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Teacher-Child Relationships in Early Childhood Classrooms

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Teacher-Child Relationships in Early Childhood Classrooms

Abstract

The purpose of this review was to evaluate the existing evidence of child and teacher relationships in early childhood settings on children's academic performance. Relationships were examined between parent and child, childcare provider and child, and teacher and child. Parent-child and teacher-child relationships are interrelated. The relationships interact with one another and influence the way a child develops. Children found with quality parent and teacher relationships were better able to concentrate, explore the environment, and ask adults for help. Research also found that quality activities in the classroom promoted strong teacher-child relationships. Two types of instruction, direct instructions and child-centered, were consistently used within the classroom and helped to foster teacher-child relationships resulting in a child's academic success.

Teacher-Child Relationships in Early Childhood Classrooms

A Graduate Review of Literature

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this review was to evaluate the existing evidence of child and teacher relationships in early childhood settings on children's academic performance. Relationships were examined between parent and child, childcare provider and child, and teacher and child. Parent-child and teacher-child relationships are interrelated. The relationships interact with one another and influence the way a child develops. Children found with quality parent and teacher relationships were better able to concentrate, explore the environment, and ask adults for help. Research also found that quality activities in the classroom promoted strong teacher-child relationships. Two types of instruction, direct instructions and child-centered, were consistently used within the classroom and helped to foster teacher-child relationships resulting in a child's academic success.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Encarta Dictionary (n.d.) of North America defines a *relationship* as the “connection between two or more people or groups and their involvement with one another, especially as regards to the way they behave toward and feel about one another” (p. 284). People form relationships in all aspects of their lives: home, work, church, and school, to name just a few (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Some relationships can be simple or even temporary while others can last a lifetime. Each relationship is strengthened or weakened by the interactions between the people involved. These interactions can occur in a variety of ways and begin at a person’s birth.

In infancy *attachments* (relationships seeking comfort and security) are created initially with parents and continue to develop as a child begins to interact with people outside of his or her home (O’Connor & McCartney, 2007). These attachments continue to develop in the early childhood classroom and include the caregiver or teacher in a childcare or school setting (Barnett & Vondra, 1999). The effects of these early relationships can have positive and negative outcomes in later school experiences. The teacher or caregiver plays an important role in these outcomes by the relationship formed with the child (Howes & Hamilton, 1992). The teacher-child relationship is strengthened by the number of positive interactions that occur each day in the classroom. O’Connor and McCartney (2007) noted that the frequency and nature of teacher-child interactions were potent indicators of children’s academic success.

The role of the early childhood teacher is multidimensional (Howes & Hamilton, 1992). She/He must not only form a relationship with each child, but also create a

classroom environment that supports positive social experiences between teacher and child and amongst peers (Pianta, LaParo, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002). Throughout this paper existing evidence is discussed to show the effects of these relationships on a child's future academic performance.

Rationale

A child's first relationship is formed with his/her parents. John Bowlby developed the attachment theory. He looked at the "significant roles played by interaction with parents in the development of a child's personality" (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1991, p. 333). These interactions began at infancy and were carried on as a child developed. Ainsworth (1991) established that children, at an early age, were curious about the world around them and wanted to explore and learn about it. At times this exploration and curiosity can be frightening. Children rely on their parents to comfort and make them feel secure. In a childcare setting this sense of security is provided by caregivers and enables children a base to explore and learn more about the world around them. Research has found that these attachment relationships can also extend outside of the home.

Howes and Hamilton, in their research on childcare teacher's interactions with children found "most North American children now experience some form of childcare, a family day-care home, a childcare center, or a part-day or part-week preschool prior to entering formal school" (1992b, p. 872). For these young children, child care teachers played more than a teaching role; they functioned as playmate, manager, and caregiver (Howes & Hamilton, 1992b). When parents left their children at daycare they told them they would be taken care of by the teacher in their absence. The teachers also felt they were substituting for the parents while they were away. Howes and Hamilton (1992a) felt

the study of caregiver-child relationships for children in child care provided an opportunity to extend understandings of children's development of relationships with adults.

