

Fostering a Village of Attachment in Schools

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This information was presented at the Neufeld Conference 2009 regarding what some schools are doing to foster a context of attachment and connectedness. The stories and ideas have been collected from teachers that have attended Dr. Neufeld's presentations, and are working at bringing this paradigm into their daily practices. Most stories come from Vancouver Island and the Metro Vancouver area.

We thank these educators for their willingness to share their ideas with us!

| | Collecting | Bridging | Matchmaking |
|------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Classroom | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - beach party at the beginning of the year - regular phone calls - welcoming in the morning - class meetings - morning games - breakfast with the teacher - morning temperature read activity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - website for class activities - regular phone calls - class meetings - farewell at the door - letter to students in the summer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introducing teacher on call - if possible, same teacher on call when teacher away - year end picnic with receiving teacher - regular phone calls - parents reading in classroom |
| School wide | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monday morning assemblies - welcoming students as they get to the school - transition to new year - school wide walk - noon hour clubs - camping trips | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teachers transition students to new teacher - welcoming in the morning - buddies - community involvement and mentoring - camping trips |
| Parents/Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - picnic for families - Monday assemblies - school walks - parenting courses at the school - regular meetings - potlucks/evening events - breakfast with elders - community volunteers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - regular meetings - potluck/evening events | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - potlucks for entire school to introduce teachers & community - community events (grandparents day, etc.) - parents reading in classroom - community members invited to come into school to mentor students - parenting courses - regular meetings - potluck/evening events - community volunteers |
| Teachers and Staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mentorship programs - soup day | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mentorship programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - soup day - mentorship programs |
| District Level | | | |
| Teacher Education | | | |
| At Risk Students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - welcoming late comers in the morning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - principal welcomes students back | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - recess supervision |

I. Classroom

1. Beach Party

A teacher in Courtenay does this every year. In the beginning of August, he sends out invitations to all the families of the children in his class. He invites them to a beach party the week before school starts. This provides him with an opportunity to meet his new students and their families in an informal setting.

2. Picnic at the end of the school year

The same teacher from Courtenay hosts an end of the year BBQ in his house at the end of the school year with his students, their families, and the receiving teacher(s).

3. Phone calls to parents with good news

This teacher created list and called 2-3 parents each night to tell them one thing that went well with their kids that day. Instead of waiting until he had 'bad' news, he made it a habit to have conversations with the parents of his students about what was going well, about his observations, and about what he was aiming for in the development of the children. This also gave him an opportunity to learn about what his students were experiencing at home.

4. Welcoming in the Morning or at the Beginning of Class

Kindergarten teachers are masters at this. Many master teachers do this on a regular basis. As the students come into their classroom, the teachers greet them by the door, often asking them how they are doing, and checking on something that they know about them to connect.

5. Class Meetings

Some hold these on a regular basis, some hold these as needed. Often sitting the students in a large circles, class meetings give an opportunity for students and teachers to connect. It provides the teacher with a great way to collect the students, to discuss current issues, to take a lead in something that may be going on, to script for students regarding upcoming events or experiences.

6. Morning Games

A teacher in Nanaimo starts her day with routine games and activities that collect the students. This gives her an opportunity to touch base with her students first thing in the morning to make sure that they have connected with her on a one-on-one. The students come into their classroom and immediately engage in prepared educational games. This time also allows for students who may arrive a bit late, or for a quick time to connect with the parents that may have delivered the students in the morning.

7. Breakfast in the Mornings

A teacher in an Alternate Education class in Courtenay starts her day by preparing breakfast for her students. Originally she had decided that she needed to position herself in an alpha position with her students, so she decided to start putting herself in the role of the provider. Soon after she had started this practice, parents and members from the aboriginal community where she teaches decided to join her in this venture. Every morning, they come to help her to prepare a meal for the children. They eat together, chat about their lives and themselves, clean up, and are ready to get on with their day and their learning. This teacher reports that the incidents of behaviour challenges in her class have significantly decreased since she started the breakfast ritual.

8. Taking Temperature in the Morning

A teacher in an inner city school starts her day by 'taking the temperature'. The students identify how they are doing on a scale of 0 to 10, and then share (if they want to) where they are at on their scale and why. This gives the teacher a good chance to get a sense of where her class is at, and to touch base with the students that are having troubles. Her educational assistant pays attention to this as well, and is available to chat on a one on one with the students.

9. Class Website

Often teachers use websites as a means of information about homework or a way to connect with the teacher. This can also be used as a way to connect students and parents to the life of the classroom. Teachers post upcoming events, themes or activities that the students are engaged in, newsletters, links to learning sites, greetings for students who may be away, and a place for students and parents to post comments and ideas.

