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# The Theory of Educational Attachment

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## Cover Page Footnote

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## Overview

Children are born into the world with untapped potential and abilities (Johnsen, 2016; Krombholz, 2018; Owen & Porath, 2017). They have instinctual drives and desires that are genetically programmed into the essence of their being (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954, 1977, 1982; Schwartz, 2015). One of the greatest instinctual needs of human beings is that of attachment bonding (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Solomon et al., 2017; Webber, 2016). The earliest attachment bonding should naturally occur between a child and a mother or primary caregiver (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954, 1977, 1982; Schwartz, 2015; Solomon et al., 2017). When positive attachment bonding occurs on this level, the child begins the process of developing a healthy emotional state of well-being which lasts throughout the child's life (Ainsworth, 1989; Schwartz, 2015; Solomon et al., 2017). This stable attachment bond enables the child to have the emotional security to establish healthy attachments to peers, other adults, teachers, and authority figures in general (Xerri et al., 2018; Xie & Zhang, 2020). They have the security to ask others for help when needed and have a healthy sense of personal worth and value (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Masten, 2018; Webber, 2016). Their sense of self-esteem and well-being helps these individuals discover their potential and abilities and enhance their skills through their growth processes (Akin & Radford, 2018; Masten, 2018; Solomon et al., 2017; Webber, 2016).

Unfortunately, not every child begins life by establishing a healthy attachment bond with their parent or primary caregiver (Bretherton, 1992; Masten, 2018; Webber, 2016). Children who lack secure attachment bonds are more likely to be suspended from school, be habitually delinquent from school, have aggressive behavioral problems throughout their lifespan, become incarcerated, abuse alcohol and drugs, suffer from psychological disorders, become gang-

affiliated, and drop out of high school (Gage et al., 2018; Mowen & Brent, 2016). The harmful effects which are derived from the lack of healthy attachment bonding with a parent or primary caregiver can be altered and even reversed by the establishment of healthy attachment bonding relationships with teachers, academic club sponsors, athletic coaches and staff, school faculty and administration (Lawrence, 2022; Webber, 2016; Xerri et al., 2018). The most startling result derived from the literature review shows the benefits of positive attachment bonding relationships can be achieved with just one secure attachment bond (Lawrence, 2022; Schwartz, 2015; Solomon et al., 2017). This means that just one person in the school environment or local community can change the life trajectory of an at-risk child who did not have the opportunity to form a secure attachment bond with a parent or primary caregiver (Lawrence, 2022; Solomon et al., 2017; Webber, 2016; Xerri et al., 2018).

## The Development of John Bowlby's Attachment Theory

John Bowlby began research in the mid-1940s to understand the separation anxiety children experience when removed from the presence of their primary caregiver (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954; Schwartz, 2015). Until Bowlby's research findings, early behavioral theorists believed that child attachment was simply a learned behavior and not an internal psychological drive (Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954). They felt that infant attachment was merely a result of the relationship between an infant and the person who provided the infant's source of nourishment (Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954). Since the caregiver provided the basic human need for nourishment, the infant was attached to the source of this process (Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954). Through the course of Bowlby's research, results derived from his studies show that the nourishment process does not diminish the anxiety experienced from the infant when the infant is removed from the presence of the caregiver (Ainsworth, 1989;

Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954, Schwartz et al., 2016). He instead determined that infant anxiety is characterized by distinct behavioral and motivational patterns (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954, 1977, 1982; Schwartz et al., 2016). Children will seek proximity to their primary caregiver when frightened (Ainsworth, 1989, Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Schwartz et al., 2016). When the child has established strong attachment bonds with the caregiver, this process will bring comfort to the anxious child (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954, 1977, 1982; Schwartz et al., 2016).