The ways children learn to cope with social environments in their early school experiences "...are important factors in establishing a trajectory of academic and behavioral performance. Many studies have shown that students who are able to successfully navigate these early social environments will have more success in school" (Hamre & Pianta, 2001, p. 627). Upon entering school, the relationship between teacher and child played an important role in shaping children's school experiences. Teachers were responsible for not only facilitating academic growth but also for regulating activity level, communication, peer contacts, and behavioral supports. The various roles in which the teacher took part created opportunities for different types of interactions between the students and him or herself. These relationships are an important factor in children's school performance. O'Connor and McCartney (2007) found "High quality teacher-child relationships fostered children's achievement. There were three main findings" (p. 345). Quality teacher-child relationships promoted high academic achievement, positive classroom behaviors, and safeguarded children from insecure attachments (O'Connor & McCartney, 2007).

Purpose of Review

The purpose of this review was to evaluate the existing evidence of the effects of child and teacher relationships in early childhood settings on children's academic performance. The bond between a teacher and child can have a large impact on a student's academic success. At the end of each school year a teacher may reflect on the bond he/she had with

each student, some being stronger than others. He/She may wonder what she did that was beneficial and the changes she might need to make. Through researching teacher-child relationships I hoped to learn strategies and classroom characteristics I could apply to a kindergarten program. I wanted to strengthen my bond with each student and assist him/her in becoming more successful both academically and as persons.

Importance of Review

Classroom characteristics and strategies have been identified in the classroom environment through reviewing available research that is important in creating relationships between teachers and students. The development of such relationships increases the likelihood of a child's successful academic performance. Information provided in this review of research can have a positive impact on the early childhood classroom including the teacher, students, and families.

Terminology

1. *Attachments*: "Attachments are powerful emotional relationships within which children seek comfort and safety" (Connor & McCartney, 2007, p. 343).
2. *Attachment theory*: "A procedure and theory for describing and explaining individual differences in infant attachments to caregivers" (Barnett & Vondra, 1999, p. 3).
3. *Childcare*: "A regularly scheduled out-of-home arrangement that included at least one other child" (Howes & Hamilton, 1992a, p. 862).
4. *Contextual Systems Model (CSM)*: "Systems are an organized set of interrelated components each of which serves a function in relation to the activity of the whole system" (Pianta & Walsh, 1996, p. 65).

5. *Quality*: “A term that refers to classroom-level variables that presumably affect children’s development” (Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002, p. 233).

6. *Relationships*: “The connection between two or more people or groups and their involvement with one another, especially as regards the way they behave toward and feel about one another” (Encarta, n.d., p. 284).

Research Questions

The literature review examined studies of teacher-child relationships and their correlation to academic success for children in preschool and kindergarten. The following questions were considered:

1. What academic advantages are evident for children to have a high quality relationship with their teacher?
2. What characteristics are important in the classroom environment to create strong relationships between teachers and students?
3. What types of instructional strategies affect relationships within the classroom and create teacher-child interactions resulting in a child’s successful academic performance?

Chapter 2

Methodology

Method to Locate Sources

The majority of sources for this review were found using electronic data bases such as JSTOR, ERIC, Psyc ARTICLES, or PsycINFO, as well as citations within each study. A majority of the literature for teacher-child relationships was found on JSTOR, while many educational methods articles were found using ERIC. Most articles were retrieved electronically; some were sent through the Rod Interlibrary Loan program for distance learners accessed through the University of Northern Iowa. Other articles were obtained at the University of Nebraska at Omaha library. Many articles were located using descriptors including *team teaching* and *co-teaching*, *constructivist*, *child-centered*, *teacher-child relationships and teacher-child interactions*, and *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)*.

Several authors, including Howes and Hamilton (1991a, 1991b), Pianta and Hamre (2001), and La Paro and Pianta (2002, 2004) were referenced in many articles. These authors conducted many studies in the area of teacher-child interactions and classroom practices in early childhood classrooms including kindergarten and first grade. A search of their names brought up a number of articles.

Method to Select Sources

There was an abundance of information about parent and child relationships and relationships of children and childcare teachers. Some of the studies by Bowlby and Ainsworth (1991) needed to be included to give background information for more recent studies. Many researchers created their studies based on Ainsworth and Bowlby's work.

Most articles pertained to early childhood programs. I added the descriptors *kindergarten* and *first grade* to narrow my search. To keep the research reviewed current I included studies and articles that were published in the last 10 years except for the Ainsworth and Bowlby studies, which were completed 18 years ago. There were a limited number of studies available related to kindergarten and first grade classrooms, so the age levels for this review were extended to include preschool. A few studies about attachments from birth through age three were included to give a history of relationships and interactions prior to children entering school.