10. Morning Reading Program with Parents

A teacher in Coquitlam, B.C. starts her day with a reading activity. Parents are invited to come in and volunteer every morning (whoever can come is always welcome) and spend a half an hour reading with students (their own kids and any of their friends). For that half hour, the classroom becomes a large living room with parents sitting on the floor cuddled up with children who are listening to stories. Children whose parents are not there are temporarily 'adopted' by parents who are there. Once the half hour is over, the teacher thanks the parents for coming, the students thank them and say their goodbyes, and then get on with their day.

11. Introducing Teacher on Call

In some districts, teachers can make requests for specific Teachers on Call (substitute teachers). Teachers will request the same TOC whenever possible (or schools), and will introduce the teacher to their students in anticipation of being away. I have seen teachers writing a letter to their students (placed in the TOC file) introducing the TOC to the students, and entrusting them

to him/her while away.

12. Farewell at the Door

At the end of the day, teachers may again stand at the door and say goodbye to the students, talking about something that they learned today or something that they will do tomorrow.

13. Letters to Students in the Summer

This teacher writes a letter during the year and sends it to the students during the summer.

II. School Wide

1. Monday Assemblies

Every Monday, the students and parents head into the gym at the beginning of the day. Teachers are there to collect the students so they can sit together as a class. Parents sit at the periphery of the gym with the staff. The principal is usually in charge of this meeting, welcoming the students, the staff and the parents back to school and introducing them to any upcoming events and information relevant for that week. This assembly is also an opportunity for the students to sing together, to see slide shows of their school, or to hear special presentations by peers or teachers. There is a quick check in for each class, and then a good wish for the week before the classes proceed to their own classrooms.

This assembly meets several needs. Support staff (student services teachers, counsellors and educational assistants) have a chance to quickly check in with at-risk students. Teachers are able to connect with parents. Any students that struggle with punctuality (this is an inner city) are not singled out, but are enfolded into the community as they enter the school.

2. Transitions to New Year

A school in Campbell River decided to spend the whole first week back to school setting up collecting, bridging and matchmaking routines. Students are assigned back to their former year's teacher, where they spend some time re-establishing their connections with the adults. At the end of the week, the teacher from the 'giving' class takes his students in small groups to the 'receiving' teacher and introduces them one by one to them. "This is so and so, he is very good at, he loves ... , etcetera."

3. Greetings in the Mornings

Another school in Campbell River decided to have their administration staff and teachers outside in the playground and the entrance of the school every morning before school starts. Students are welcomed as they arrive in the bus, and as they are dropped off by their parents. As the students arrive, the staff welcomes them to the school.

4. Buddies

As part of a school wide program called 'Project Hope', this school in Burnaby has orchestrated a number of hierarchical connections for their students. Students from the local secondary school come to the elementary school and are matched up with a buddy from the school. Often the matches are made based on interests or areas of strength. A school in Nanaimo has done the same, except that they have matched up the secondary student with one of the elementary 'at risk' kids. Some structure and training has been provided for the secondary students, who then lead their buddies through activities that are meant to enhance their connections and their areas of strength.

5. School Wide Walks - Walk Across Canada

A school in an inner city has introduced daily walks. Twenty minutes before recess, every student and staff member puts on their walking shoes and their coats, and sets out for a 2 kilometer walk. Classes walk together, chatting and sometimes singing together. Parents are invited to join on the walk, or to support this event by helping out at the crosswalks. Support Staff walk with classes and with students who may be on the fringe. Conversations take place while the whole school enjoys some fresh air and activity.

6. Secondary Schools create Smaller Communities (Educational Leadership)

A recent article in Educational Leadership described a wonderful practice instituted by a secondary school that was attempting to create opportunities for students to connect to the adults in the building. As a whole school, the school was divided into 'homerooms' (a practice that already exists in most schools) except that they chose to have this connection happen every day all year long. On Mondays, the students meet with their homeroom teacher and any upcoming events or announcements are discussed or clarified. On Tuesdays, the homeroom students meet with their homeroom teacher and engage in some kind of 'learning' activity (a learning strategy, something that can help them to become better learners). On Wednesdays and Thursdays, students are able to bring any work from any class and receive support from their homeroom teacher. And on Friday, the whole school engages in some kind of community activity as a whole school. If there are any concerns about a student (absenteeism, struggling academically, social issues, etc.) this information is passed on to the homeroom teacher who then looks after follow up on whatever is going on. It is the homeroom teacher who advocates for the child, who makes sure that the school community finds out about any particular or specific learning or social needs, and the one who touches base with the student on a regular basis.

7. Project Hope - Morley Elementary School

This elementary school in Burnaby has invited the whole community into building a village of attachment. In addition to running The Vital Connection courses on a regular basis, the teachers meet on a regular basis to collaborate and work together, the students are encouraged to participate in community building activities, and community members come into the school to support and connect with students. Teachers and community members receive regular opportunities for Professional Development and exposure to a developmental approach to nurturing children.