The theory John Bowlby then established describing emotional bonds with another person is named theory Attachment Theory (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954, Schwartz et al., 2016). The theory states that the earliest bonds created by an individual are with the mother or primary caregiver (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954; Schwartz et al., 2016). He felt the quality of this bond affected the individual for the remainder of the child's life (Ainsworth, 1989, Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954; Schwartz et al., 2016). Bowlby suggests the process of early attachment serves a psychological need for the infant to remain close to the mother or primary caregiver, thus improving the chances for the survival of the infant (Ainsworth, 1989, Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954). While early behaviorists of the time felt attachment was a learned process, Bowlby's research demonstrates this is an innately driven evolutionary process within the child to form attachments with early caregivers (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Schwartz et al., 2016). If the child remains close to the primary caregiver, the child will receive comfort and protection and will therefore be more likely to survive into adulthood (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1946, 1950,

1954; Schwartz et al., 2016). This research went against the behaviorist of the time who felt that food was the primary component that aided in the formation of attachment behavior (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954; Schwartz et al., 2016). Bowlby's research consistently demonstrates the level of care and responsiveness displayed to the infant by the caregiver determines the level and quality of attachment (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Schwartz et al., 2016). The central component of John Bowlby's original Attachment Theory suggests mothers or primary caregivers who are readily available and responsive to the needs of the child assist in the development of a sense of security and emotional well-being within the child (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954, 1977, 1982; Schwartz et al., 2016). The child feels the mother or caregiver is reliable and dependable, and thus a secure attachment bond is established between the child and the mother or primary caregiver (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954; Schwartz et al., 2016). This secure attachment bond helps children develop a secure sense of self-esteem and self-reliance and is thus able to explore the world in which they live and to develop secure attachment bonds with others (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954, 1977, 1982; Schwartz et al., 2016).

## Factors Which Directly Affect Early Attachment Bonds

Several factors directly affect how individuals form early attachment bonds. Quality caregiving has a great impact on the formation of secure attachment bonds (Briere et al., 2017; Solomon et al., 2017). A child is highly likely to develop secure attachment bonds when a primary caregiver responds quickly and consistently to the needs of the child (Briere et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2015). Secure attachment bonding occurs because the child learns that the caregiver

can be depended upon to care for the child. Secure attachment is vital for healthy attachment and consequent emotional growth (Beri & Kumar, 2018; Solomon et al., 2017; Webber, 2016).

Children who do not have a primary caregiver may not develop feelings of trust needed to form secure attachment bonds (Akin & Radford, 2018; Allen et al., 2018; Briere et al., 2017). Disorganized- insecure attachment bonding can occur in settings such as orphanages and other similar types of care institutions (Akin & Radford, 2018; Allen et al., 2018; Briere et al., 2017) Other factors may negatively influence the type of attachment bonding that occurs in situations where a child has a primary caregiver who may respond inconsistently, may be neglectful, or abusive (Bretherton, 1992; Briere et al., 2017).

## Students' Need for Educational Attachment Bonding

Secure bonding attachments to family and friends are extremely important in the adjustment process of an individual (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Lawrence, 2022; Schwartz et al., 2016; Solomon et al., 2017). Those who do not have a sense of connection to a larger group or community are more likely to experience increased emotional distress (Lawrence, 2022; Sulimani-Aidan, 2018). It is, therefore, essential for a child who has not previously formed secure attachment bonds to establish attachment bonds with members of the school community (Lawrence, 2022; Masten, 2018; Thomas et al., 2020).

The formation of healthy attachment bonds with members of the school community enables students to develop resilience which involves protective factors well beyond simply the emotional stability of the attachment relationship (Lawrence, 2022; Masten, 2018; Thomas et al., 2020). Resilience is not a fixed thing but is continuously evolving and adapting. Resilience is not simply a personal characteristic that some individuals possess, and other individuals do not, but

develops within a reciprocal nurturing relationship over time within the parameters of a nurturing attachment bond (Masten, 2018; Thomas et al., 2020). Both attachment bonding and the growth of personal resilience need acceptance, emotional connection, and a sense of safety in a nurturing relationship to grow (Bae et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2020; Webber, 2016). One of the most important catalysts for secure attachment bonding and the development of personal resilience is the support from a wider community so that these factors can evolve and flourish (Bae et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2020; Webber, 2016).