Procedures to Analyze Sources

After reading and locating sources, annotated bibliographies were written for each study. The bibliographies included a summary, research questions, research design, results, and implications. Bibliographies were grouped in like categories and then compared and contrasted by research question. Trends and similar themes were also recognized. Procedures, participants, and results from the studies were then analyzed.

Criteria to Include Literature

The criteria established to review literature for the study included studies written in the last 18 years. Most studies were found in peer-reviewed journals. The participants in the studies ranged in age from birth to seven years with a majority being preschoolers, kindergarteners, or first graders. Some secondary sources were found in research articles and used to support this review.

Chapter 3

Review of Literature

A child's first relationship is formed between parent and child. As children develop, they begin to interact with other adults outside of the home and begin to form new relationships. Different types of relationships will be discussed in this review showing specific characteristics of teachers and classroom environments that create strong relationships between both teachers and students. In addition, the types of instructional strategies used within preschool, kindergarten, and first grade classrooms that have positive effects on teacher-child interactions will be examined, specifically looking at those that result in a child's successful academic performance.

To fully understand the relationships formed between teacher and child you must gain some background knowledge on children's first relationship, which is their relationship with their parents. This parent-child relationship can have lasting effects on children's later relationships and especially their academic success. O'Connor and McCartney (2007) said: "The association between supportive relationships with parents, especially mothers, and children's achievement is a robust finding in developmental psychology" (p. 340).

Pianta and Walsh (1996) created the Contextual Systems Model (CSM) to examine children's development within various systems. "Systems are an organized set of interrelated components; each of which serves a function in relation to the activity of the whole system" (Pianta & Walsh, 1996, p. 65). Factors within each system interact with one another to influence child development. Thus, the effects of a factor in one system

may be influenced by factors in another system. O'Connor and McCartney (2007)

discussed the following:

Four of the systems, in order of proximity to the child, are the individual child, family, classroom, and culture. Relationships are central to this model. At the core of the family system are parent-child relationships, and at the core of the classroom systems is [sic] a teacher-child and peer relationship. (p. 342)

A brief history of research on each of these factors and achievement follows. The remainder of this review examined teacher-child relationships.

Parent-Child Relationships

Typically parents are a child's first relationship. These relationships have a great influence on the child that are fostered or hindered by the type of attachment formed starting at birth.

The Child

Reynolds (1991) developed a study that looked at first and second year reading and math achievement and socio-emotional maturity of low income, minority children.

Reynolds (1991) found the following:

Major results indicated that cognitive readiness in kindergarten had pervasive indirect effects on first- and second-year outcomes and those variables directly alterable by families and schools — pre-kindergarten experience, motivation, mobility, and parent involvement—significantly influenced either directly or indirectly early school outcomes. (p. 392)

Child cognitive ability, behavior problems, and gender were linked to achievement.

Reynolds found that strong correlations existed between children's early cognitive ability

and later performance on tests of achievement (1991). Behavior problems, on the other hand, were associated with low levels of achievement in elementary school. "Children with behavioral problems showed lower levels of achievement because of their perception of difficulties interacting with others in the classroom, which results in their learning less from educational experiences than those without behavioral problems" (Pianta, 1999, p. 152).

Hamre and Pianta (2001) looked at a sample of 179 children (out of an original group of 436) from kindergarten to eighth grade "... to examine the extent to which kindergarten teachers' perceptions of their relationships with students predict a range of school outcomes" (p. 625). Two rating scales were used to collect information from kindergarten teachers (in May of that school year) concerning children's behavior and the quality of the teacher-child relationship. The Teacher-Child Rating Scale (TCRS) (Hightower et al., 1986) "... is a 38 item teacher reported rating scale of children's classroom behavior" (p. 628). The Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) (Pianta, 1992) "... is a 28-item rating scale, using a Likert-type format, designed to assess teachers' perception of their relationships of a particular student" (p. 628). Kindergarten teachers completed a STRS for every child in their classroom. Follow up data from first through eighth grade were organized by epoch and included academic grades, standardized test scores, work-habit ratings, and discipline records.

