The Nature of Relationships Between Young Children and Their Secondary Caregiver

In a Childcare Center Classroom

by

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Abstract

Children’s relationships with their childcare teachers and its effects on their subsequent behaviors, attachments, and outcomes have been an interest in the last two or three decades primarily due to the significant increase of young children in full-time childcare. Attachment Theory, and its identifying behaviors in children categorized by the Strange Situation or the Attachment Q-Sort, has been the main focus of previous research. The purpose of my study, using an ethnographic approach, was to understand and describe the varied and multiple relationships between children (approximate ages 12 to 24 months) and their childcare teacher in their day-to-day interactions.

Observations were my primary source of data, supported by videotaped sessions, and parent and teacher interviews. My focus was on secondary caregiver-child dyads, their relationships, and the parameters and identifying behaviors characterizing each pair. Data collection took place over an eight-week period in one toddler center classroom where I was a passive participant observer.

Results indicated the children had warm, nurturing relationships, often with multiple caregivers, without the prevailing attachment behaviors. My research did not support the customary categorization of childcare relationships using the attachment paradigm, nor an increase in the insecure-avoidant category among children in full-time childcare. Evidence suggested, instead, a broader base of relationship descriptions, and a future development of a multiple caregiver model analogous to the extended family for understanding the varied relationships within a childcare center setting.
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