## School Environments that Promote Educational Attachment Bonding

Secure attachment bonding and the growth of personal resilience can often be accomplished by the attendance of schools that maintain loving, nurturing school climates (Bae et al., 2020; Nicholson & Putwain, 2018; Webber, 2016; Xerri et al., 2018). Students who are actively engaged in their school environments understand the relationship between academic learning and their future life goals, demonstrate an aptitude to motivate themselves and to persist when faced with frustration and hardships, can effectively develop a specific action plan to accomplish learning goals and can seek and receive social and emotional support when needed (Xerri et al., 2018; Xie & Zhang, 2020). Research has shown that active student engagement positively affects cognitive and intellectual skill development, moral and ethical development, psycho-social development and helps in the development of a positive self-image (Xie & Zhang, 2020; Zolkoski et al., 2016). Students who are actively engaged in their school community have higher levels of academic achievement, academic motivation, less aggression and delinquency, and fewer health risk factors such as suicide attempts, early initiation of sexual behavior, and alcohol and cigarette use when compared to at-risk students who are disengaged with their academic institutions (Bae et al., 2020; Sanders et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2020). The education

of an individual involves addressing the needs of the whole person, not just cognitive processes (Solomon et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2020; Webber, 2016). Students are not just empty vessels that need to be filled with academic content but should be seen as whole persons with multifaceted needs and interests who are actively seeking to belong to a community (Solomon et al., 2017; Webber, 2016).

A student's motivation to succeed in school cannot be understood apart from the social context in which it encompasses (Robinson et al., 2016; Smith & Bradshaw, 2017; Solomon et al., 2017; Webber, 2016). Students who feel a sense of belonging to a supportive educational family or a caring community of learners can be shown to have stronger academic motivation and positive academic outcomes (Lawrence, 2022; Sanders et al., 2018; Xerri et al., 2018; Xie & Zhang, 2020). Student engagement has been described as the level of passion, and interest students show in their learning experiences (Robinson et al., 2016; Smith & Bradshaw, 2017; Zolkoski et al., 2016). Student engagement in school settings is a multifaceted process that involves the interplay of several key components. A student's behavior is the first major component that encourages strong school engagement (Robinson et al., 2016; Smith & Bradshaw, 2017; Zolkoski et al., 2016). A student's behavior in the classroom during academic instruction, proper behavior skills which promote social interaction and bonding, and appropriate behavior displayed during after-school events and extra-curricular activities all contribute to the effectiveness of a student's ability to become and maintain healthy school engagement (Robsinson et al., 2016; Smith & Bradshaw, 2017; Thomas et al., 2020). The second component of active school engagement aligns with proper student behavior but also involves proper social responses and interplay between the student and others (Robinson et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2020). Students must understand how to appropriately converse and interact with teachers, peers,

and other individuals in the school setting (Robinson et al., 2016; Slavit et al., 2016). Finally, students must also develop strong cognitive learning skills such as understanding the need for mental effort, the investment of time needed for lesson mastery, organizational skills, and general time management (Robinson et al., 2016; Smith & Bradshaw, 2017).

## School Administrators Who Encourage Educational Attachment Bonding

School administrators who encourage secure attachment bonding have unique characteristics. These characteristics are reflected in a school's philosophy of shared attitudes and values among students, teachers, and administrators (Sanders et al., 2018; Xie & Zhang, 2020). These types of school administrators encourage and maintain open, honest, and respectful communication between every individual who is affiliated with the school setting (Sanders et al., 2018; Xie & Zhang, 2020). School administrators who encourage secure attachment bonding create respectful school climates where students feel a sense of security and protection regarding their right to express their opinions even with those who do not necessarily share their feelings and beliefs (Sanders et al., 2018; Xerri et al., 2018; Zolkoski et al., 2016). As part of a respectful school climate, school administrators promote interpersonal safety and emotional health (Robinson et al., 2016; Slavit et al., 2016). Research has shown that educational administrators who protect students from physical and emotional harm by providing safe, stable, nurturing learning environments promote student well-being and serve as factors of support from maltreatment and other forms of violence and victimization (Sanders et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2020). Students who attend schools managed by these types of school administrators are more likely to build healthy brain architecture and are less likely to experience toxic stress within their school environment (Akin & Radford, 2018; Sanders et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2020). The stability derived from attending a nurturing learning environment may assist students in

developing stronger, more stable attachment bonding relationships with peers, teachers, and other members of the school administration and staff and have markedly fewer days absent from school (Robinson et al., 2016; Sanders, 2018; Slavit et al., 2016).

