The Attachment Relationship with the Mother and the Exploratory Behavior of the Children Aged 5-6

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Abstract

Attachment is the formation process of the emotional and stable relationship between a mother and her child. This emotional relationship starts to grow since the first days of the child’s life. The healthy attachment of the child and his/her mother creates the most important bond in a way that the child can be safe, courageous and persistent in his/her behaviors. This study is supported by this kind of perception and it is conducted with children of the age 5-6. There is also presented information, quotes, researches and ideas from education and psychological field for this study. There also presented several behaviors with concrete facts, data, and different experiences from the research who involved a group of children of this age. The aim of this study consists in the fact which affects the child with his/her mother in his psychological formation and his exploratory behavior. The experiment through games was another way for the data collection of the exploratory behaviors of these children. After the collection of these data, their process was elaborated in order to have concrete conclusions for the study. Consequently, these data showed that the healthy attachment between a mother and her child affects positively in his/her social and psycho emotional formation. The relationship between a mother and her child plays a significant role in the multidimensional process of his/her formation. The attachment relationship determines the long-term impact on the psychological characteristics of the children by affecting their worldview and in their perception of social environments.

Keywords: attachment, relationships, children, behavior, exploratory.

Introduction

The attachment is a significant relationship of the child and his/her caretaker who is usually the mother. Pursuing this idea, every infant develops an attachment bond with the people who take care of it and try to see these people as a source of tranquility and security facing the challenges and threats that come from the environment. The presence of the attachment bond between a child and its caretaker should be universal. These relationships and their quality is affected by the individual differences that some people tend to demonstrate. According to Bowlby the infant builds an attachment bond with the caregiver as long as the person interacts with him and forms and attachment figure. Children will be unattached if they will not have a stable caregiver as in the case of institutionalized children. (Cassidy. J., & Shaver.P.R, 2008, pg 78).

Through repeated interactions with the same adult the infant begins to know his/her caregiver and considers him as the primary caregiver. Bowlby and Ainsworth were the first who explicated intensively these early attachments and relationships. They described the infant as biologically predisposed to use the caregiver (usually the mother) as a “safety shelter” and as a “sure foundation” while he/she is exploring the environment. (Cassidy.J & Shaver.P. R, 2008, quoted by Ainsworth,1967; Ainsworth et, al 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982). When the child feels the threat he/she requires care for protection and tranquility. In fact, Bowlby and Ainsworth the infants balance through exploration and research of attachment when the explorations turn threatening.

The confidence of a child against his care, induces the exploration and competence as a main notion in the attachment theory ( Cassidy. J., & Shaver.P. R, 2008, quoted by Bowlby 1969/1982). During his grow the infant should balance the exploratory motivation with the appropriate fear against the danger and the new things, while he becomes acquainted with the new environments and develops new skills. The early childhood, the middle, and adolescence last much more comparing to the animals. Many human behaviours are just games. (Cassidy. J., & Shaver.P. R, 2008, quoted by Lorenz,1977, pg.147). The attachment period provides an intuition of what is necessary to make the child feel safe and without any tensions; an attached and protective figure who responds, who is also supportive, reliable, stronger and more intelligent. Through this kind of nourishing behavior the infant has the possibility to explore the world in a confident way, to

The mother-child attachment is a vital process which establishes the foundation of verbal and nonverbal communication. The attachment is a peaceful and beautiful interaction between the mother and her child because it is the first social-emotional bond, that the child creates with the environment which surrounds it. In this process the child begins the connection with the life, with the people and anything else around. Some studies based on this subject present some information that the well-attached children are more sociable, more communicative, more collaborative and they are also exploratory in their behaviours. It is thought that those are children with a good development in both aspects physical aspect and linguistic, and emotional aspect.