8. Noon Hour Clubs

Identifying that unstructured times can be the most challenging times for immature students, schools have organized noon hour clubs and activities so that the students are able to connect. Parents and community members, as well as teachers and school personnel are encouraged to sponsor these, sharing their skills and providing an opportunity for the students to connect with an adult (or with adults). Examples of these can be: craft groups, photography clubs, sports, games room, book clubs, etc.

9. Camping Trips

A Middle School in the Nanaimo area has a back to school camping trip early in the school year. Parents are encouraged to bring their children to the campground and help with the camping set up. Activities are organized for all students, who spend the two days camping with their teachers and any parent who is available. Parents are welcome to come (and stay or go) any time during the duration of the trip. Activities are designed so that the students can connect with the adults.

III. Parents and Community

1. Parenting Courses

Offering parenting courses (Vital Connection) during the day or during the evenings in the school is a great way to support families, and to bring about a common language regarding our children. One school offered it in the beginning of the year as part of the welcome to the school for parents of Kindergarten students. The course was offered at the same time as the students were in the school. Another school offered it in the evening, and enlisted some of the older students to look after the younger children while their parents were in the class. This is a great way to bring the community into the school. Teachers and staff personnel attended the courses as well, providing for a great way for parents to connect with the teachers and support staff.

2. Regular meetings

Meeting with parents on a regular basis is a common practice in many schools. It is a positive way of interacting and partnering with parents rather than reacting to problems. A great way to collect parents, to bridge the gap between breaks and staffing changes, and to match make with other school personnel or new staff coming in.

3. Phone calls to parents with good news

This teacher created list and called 2-3 parents each night to tell them one thing that went well with their kids that day. Instead of waiting until he had 'bad' news, he made it a habit to have conversations with the parents of his students about what was going well, about his observations, and about what he was aiming for in the development of the children. This also gave him an opportunity to learn about what his students were experiencing at home.

4. Potluck dinners/Special Evening Events for families

This school organizes potluck dinners for the whole community two to three times a year. After a meal shared together, there is a short presentation with students performing, any new staff introduced, programs from the school presented, and so on. The key is the invitation to come and become part of the school community. Events may also include craft nights, science nights, math nights, etc.

5. Community Agencies and Schools

An inner city group of school and agencies identified that they needed to work together as a community. The school building was accessed during the day by the school, and in the evening was used by community agencies. Mental Health practitioners, and social services offices were housed in the school property as well, with social workers assigned to specific schools and their communities as well. As a result, personnel and families came to know each other and to be able to work together in support of the families. Parenting groups, counselling sessions, evening classes, all occurred in the same building - which became a real community center.

6. Breakfast with Elders

A teacher in an Alternate Education class in Courtenay starts her day by preparing breakfast for her students. Originally she had decided that she needed to position herself in an alpha position with her students, so she decided to start putting herself in the role of the provider. Soon after she had started this practice, parents and members from the aboriginal community where she teaches decided to join her in this venture. Every morning, they come to help her to prepare a meal for the children. They eat together, chat about their lives and themselves, clean up, and are ready to get on with their day and their learning. This teacher reports that the incidents of behaviour challenges in her class have significantly decreased since she started the breakfast ritual.

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IV. Teachers and Staff

1. Mentorship Programs

New teachers entering the profession or taking on a new role are matched up with more experienced teachers in the school, or in the district. This provides for great conversations, for a sense of safety, and for a sense of support as the new teachers develop their skills. Under the leadership of one of the vice-principals and faculty members from the local university, a school in Nanaimo is currently organizing a series of workshops and sessions for new teachers in the

community in order to provide them with a sense of support and belonging as they enter the teaching profession.

2. Soup Day

Teachers in this school took turns making a big pot of soup once a week for the entire staff. A meal is shared, and conversation around the table is facilitated by the administrator and head teacher.

C. muffin meetings

1. Monday morning meetings

2. teachers come, have coffee and muffins together and share ideas/projects/celebrations in their classrooms

D. food

E. ProD days

F. collaboration times

G. debriefing

V. District

A. Summer Institutes

B. Alberni Cohort

C. action research groups (Nanaimo)

D. ProD presentations

E. alternate FBA/IEPs and Safety Plans that honor attachment vs. behaviour challenges

VI. At Risk Students

1. Recess Supervision

2. Transitions to new school year

3. Class organization

4. Safety Plans and Individualized Educational Plans

D. class assignments

1. student services generates list of at risk students with some basic descriptions about them

2. descriptions are shared with teachers
3. teachers choose at risk students to be in their classrooms for the following year
4. rest of class lists generated (drafts)
5. teachers have summer to plan/think about how they will include and support student
6. student invited to visit teacher week before school starts

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