Stability also plays an important part in creating a school environment where secure attachment bonding is encouraged (Sanders et al., 2018; Xerri et al., 2018; Xie & Zhang, 2020). A stable school environment is predictable, positive, and consistent (Xie & Zhang, 2020; Zolkoski et al., 2016). School administrators who strive to develop and maintain a stable, secure atmosphere are careful to address changes in school curriculum cautiously and strive to maintain continuity by maintaining curriculum in an orderly, organized, and consistent fashion (Robinson et al., 2016; Sanders et al., 2018; Slavit et al., 2016). Any changes to the curriculum are addressed cautiously with insight into the impact curriculum transitions might have on students and staff (Sanders et al., 2018; Xie & Zhang, 2020; Zolkoski et al., 2016). Research has shown that a developmentally appropriate curriculum that reflects cultural and ethnic diversity and is centered on strong social and emotional goals help at-risk students gain social skills that can often aid in the creation of secure attachment bonds with other members of the school community (Xie & Zhang, 2020; Zolkoski et al., 2016).

The focus school administrators place on stability also extends to how a school's administrative team addresses issues of staff stability (Xie & Zhang, 2020; Zolkoski et al., 2016). Staff stability is essential to create a nurturing, respectful climate for teachers and staff to encourage low teacher turnover (Masten, 2018; Thomas et al., 2020; Webber, 2016). The consistency and predictability of a continuous, predictable nurturing teaching staff encourage healthy and caring teacher-student relationships (Sanders et al., 2018; Webber, 2016; Xerri et al., 2018). School administration professionals of effective schools that encourage secure

educational bonding are especially concerned with matching students with at-risk characteristics with teachers who are especially adept at handling diverse behavioral temperaments (Thomas et al, 2020; Webber, 2016). School administrators and staff can also help promote school attachment bonding by providing staff development training that helps to teach staff to understand student motivation, how to help student's increase self-confidence, how to instruct students how to manage stress, and organizational and goal setting skills (Masten, 2018; Webber, 2016).

School administrators who encourage strong attachment bonding to take special care to ensure that all school policies are fairly and consistently enforced throughout the entire school (Mowen & Brent, 2016; Webber, 2016). The administration and staff of the school develop and implement intentional strategies that foster supportive, nurturing, secure attachment bonding relationships among not only students but among adults as well (Robinson et al. 2016; Webber, 2016). This intentionality especially extends to the implementation of student disciplinary practices (Masten, 2018; Mowen & Brent, 2016; Webber, 2016). School administrators who promote the respectful treatment of every student foster the development of respectful attachment relationships and seek to understand the underlying influences that drive student behavior (Masten, 2018; Mowen & Brent, 2016; Webber, 2016). The collaboration of all involved parties is essential to address the social and emotional needs of students who make inappropriate behavior choices and is paramount in the development of a respectful school climate (Mowen & Brent, 2016; Webber, 2016). Effective school leaders intentionally decide to not use disciplinary practices as a means of removing disruptive students from the classroom but intentionally seek to increase a student’s sense of belonging and acceptance into the school

environment by proactively addressing inappropriate behavior choices (Nicholson, & Putwain, 2018; Thomas et al., 2020; Webber, 2016).

School-wide teacher-student mentorship programs are extremely effective ways to increase school connectedness and encourage educational attachment bonding (Walls, 2016; Xerri et al., 2018). Student-teacher mentorships offer students opportunities to form nurturing, positive bonding relationships and help students develop feelings of school connectedness (Nicholson & Putwain, 2018; Thomas et al., 2020; Zolkoski et al., 2016). By acquiring school connectedness, students develop positive attitudes toward adults in the school setting and feel that these adults see them as capable individuals with unique learning and life goals (Xerri et al., 2018; Zolkoski et al., 2016). Research has also demonstrated that secure teacher-student attachment bonds increase daily school attendance, academic achievement, and high school graduation success (Masten, 2018; Nicholson & Putwain, 2018; Thomas et al., 2020).

