of one's own internal working models. In addition, Bowlby encouraged therapists to assist the patient explore how the current situation was an expression of how one's own experiences in childhood may be continuing to impact on current relationships. Though the suggestion is not being made that adult educators are therapists or indeed that educators provide therapy, there is a tradition in our discipline that pays attention to the counselling and therapeutic process, as in Carl Rogers, as a site for insights about change, learning and facilitating learning. Of course key to the use of therapy is the way Rogers, for example, explicitly sets out to create a relationship with the client and in the context of that relationship moments are produced that are insightful, developmental and that we could describe as learning. The adult educator too is neither a mere conduit for information (thought that is important) nor a therapist, but there is a way of looking at teaching as having an emotional dimension (Salzberger-Wittenberg, et al., 1983).

By implication, in the training of adult educators, as with therapists, it would be worth developing the ability of the tutor to construct a safe place for exploration. The tutor would benefit from being aware of his or her own attachment style and of their own internal working models. An aware adult educator could, with great profit, be informed by such insights. In the 'strange situations' that are part of most adult learning situations, in order for learning to happen, a secure place must be created. It is a characteristic of a good educator that they can create such a space. In this way "one may cease to be a slave to old and unconscious stereotypes and to feel, think and to act in new ways" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 139).

Teaching and Learning: Secure Base and Mind-mindedness

The teacher's internal working models and strategies for coping with change and strangeness impact on how well the tutor copes with the challenge of adult students and their ability to cope with their questioning, challenges of the debates and interactions of the adult classroom.

Our earlier outlining of how success, achievement of one's goals and work are influenced by these understandings now leads to the possibility, new to adult education, that how one performs, as teacher or student, is heavily influenced by attachment style and internal working models. The secure student or teacher may be best situated to take advantage of learning opportunities. However, not all are fortunate to arrive in class with secure attachment styles and it is likely that a significant number of students (and teachers?) may be insecure, we just do not know. This poses important questions about how to work with students taking into account that some will have strategies in place for avoiding and denying stress or be quite preoccupied with the inevitable stress of the situation. In addition, the adult educator will have their own secure or insecure attachments and strategies for dealing with success, failure and the inevitable stress of the learning situation. The aim of the good teacher in this understanding becomes that of providing a secure base in which security is provided and an environment created so that, at least tentatively, the learner may have an experience of working through the strangeness of the situation and hopefully develop internal working models that are consistent with secure attachment styles.

Paying attention to the student as having a mind and feelings is not new to adult education. It is in fact a precondition for all interactions. However, the insights from attachment theory give a solid and additional grounding for attending to the student in this way, as one with a mind and feelings. Mind-mindedness is developmental. As Maxine Greene says, while emphasising the role of the teacher in supporting learning, "I want teachers to become a friend of someone else's mind" (Rothman, 2007). Mind-mindedness is a useful way of supporting adults in the process of learning and supporting the move toward secure attachments.

A fundamental tenet of attachment theory is that the attachment style developed in the child–parent relationship influences future relationships (Bowlby, 1973). Bowlby saw that "whatever representational models of attachment figures and of self an individual builds up during childhood and adolescence tend to persist relatively unchanged into and throughout life" (1979, p. 141-142). But they are open to change (Waters, et al., 2000).

In this exploration of the implications of attachment theory it is important to emphasise the relative nature of all knowledge and be aware that there are objections to attachment theory. Rutter (1997) provided a series of structured critical reviews of attachment theory. One of his main criticisms of attachment theory concerns the idea that infant experiences determine adult behaviour. Research confirms that there is considerable scope for later change in attachment style but research also points to a strong link between child and adult attachment. The word 'determine' is not best but it is the consistent insight of psychoanalysis and adult learning theory that early experiences make a unique contribution to adulthood. It is also the consistent insight of counselling and of adult education that change, though constrained by previous adaptations, is always possible (Goldberg, 2000, p. 247). Attachment styles remain open to revision throughout life and there is no disagreement among the theorists on this, in fact the idea that they would not change might be seen as a challenge to Bowlby's theory (Waters et al., 2000, p. 688). Attachment is a lifelong learning project. In addition these insights are not presented here to contradict other insights from psychology but to add layers to our understanding of adult development. It is the position of this author that attachment theory is useful as it contributes to our understanding of how social structures (child rearing, etc.) are reproduced across the generations through psychological processes.

Mezirow's Transformative Learning

Adult learning involves change. Learning of all kinds, even of the most modest kind, involves change of behaviour or of our understanding or indeed of our values and perceptions. Mezirow's work alerts us to one of the most significant kinds of change that he describes as transformative. The theory of transformative learning states that the most significant adult learning involves becoming aware of the ways in which unquestioned assumptions, that act as taken-for-granted beliefs, constrain and distort the ways in which we make sense of the world. Frequently, these assumptions originate in childhood experiences. These unquestioned assumptions and frames of reference have two dimensions. One involves habits of expectation (meaning perspectives) that serve as filters or codes to shape, constrain or on occasion distort our meaning making. The other involves our points of view (meaning scheme) or individual beliefs, judgements, attitudes, etc (Mezirow, 2007, p. 11). Attachment styles and internal working models are good examples of psychological filters or codes that continue to influence ways of feeling and acting in adulthood. These internal working models are an example of the frames of reference described by Mezirow (2007, p.