Mother-Child Relationships

Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991) provided seminal research concerning the relationship between mother or caregiver and child. They conducted extensive observations of the interactions between mother and child. *Attachment Theory* created from this research, is a

very well known "... procedure and theory for describing and explaining individual differences in infant attachments to caregivers" (Barnett & Vondra, 1999, p. 3). Bowlby (1958) proposed that a baby's attachment was first shown through an assortment of behaviors that developed within the first few months of life. The mother (or primary caregiver) was the focus. An infant's repertoire included sucking, crying, smiling, clinging, and following. Bowlby found the last two most important. "He also discussed how these behaviors were activated and terminated, at first independently before an attachment was formed, but afterward as organized together toward the attachment figure" (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991, p. 5). He regarded the attachment behavior as a major component of human behavior.

Mothers of babies who were considered securely attached promptly responded to their infants' crying early in life (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). By the middle of the first year, infants demonstrated signs of attachment because they showed distress when their mothers left the room (separation anxiety). Babies who were securely attached built up an image of their mothers when they were not there. These babies believed their mothers were still available, even though they could not see them (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). They were able to gradually adjust to their mothers' absence more so than insecurely attached babies. Securely attached babies were also more likely to welcome their mothers back with a smile or tears (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

O'Connor and McCartney (2007) felt children develop specific types of relationships with their mothers in the first years of life. "Attachments are powerful emotional relationships within which children seek comfort and safety" (O'Connor & McCartney, 2007, p. 343). In O'Connor and McCartney's (2007) study they looked at the correlation

between the quality of teacher-child relationships from preschool through third grade and third grade student achievement. There were three main findings.

First, positive associations were found between quality of teacher-child relationships and achievement. Second, high quality teacher-child relationships buffered children from the negative effects of insecure or other maternal attachments on achievement. Third, the effect of teacher-child relationships on achievement was mediated through child and teacher behaviors in the classroom. In sum, high quality teacher-child relationships fostered children's achievement.

(p. 340)

Culture

Associations have been found between children's culture and academic achievement. Brooks-Gunn, Klebanov, and Duncan (1996) found that European Americans were more likely to outperform African American and Latino American peers on achievement tests throughout school years. Two major factors contributed to their findings; many more black (and Hispanic) families had income below the US poverty line (than white families) and black children tended to live in poor neighborhoods whether or not they were poor themselves. Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, and Klebanov (1994) also found "... five year old children's IQs were found to be higher in neighborhoods with greater concentrations of affluent neighbors, while the prevalence of low income neighbors tends to increase incidence of internalizing behavioral problems" (p. 296). Some solutions Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, and Klebanov (1996) considered were to create policies that reduced the number of people living in poverty. Also, they felt programs needed to be developed that would teach low income mothers skills to enter the job market and move

to higher paying jobs and that these programs needed to focus on supporting the family. Lastly, they found that high quality preschool programs needed to be available to poor children to “enhance children’s developmental outcomes” (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, p. 405).

Teacher-Child Relationships

The quality of relationships between the teacher and child play an important role in a child’s academic success. In the next section, I looked at the many factors that impact the relationships formed in the classroom and how they affect students’ behaviors in the classroom. The review will begin with relationships between teachers and infants, followed by teachers and preschoolers, and then kindergarten and first grade students and teachers.

Childcare Providers and Infants

As stated previously a child’s first attachment is with his/her mother and/or parents. However, parents work and require care for their children outside of their home. Howes and Hamilton (1992 a, 1992b) found most children experience some type of childcare: a childcare center, preschool, or home daycare. For young children, especially infants and toddlers, teachers are more than just educators. In addition to teacher, they play the roles of playmate, manager, and caregiver. This provided many opportunities for researchers to study children’s relationships with adults.

Howes and Hamilton (1992b) had a longitudinal sample of 72 children who were followed from infancy through preschool. They examined caregiving relationships of children enrolled in childcare. They were especially interested in the stability of parent-child and teacher-child relationships over time. Researchers observed children five times

and assessed their relationships with parents and teachers. Howes and Hamilton (1992b) demonstrated the following results

Maternal attachment as assessed by using the Strange Situation, four-year-old reunion behavior, and the Attachment Q-Set (Waters & Deane, 1985), was stable across time. Children's teacher-child relationship quality, as measured by the Attachment Q-Set (Waters & Dean, 1985), was stable if the teacher remained the same. (p. 867)

"After thirty months of age, relationship quality with teachers remained stable regardless of whether or not the teacher changed" (Howes & Hamilton, 1992b, p. 869). By using the Attachment Q-Set to assess relationships Howes and Hamilton (1992a) were able to categorize the relationships into three categories: secure, avoidant, and ambivalent.