## Teachers Who Encourage Secure Educational Attachment Bonds

Secure attachment bonding often occurs between a student and a teacher (Briere et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2016). Because a child's internal emotional health and development become more resistant to change over time, early student-teacher relationships have a strong influence on subsequent educational attachment relationships (Lawrence, 2022; Robinson et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2020). Bonding between a preschool teacher and an at-risk student who has not formed secure attachment bonds with a parent or primary caregiver is, therefore, especially impactful to a child's emotional and psychological growth (Briere et al., 2017; Lawrence, 2022; Robinson et al., 2016). Secure student-teacher relationship bonding often may compensate for negative child-parent relationships (Bae et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2020). Students with insecure attachment bonding with their mother/primary caregiver but experience high student-teacher

closeness are less likely to display aggressive behavior than those who did not have the benefit of a supportive, nurturing relationship with a teacher (Bae et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2020).

There are several characteristics of effective teachers that can positively affect students and thus assist students with the establishment of secure educational attachment bonds (Briere et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2020). Teachers who promote secure educational attachment bonds with students form teacher-student relationships based on care, trust, respect, and cooperation (Thomas et al., 2020; Xerri et al., 2018). They establish positive, open communication within the classroom setting and approach behavior management in positive and encouraging ways (Briere et al., 2017; Solomon et al., 2017). Teachers who are responsive to students often view inappropriate student behavior as opportunities for student growth and openly display confidence in the ability of students to perform well in the classroom (Thomas et al., 2020; Xerri et al., 2018). It should be noted that it is critically important that all teachers strive to look behind incidences of inappropriate student behavior and examine the reasons why students choose to behave inappropriately in light of information regarding attachment behaviors and of students' attachment histories ( Xerri et al., 2018; Xie & Zhang, 2020). The knowledge of why a student displays inappropriate behavior helps teachers to better understand students' reactions to classroom situations and why their reactions are grounded in attachment patterns (Briere, 2020; Xie & Zhang, 2020; Zolkoski et al., 2016). It is easy for at-risk students to establish healthy relationships with this type of teacher because teachers of this type create classroom atmospheres that encourage positive attachment bonding (Briere, 2020; Zolkoski et al., 2016). They are understanding, supportive, and provide intense motivation for struggling students (Briere, 2020; Thomas et al., 2020). They also help these students feel valued and an important member of the learning community (Briere, 2020; Thomas et al, 2020). A teacher who supports secure

attachment bonding experiences for students creates classroom settings into communities of learning where every member of the classroom contributes to learning success (Bae et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2020). These classrooms promote positive thinking, high motivation and are goal-driven (Thomas et al., 2020; Zolkoski et al., 2016). Effective teachers often accomplish rapport building and secure attachment bonding with students by setting high expectations for learning and providing encouraging one-on-one feedback for students during the learning process ( Kelly et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2020). An effective teacher also encourages skill mastery by addressing all learning styles of students and creating stimulating lessons which capture student interest (Robinson et al., 2016; Smith & Bradshaw, 2017). A major factor in classrooms where teachers encourage secure attachment bonding is the fact that teachers include students in the classroom decision-making process (Robinson et al., 2016; Slavit et al., 2016; Smith & Bradshaw, 2017). Being involved in the decision-making process demonstrates to students that they are valued and that their opinions are important to the dynamics of the classroom (Barrie et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2016; Smith & Bradshaw, 2017).

