

The Nature of Relationships Between Young Children and Their Secondary Caregiver  
In a Childcare Center Classroom

by

Karen E. Reigle

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the  
Department of Human Development  
College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

APPROVED:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Andrew Stremmel, Ph.D., Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mark J. Benson, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Vicki Fu, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lenore McWey, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mary Ellen Verdu, M.S.W.

April 21, 2004  
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Relationship Behaviors, Young Children, Secondary Caregivers, Childcare.

The Nature of Relationships Between Young Children and Their Secondary Caregiver  
In a Childcare Center Classroom

Karen E. Reigle

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.

The Nature of Relationships Between Young Children and Their Secondary Caregiver  
In a Childcare Center Classroom

Table of Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Title                                   | 1   |
| Table of Contents                       | 2   |
| Abstract                                | 3   |
| Chapter One- Introduction               | 4   |
| Research Interests                      | 5   |
| Purpose of Study                        | 10  |
| Research Question                       | 10  |
| Chapter Two- Literature and Research    | 11  |
| NICHD Study                             | 16  |
| Theoretical Framework                   | 35  |
| Attachment Theory- Bowlby and Ainsworth | 35  |
| <b>Strange Situation</b>                | 44  |
| Q-Sort                                  | 45  |
| Separation and Individuation- Mahler    | 47  |
| Social Learning Theory- Bandura         | 49  |
| Psychosocial- Erikson                   | 50  |
| Ecological- Bronfenbrenner              | 52  |
| Constructivist- Piaget                  | 53  |
| Social Constructivist- Vygotsky         | 55  |
| Chapter Three- Methodology              | 58  |
| Participants                            | 58  |
| Setting                                 | 59  |
| Data Collection                         | 60  |
| Researcher's Role                       | 65  |
| Ethics and Limitations                  | 66  |
| Analysis                                | 67  |
| Categories                              | 68  |
| Chapter Four- Results                   | 71  |
| Main Categories of Relationships        | 73  |
| Indiscriminately Friendly               | 73  |
| Singular Close Relationships            | 76  |
| Multiple Close Relationships            | 83  |
| Attachment                              | 87  |
| Disinterest/Unattached/Independent      | 88  |
| Self-Comforting Examples                | 103 |
| Caregivers' Synopsis                    | 105 |
| Minor Caregivers                        | 105 |
| Major Caregivers                        | 117 |
| Role as Researcher                      | 144 |
| Chapter Five- Discussion                | 154 |
| References                              | 165 |
| Appendix                                | 175 |