Items differentiating secure relationships include not expecting adult to be unresponsive, spontaneous check-in to adult, and not easily angry with adult.

Items differentiating avoidant relationships include unaware of adult location changes, no physical contact with adult, expects adult to be unresponsive. Items differentiating ambivalent relationships include demanding and impatient, distressed social interaction, and cries often. (p. 862)

The researchers found the majority of children in the study had secure relationships with both mother and teacher. The secure children in the study had a teacher who fostered security in the child care setting and at least one secure parental attachment. "Only a small number of children were insecure with both mother and teacher" (Howes & Hamilton, 1992b, pp. 876-877). It was suggested that the parents of these children might

not provide a nurturing home environment, which, in turn, might make it difficult for them to choose an appropriate daycare setting.

The preschool setting

Kontos, Burchinal, Howes, Wisseh, and Galinsky (2002) found children were more likely to thrive in a preschool setting that had certain characteristics. Their research and others (Howes & Smith, 1995, Kontos & Keyes, 1999) have shown that children's classroom experiences should include activities in which children are interacting with teachers. Students should be engaged in creative and *high yield activities* (Kontos et al., 2002, p. 242) such as blocks, dramatic play, and open-ended art activities. "High yield activities elicit more competent or complex children's behavior" (Kontos et al., 2002, p. 242). Howes and Smith (1995) also supported this finding by demonstrating "that children's cognitive competence was predicted by participation in creative activities" (Kontos et al., 2002, p. 242). An eco-behavioral study by Kontos and Keyes (1999) of 225 four year old children from 61 classrooms in 46 centers in Hawaii demonstrated that activity was the best predictor of cognitive competence (dramatic play was the activity where complex cognitive play was most likely to be displayed). These activities allowed children to be creative, to socialize, and to be highly engaged thus creating more meaningful interactions between teacher and child. A study by Goncu and Weber (2000) suggested that children are more likely to interact with the teacher when they are engaged in a teacher directed activity rather than in free play.

The amount of involvement a teacher has in the activities he/she creates affects the classroom environment. A study by Kontos et al. (2002) suggested that teachers emphasize creative activities in the classroom and regulate their interactions with

children depending upon the activity (making the interactions more deliberate and meaningful). Their "... results demonstrated that more complex interactions with objects were more likely to take place in activities that place greater cognitive demands on the child (i.e., creative activities) rather than gross motor, language arts, or manipulative activities" (Kontos et al. 2002, p. 253).

Goncu and Weber (2000) observed preschool children during free choice time in the classroom. They looked at how "... children's classroom activities and interactions varied according to the power structure of their relationships" (Goncu & Weber, 2000, p. 93). The three categories of interactions were proximity (child was near teacher but did not interact with her), watching (the child looks at teacher but does not interact), and partner presence (direct communication with teacher at least two times). The interactions between teacher and child involved two types of activities: play (engagement for the purpose of having fun) or problem-solving (child and teacher worked together to perform a specific task). Goncu and Weber (2000) coded the different types of interactions students had with teachers and peers and in what activity they were participating. They then looked at patterns amongst the interactions, and then broke them into three categories: management (purpose for framing the activity), assistance (always occurred after an activity was chosen), and collaboration (child and teacher participated as equals).

The findings of the present study support our expectation that preschool children's activities and interactions are influenced by the relative power in their relationships. Teacher-child activities in which children have less power differed from child-peer activities, with the main difference occurring in play. (Goncu & Weber, 2000, p. 103)

Teacher-child interactions occurred more often in problem-solving activities. The teachers Goncu and Weber (2000) interviewed believed that their job was to educate autonomous children and to provide opportunities for them to become problem solvers. "It is clear that teachers assumed the responsibility of structuring children's classroom life by guiding them towards the activities that were available for them" (Goncu & Weber, 2002, p.104). They also found interactions between teacher and child involved more management and assistance and more collaboration with peers.

The kindergarten classroom

As children enter kindergarten, the focus changes academically. From infancy, teachers have concentrated on developing children's social and cognitive development. As mentioned earlier, this involved learning through a variety of activities based around play. In kindergarten, the shift for learning steers away from play and begins to be more focused on academics. For some children this is appropriate, but for others it can be stressful, so the role of the teacher is very important to help children begin their academic journey successfully.