Research has determined that having a positive relationship with a teacher is a powerful buffer against traumatic events and at-risk life circumstances (Lawrence, 2022; Solomon et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2020). Supportive teachers can promote emotional health and healing in many ways. One of the most effective techniques that can be utilized with students to promote emotional growth is through the use of scaffolding techniques to promote productive and developmentally appropriate social opportunities between students (Thomas et al., 2020; Webber, 2016). By utilizing knowledge of classroom dynamics, a responsive teacher can promote student responsibility for developing and maintaining positive peer relations (Robinson et al., 2016; Slavait et al., 2016). Research has shown that this can be accomplished in any

classroom regardless of the age of the child, but this technique is best accomplished at an early age before patterns of classroom behavior are established (Webber, 2016; Xie & Zhang, 2020).

If a teacher successfully establishes secure educational attachment bonds with students, students are less likely to perceive the school environment as threatening (Robinson et al., 2016; Slavit et al., 2016; Smith & Bradshaw, 2017). School environments that are seen as non-threatening provide students with an important resource to aid in the adjustment process during times of stress and risk. It may also safeguard and increase a student's ability to develop a positive self-identity (Gage et al., 2018; Xie & Zhang, 2020). Furthermore, the harmful effects of other negative relationships for students may be less emotionally damaging and more easily overcome through the development of a more defined sense of self-worth (Allen et al., 2018; Schwartz et al., 2016; Solomon et al., 2017).

It has long been determined that learning occurs within a formal and informal classroom network of social relationships (Allen et al., 2018; Xerri et al., 2018; Xie & Zhang, 2020). A teacher's actions and interactions within the classroom influence the development of student self-esteem and directly impacts student motivation and behavioral patterns (Briere, 2020; Robinson et al., 2016; Slavit et al., 2016; Smith & Bradshaw, 2017). A teacher’s pattern of positive actions and interactions within the classroom is extremely important during the critical preadolescent and adolescent years of growth (Masten, 2018; Solomon et al., 2017; Webber, 2016). When essential secure educational attachment bonding occurs during the preadolescent and adolescent years, positive student-teacher relationships are found to protect against maladaptive, risky behavior for students (Bae et al., 2020, Briere, 2020; Thomas et al., 2020). Unfortunately, as the need for positive teacher interaction increases, there is a marked decrease in the quality of time spent between an adolescent and teaching instructors during the middle and high school years

(Briere, 2020; Thomas, 2020). Although positive student-teacher relationships become increasingly influential and are an essential component of healthy emotional growth, student-teacher relationship quality decreases during these essential formative years (Bretherton, 1992, Bae et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2020). Positive student-teacher relationship is especially pertinent for students who have a difficult temperament and for students with externalizing behavior problems who feel that life events are beyond their control (Bretherton, 1992; Bae et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2020). With preadolescent and adolescent students, culturally responsive teaching and response interventions have been successfully implemented in the classroom to address at-risk factors (Xerri et al., 2018; Xie & Zhang, 2020). These types of interventions address topics such as conflict resolution training, appropriate classroom behavior, social skill training, and teamwork building ( Xerri et al., 2018; Xie & Zhang, 2020). All of these training interventions serve to enhance students' capacity to stay actively engaged in the classroom and increase academic competencies (Xie & Zhang, 2020; Zolkoski et al., 2016). The importance of caring, nurturing classroom teachers in redirecting and establishing secure attachment bonds with at-risk students cannot be overemphasized (Robinson et al., 2016; Slavit et al., 2016; Smith & Bradshaw, 2017). Teachers who strive to develop positive, secure attachment bonds with their students will offer their students the best chance of developing healthy emotional and psychological health (Robinson et al., 2016; Slavit et al., 2016; Xerri et al., 2018). A positive, nurturing teacher can have a lasting impact on the lives of students well beyond the classroom doors (Robinson et al., 2016; Slavit et al., 2016; Smith & Bradshaw, 2017).