11). A transformed frame of reference is "more inclusive, differentiating, more open to alternative perspectives and more integrative of experience" (Mezirow, 2007, p. 11).

The presentation of attachment theory in this paper leads to asking what is it that gets transformed in transformative learning? Attachment styles and internal working models get transformed and the understanding of transformation theory can be expanded and enhanced in a number of ways. According to Mezirow, the process of transforming a frame of reference commences with a disorienting dilemma and concludes with a reintegration into community with a new set of assumptions. This is suggestive of a process of altering or transforming ones attachment style and internal working models. Mezirow's disorienting dilemma is reminiscent of the strange situation. They have in common an experience that what was taken for granted does not hold anymore. In the case of the child, it is the departing attachment figure or the arrival of a perceived danger, possibly another person. In the case of the adult it might be the apprehension felt by the arrival at new learning situations or exploring new ideas. The strange situation has the added importance for transformation theory that it allows us identify the experience of disorientation as a sense that things do not fit any more, previously taken for granted meanings do not hold and the profound sense of loss implied in that experience may precipitate or bring to the fore our own attachment style. If the student is secure, they are more likely to react with less anxiety and a decreased possibility of avoiding issues and situations.

By inference, we can further enhance our understanding of transformative learning by proposing that if one has transformed one's frames of reference it is suggested that a better frame of reference, using Mezirow's language, involves the move in one's attachment style towards a style that is more secure or less anxious and less avoidant. This also gives a useful way of framing the by now familiar comment that involvement in adult education enhanced one's self-confidence. It ought to also enhance one's attachment style making one more secure to engage with new situations, new learnings and relationships.

In transformative learning theory a key role is given to meaning as the organisation of experience. One's attachment style and more importantly one's internal working models are, as previously suggested, psychological dimensions of meaning schemes. In transformation theory it is these meaning schemes or frames of reference that get transformed (Mezirow, 2007). The internal working

models are exactly what Mezirow means by psychological filters or codes "that shape and delimit and often distort our experience" (Mezirow, 2007, p. 11). It is implied in these explorations that we can associate the process of transformation with the development of new internal working models. It is also consistent with attachment theory to see the creation of perplexity as a prompt for transformative learning. In addition, we come to understand how a changed internal working model may be an improvement on a previous one. We know it is better if it meets Mezirow's criteria that it be more inclusive, more discriminating and more open to future change. This may also be a good set of criteria for judging a 'better' internal working model. It is at least a real possibility that development and growth are best supported by more secure attachment styles.

As one's attachment style informs one's way of relating to others it is suggested here that a significant kind of adult learning involves the developmental task of moving toward more secure attachments. Human development is being redefined here as the transformation of attachment styles and internal working models. Bowlby (1973, p. 368; 1988, p. 126) did envisage attachment as a lifelong learning project.

Conclusion

This study of Bowlby's attachment theory allows us understand more thoroughly how society and culture in constructing child rearing practices have a profound impact not only on the child but on the entire learning life of that individual. Attachment theory provides us with a lifelong learning project that brings together deep psychological patterns as well as the reproduction of society. These ideas allow us take on board, in a way reminiscent of Erich Fromm's work, how the individual and society are inextricably connected. It also allows us add a new chapter to widely respected psychology textbooks such as Tennant (2006). Marris (1991, pp. 79-80) understands this:

> The experience of attachment is the first crucial link between sociological and psychological understanding: the experience of attachment, which so profoundly influences the growth of personality, is itself the product of a culture, and a determinant of how that culture will be reproduced in the next generation – not only the culture of attachment itself but all our ideas of order, authority, and control.

Knowing that Bowlby does not do justice to the social and cultural factors that impact on development. At the core of a critical adult learning theory is the necessity to imagine and theorise how the cultures and societies in which we live, interact with and influence the ways in which people relate to each other. This would allow us understand more thoroughly how adult learning may be enhanced or distorted by secure or insecure attachment styles and internal working models. Finally, the move toward more secure ways of relating and exploring the world is a lifelong learning project of the most significant personal and political importance.

Because attending to the mind of the student is of such importance I am reminded of Claudia in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1990, p. 15) and how she hates Shirley Temple dolls. These were a representation of the world of things to be possessed and the child emphasises the importance of attachment rather than the possession of things. It is a reminder of how white dolls were given as presents to black children. She destroyed these dolls:

> But I did know that nobody ever asked me what I wanted for Christmas. Had any adult with the power to fulfil my desires taken me seriously and asked me what I wanted, they would have known that I did not want to have anything to own, or to possess any object. I wanted to feel something on Christmas day. The real question would have been 'Dear Claudia, what experience would you like on Christmas?' I could have spoken up, 'I wanted to sit on a low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone.' The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and warmth of Big Mama's kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sound of music, and, since it would be good to have all of my senses engaged, the taste of peach, perhaps, afterwards.

Mind-mindedness for adults too is what is being proposed.

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