Pianta, LaParo, Payne, Cox, and Bradley (2002), in their study of 200 kindergarten students in three states, found that kindergarten classrooms vary greatly, and there were no typical classrooms. A variety of teaching strategies were observed ranging from teacher-directed instruction to center activities. Teacher-child interactions were also varied. Some teachers only interacted with students as a part of the whole class while others were a part of small group or one on one interaction (Pianta et al., 2002). The teachers in their study completed end of the year reports on a targeted child's social and academic performance. Results from observations and student reports from teachers

found "... ratings of qualitative dimensions of the classroom environment depicted two central dimensions of the classroom setting: an emotional child-centered dimension of the classroom climate, and an instructional dimension" (Pianta et al., 2002, p. 235).

Child-centered classrooms allowed children more choices and had a more positive and supportive feeling amongst peers and teacher and child. Hamre and Pianta (2001) also found that "... children with significant behavioral problems, were able to develop relationships with kindergarten teachers marked by low levels of negativity, were in turn more likely to avoid future behavioral difficulties than their peers who had high negativity ratings" (Hamre & Pianta, 2001, p. 632). These classrooms were more consistent with the principles of developmentally appropriate settings. Classrooms with more of an instructional base had more interactions centered around instruction and feedback focusing on improving performance (Pianta et al., 2002). Classrooms with an instructional base "... related positively to concurrent on-task behavior, reflecting the association between a teacher's involvement in a task and the child's involvement" (Pianta et al., 2002, p. 236).

Other indicators within quality classrooms promote quality teacher-child relationships. Pianta, LaParo, Payne, Cox, and Bradley (2002) studied 1364 children from infancy to sixth grade and found teacher-child ratio, not class size, was a characteristic of quality teacher-child relationships. A higher teacher-child ratio indicated more frequent and meaningful contacts between teachers and students.

O'Connor and McCartney (2007) observed children at 6, 15, 24, 36, and 54 months of age and in first and third grade in the Strange Situation. The Strange Situation is a 22 minute laboratory assessment divided into eight short episodes. It is designed to be a

naturalistic experience but also stressful as to create a range of emotions in a child. In this study each observation was videotaped. They found that all age groups of children in the study “acquire skills and knowledge through participation in the classroom and engagement of the activities” (p. 345). They also found caregivers and teachers that were supportive and gave guidance to students enhanced their academic achievement.

O’Connor and McCartney (2007) “hypothesized that teacher-child relationships influenced academic achievement through child and teacher behaviors” (p. 345). Students with quality teacher relationships were better able to communicate in instructional communications, concentrate, take risks academically, and use the teacher for support. “Children with higher quality relationships demonstrated higher levels of classroom engagement than children with low quality relationships. Higher levels of engagement were associated with higher levels of achievement” (O’Connor & McCartney, 2007, p. 356). The negative side is that teachers spent more time with low achieving students because they needed assistance and the high achieving students did not receive as much of the teacher’s time, so they experienced less academic success.

Fostering teacher-child relationships can be an extra challenge for a teacher in the classroom. DeVries and Zan (1994) believed time must be spent developing these relationships to make a teacher more effective in encouraging academics. They referenced Piaget (1932/1965) and his research in teacher-child relationships. DeVries and Zan noted two moralities: heteronomy and autonomy. The principle of heteronomy is based on following someone else’s rules, and autonomy is based on children becoming self regulated. Heteronomy rules are “... accepted and followed without question” (DeVries & Zan, p. 46). Autonomous rules allow a child to feel a need and personal

connection to the rules and that they are necessary. Each of these types of moralities can have adverse and positive results in the area of children's academic success. DeVries and Zan said that "... emphasis on obedience fosters self doubt" (p. 252). This obedience can give children an educational experience that is "reflected in a passive orientation to the ideas of others, an unquestioning and uncritical attitude, and low motivation to reason" (DeVries & Zan, p. 252). "When the adult respects the child's reasoning and provides extensive opportunities for exploration and experimentation, intellectual sharpness results." (DeVries & Zan, p. 253).

A child's first relationship is formed with his or her parents. As a child grows he or she begins to form new relationships with people outside of the home. Attachments continue to develop as children enter a childcare/preschool setting and continues throughout their school experiences with childcare providers and teachers. The effects of these relationships over time can have negative and positive outcomes in later school experiences.