**The Effects of Extra-Curricular Activities on At-Risk Students' Educational Bonding**

Student extra-curricular activities are activities that are performed by school students that fall outside the sphere of the normal academic instruction (Smith & Bradshaw, 2017; Thomas et al., 2020). An extensive body of research conducted over the past 5 years demonstrates the benefits of student participation in school-sponsored extra-curricular activities, especially during the critical adolescent years of development (Lawrence, 2022; Mushtag et al., 2019; Rathore et al., 2018). The benefits of student participation include the positive development of appropriate competitive and social behaviors, a general increase in student motivation, goal-setting skills, an increased sense of self-worth and value (Lawrence, 2022; Mushtag et al.,2019; Rathore et al., 2018). Research shows the longer a student is involved in extra-curricular activities, the greater the personal benefit which will be derived from these activities (Lawrence, 2022; Mushtag et al., 2019; Rathore et al., 2018). Research also demonstrates that at-risk youth who participate in sports are given positive opportunities to interact with peers and adult leaders, learn how to follow rules and routines, learn how to set and monitor performance goals, confront and overcome challenges, learn how to manage emotions in positive ways especially during times of loss, and are much more likely to form positive and strong school identities (Felfe et al., 2016; Mushtag et al.,2019; Rathore et al., 2018). At-risk students are given opportunities for growth regarding teamwork building. They can learn to recognize the importance and value of each team member, and this leads to positive emotional growth (Lawrence, 2022; Mushtag et al.,2019; Rathore et al., 2018). Students are shown to function more effectively when given opportunities to join networks of adults that support their efforts to succeed in school and provide guidance to them about school and personal social matters (Bae et al., 2020; Felfe et al., 2016; Mushtag et al.,2019; Rathore et al., 2018). Extra-curricular activities are often designed in ways that

facilitate high-quality peer and coach interactions and for the development of prosocial friendships and bonding (Felfe et al., 2016; Mushtag et al.,2019; Rathore et al., 2018).

Research shows the many benefits for at-risk students who join and participate in extra-curricular activities transfer to the academic school setting. These benefits include the development of positive school identities, positive behavioral engagement in the classroom, better academic grades, and is an important factor in the likelihood of at-risk students' graduation from high school (Lawrence, 2022; Mushtag et al., 2019; Rathore et al., 2018). Taking into consideration all of the positive benefits and consequences of students' participation in extra-curricular activities and the many opportunities that participation in extra-curricular activities provide for the advancement of educational attachment bonding, society needs to view participation as an educational asset rather than an expendable option (Lawrence, 2022; Mushtag et al., 2019; Rathore et al., 2018).

## Conclusion

Children have a instinctual desire to bond with others. It is genetically programmed into the essence of their being and is an essential component of psychological health (Bowlby, 1946, 1950, 1954, 1977, 1982). A child's first emotional bond should naturally occur while the child is an infant and naturally should occur between the infant and their mother or primary caregiver. If a child forms a healthy attachment bond at this stage of human growth and development, the child begins a process of developing psychological health that will progress, if unimpeded, for the rest of the child's life (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). The emotional security derived from this early attachment bond allows the child to develop a sense of personal worth and healthy self-esteem and encourages the child to develop other healthy emotional relationships as the child grows and matures (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Schwartz, 2015).

Unfortunately, not every child experiences this type of healthy psychological relationship. The absence of this early attachment bond may cause a variety of negative consequences that could follow the child for the rest of the child's life (Gage et al., 2018; Kokemuller, 2019). Children who lack early attachment bonds are more likely to have aggressive behavioral problems throughout their lifespan, become incarcerated, abuse alcohol and drugs, suffer from psychological disorders, become gang-affiliated, and drop out of high school (Gage et al., 2018; Kokemuller, 2019; Mowen & Brent, 2019). The harmful effects that are derived from the lack of a healthy early attachment bond can be altered and even reversed by the establishment of educational attachment bonds with teachers, school faculty and staff, academic club sponsors, and athletic coaches and staff. Just one educational attachment bond can change the trajectory of an individual's life and have a lifelong positive effect on the individual (Lawrence, 2022). The Theory of Educational Attachment is an expansion of The Theory of Attachment Bonding first developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. The Theory of Attachment Bonding explains the necessity of attachment bonds between a child and a primary caregiver in the development of psychological health. The Theory of Educational Attachment expands upon this theory and addresses the need for children to form healthy attachment bonds with professional in the field of education.

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