Barnett and Vondra (1999) looked at past research from Bowlby (1988), Ainsworth and Wittig (1969), and Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978). All studies used the Strange Situation (explained in detail in a study previously mentioned by O'Connor and McCartney, 2007) and how it correlates to the Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1959), and the patterns of attachment observed in each study. Barnett and Vondra then divided the patterns into three categories: secure, avoidant, and resistant. They and the other researchers they were reviewing (Bowlby, 1988, Ainsworth & Wittig, 1969, Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) found that a small percentage of infants did not fit perfectly into the three categories; they called these atypical attachment patterns (Barnett

& Vondra, 1999). The importance of Barnett and Vondras' review relating to this paper is that they believed attachment relationships were long lasting.

Attachments developed in the context of relationships, but became internalized so that beyond infancy they increasingly become characteristic of the individual, referring to the mental bond that is maintained as part of a person's mental schema. These mental schemata are based on the history of interactions with one's attachment figure. (Barnett & Vondra p. 6)

Adult-child relationships are multifaceted. As the review of research throughout this paper has shown adult-child relationships are multifaceted. These relationships begin at infancy and continue throughout a child's school and life experiences. Depending upon the type of relationship formed they can have negative or positive influences on a child that can last a lifetime. So parents, childcare providers, and teachers must take time to form quality relationships with children. Teachers must choose their roles carefully because they carry a tremendous weight upon their shoulders.

Chapter 4

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The purpose of this review was to answer the three research questions about the effects of child and teacher relationships in early childhood settings on children's academic performance. This was done through the evaluation of existing evidence. The three questions answered were the following: (a) What academic advantages are evident for children to have a high quality relationship with their teacher? (b) What characteristics are important in the classroom environment to create strong relationships between teachers and students? and (c) What types of instructional strategies affect relationships within the classroom and create teacher-child interactions resulting in a child's successful academic performance?

Through reviewing research I have found many conclusions. Research has shown that there are many advantages for children who have quality relationships with their teacher. Teacher-child relationships are influenced by the relationships a child has formed with his or her parents. The relationship a child forms with his/her parents can have lasting effects on a child's later relationships and especially his or her academic success (McCartney & O'Connor, 2007). McCartney and O'Connor (2007) found children with parents who were supportive and available, comforting, and able to make them feel secure had higher levels of achievement. They found children with these types of relationships were better able to concentrate, explore the environment, and ask adults for assistance in an educational setting.

Parent-child and teacher-child relationships are interrelated. The relationships interact with one another and influence the way a child develops. The effects of one relationship may be influenced by what is happening in the other. Pianta and Walsh's (1996) Contextual Systems Model (CSM) was developed to examine a child's development within the individual child, family, school, and culture. Reynolds (1991) also found that "... a child's preschool experience, parent involvement, mobility, and motivation significantly influenced either directly or indirectly early school outcomes" (p. 392). He also found strong correlations between children's early cognitive ability and later performance on achievement test scores. Behavior problems, on the other hand, were linked to low levels of achievement in elementary school (Reynolds, 1991). These children felt they were unable to interact with others in the classroom, thus less learning occurred.

Research also found characteristics that were important in the classroom environment to create strong relationships between teacher and child. A consistent finding was that teachers should be interacting with students in quality activities. Teachers need to emphasize activities in which the children are creative so that more complex interactions take place between themselves and the child (Kontos et al., 2002). These activities allowed children to be imaginative, more social, and highly engaged, thus creating more meaningful interactions between teacher and child. Goncu and Weber (2000) also found that children were more likely to interact with the teacher when they were engaged in teacher directed activities rather than free play. Kontos et al. (2002) also agreed that activities should be deliberate and meaningful. Goncu and Weber (2000)

found that most interactions between teacher and child took place during problem solving activities.

Through research, two types of instruction were consistently used within the classroom that helped to foster teacher-child relationships resulting in a child's academic success. Pianta, LaParo, Payne, Cox, and Bradley (2002) found there was not a typical kindergarten classroom; yet they saw a wide variety of strategies used by teachers. The strategies ranged from direct instruction to center activities. Some rooms were child-centered and others were instructionally based. Hamre and Pianta (2001) found that child-centered classrooms allowed children to have more choices and created a more supportive environment and positive feelings amongst the members. Instructionally based classrooms had more on-task behavior and teacher-child interactions that were based on instruction and feedback. Teacher-child interactions were also diverse. Teachers interacted with students in large and small groups and sometimes one on one (Pianta et al., 2002).

Identify and synthesize insights

Through my review of research I have found that relationships are formed in every aspect of a person's life beginning at birth. These relationships all intertwine and can help build up a person's future and create opportunities, or they can weigh a person down and place more obstacles in their way.

As a teacher I want to create quality relationships with my students so they can not only be successful in school, but also in life. Research has shown that various relationships (parent-child, culture-child) can affect the teacher and child's relationship. So I must try to offer numerous opportunities to help children understand that I support

them and am available. I also need to provide a classroom environment in which children feel safe physically and emotionally. By creating a classroom with these characteristics, I will be allowing children to take risks, learn from their mistakes, and to become critical thinkers and problem solvers.

Deliberate and meaningful interactions and *high yield* [italics added] (Kontos et al., 2002) activities are a central part of the educational experiences needed to promote quality teacher-child interactions. Teachers need to instruct in an environment that fits their teaching style and personality yet meets the needs of all students. So, my early childhood classroom needs to have a balance of child-centered and direct instruction activities. Children need to be allowed to play during part of the day in centers and recess so they are able to interact and socialize with peers while still getting explicit instruction in the core academic areas (mathematics, language arts, social studies, science, and health). Instruction needs to occur in large and small groups and one on one when needed.

Recommendations

The most important recommendation for teachers and administrators that I believe would have lasting effects on students in the classroom would be in regard to time. Teachers and students should be given time throughout the school year to build a classroom community without sacrificing academic learning. By forming an environment in which students and teachers are allowed to get to know each other, opportunities will be created for them to learn from one another and to gain that sense of security and self worth. This will enable them to be comfortable to take risks in their learning without worrying that their work and opinion are not valued. This type of environment should

lend itself to forming quality teacher-child relationships. Goncu and Weber (2000) also had an interesting finding that suggested that “children who entered kindergarten with behavior problems ... benefited from a positive classroom environment and were more likely to avoid future behavior problems” (p. 19).

Future projects and research

I would like to see more studies done in which specific characteristics and strategies are identified to create early childhood classroom communities that encouraged quality teacher-child relationships. I would like the emphasis of the studies to involve kindergarten classrooms rather than preschool settings due to the large academic shift between the two classrooms. The focus shifts from play based in preschool (or home) to all academic areas in kindergarten. This can be quite an adjustment for many children and families.

Educational policies

From my review of research I have learned that it is not class size that affects the quality of teacher-child relationships but rather the teacher-child ratio. I have always been a supporter of smaller class sizes, especially in early childhood. Most preschool classrooms have one teacher and at least one associate. In kindergarten there is typically one teacher and a teacher associate that is in the classroom for a half an hour per day, in addition to, lunch and recess. I feel policy makers and school districts need to pay more attention to keeping the teacher-child ratios lower in kindergarten (and early childhood).

I sometimes sense that children and parents are in shock the first quarter of the kindergarten year. After that first conference parents can seem overwhelmed upon hearing the benchmarks their child must accomplish each quarter. I am aware that there

are demands upon the state government to be accountable for each child's learning. I take responsibility for teaching the curriculum to each child in a way that meets their learning style and needs. But academic expectations need to be examined regularly to learn if they are developmentally appropriate for children at that grade level, and then adjusted as needed.

Teacher practices of self and others

Teacher-child relationships are important. These relationships may only last a school year (or sometimes more) but have a big impact on a child's academic life. This review of research has made me more aware of the power and influence I have as a teacher, not only in the role of teaching the required curriculum to each student, but also in the way I can affect his or her self perception, work ethic, and social skills. Even though I may consider my relationship with each student to be temporary (nine months), the effects of these relationships can have positive and negative results that last a lifetime.

There are so many things a teacher needs to consider when trying to create quality teacher-child relationships that promote academic success. I need to plan engaging activities that teach the core curriculum while promoting peer-peer interactions along with teacher-child interactions. I can do this by learning about each child and his or her experiences, culture, and relationships outside of school.

With knowledge of this powerful influence that I (and many others) have then there should be changes made to my classroom. The first change that I have already been trying to add gradually for the last two years is building a classroom community. Time will be set aside the first weeks of school to allow students to get to know one another and me through mini lessons and activities encouraging cooperation and conversations.

Together we need to build relationships and gain each others' trust. Through this review of literature I now know the real ramifications of the relationships teachers can build with their students. They can be a powerful and positive learning experience for everyone involved, including the teacher.

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