Therefore, this is the reason that my research is focused on, so on the mother-child attachment. The main attention is on this important relationship during the childhood which still remains important even in the future. This attachment bond, in this study, is not observed as a unique issue, but it is closely linked with one aspect of children’s development, exploration. Being exploratory, as it will be widely explained in this study, means to have self-confidence and it also means to be concentrated in what you are doing, to face and to be adapted with the familiar and unfamiliar situations. Moreover, you can have interactive skills, self-control and in the same time it is important to be autonomous. These and other features create the healthy attachment.

1- The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to observe closely and in a detailed way the children’s behaviours, actions and interactions, communication, exploratory way in different situations and also the influence on the attachment bond of the child with its mother in their behaviours. My purpose is to explore their behaviours in the kindergarten’s environment and to observe how the children create a relationship with the others, how close they are with the unknown people, how much they want to learn and how curious or persistent they are, in order to achieve their own goal.

This observation will be based on the exploratory features of the child, which are as following: stability, attention, curiosity, their way to face with the challenges and unfamiliar situations, reactions and interactions with the mother, with the friends of the group, teachers and with me. It will be also focused on the attachment features that the child has with the mother.

2- The objectives of this study

To evaluate the role and the importance of the mother-child attachment, in a real example with the children aged 5-6 years old.

To discover the attachment bond of the child with its exploratory behaviours.

To find out the causes and the reasons of the lack of exploratory behaviours of the children aged 5-6 years old.

To highlight the importance of gender roles in the development of exploratory behaviours of the children.

Furthermore, the objective of this study is not only the evidence of this bond or relationship, but it is also to create the way how it should be worked with the children who are not explorers and they have not developed this important behavioral system for their overall development and growth.

3- The research question

- Which is the role of the mother-child attachment in the development of exploratory behaviours of children aged 5-6 years old?
- How does the mother-child attachment influence on the child’s psychological development?
- How do the gender roles affect on the exploratory behaviours of the children?
4-The hypothesis

Children who are well-attached with their mother have a good psycho-emotional development. They are also cooperative, exploratory in their behaviours, communicative, curious and courageous to discover the new things which surround them. (In this case, referring to children aged 5-6 years).

5-The methodology

In oder to achieve the goal of this study, it is conducted a detailed observation in some behaviours, interactions, ways of how children react in different situations when they are in the kindergarten and their attachment bond with their mother. This observation will be based on the exploratory features of the children which are: stability, attention, curiosity, their way to face with the challenges and unfamiliar situations, reactions and interactions with the mother, with his group friends, teachers and with me at including also the attachment features that the child has with the mother by using effective methods which are described below.

Moreover, the objective of this study is not only to make an evidence of this bond, but it is also to find a way how it should be worked with the children who are not explorers and they have not developed this important behavioral system for their overall development.

There are applied all the ethical issues by providing the necessary permission from the child’s parents and in collaboration with the teachers of their group. For the realization of this study, I am based on useful literature (literature for the explanation of the Keywords, as well as similar studies related to the issues of my research that support it). The study case is done by reviewing the child’s documentation, the child’s checklist completed by the mother as well as an interview, semi-structured with the mothers.

The checklist is an instrument that includes a list with topics, objectives, skills, and knowledge that each child will be observed. The main purpose of the checklist is to register a constant evaluation for the occurrences which are observed at the child by testifying and inferring how it completes his tasks or different kinds of objectives. (Mita, N “The instrumental measurements”, Modul 2, pg 7). This checklist is also intended to observe and to measure the characteristics of child’s behaviours associated with its exploration.

Based on the researches, which are conducted on this concept and features that create it, I am focused on some characteristics that I think are important, which are as following: 1. The stability of the child during his performance on an activity/game and during its interaction with the object/toy. 2. Eye contact that the child makes with the object/toy that is playing with, or in the cases when another person is near it and suggests and instructs the child how to play. 3. The child’s skills and competences manifested in some behaviours that it develops (being self-confident). 4. The interaction with his friends and reactions during several activities. In the checklist these are specified as voices/items that reflect certain behaviours of the child who does them or not completely. Besides the specification of these behaviours, there is even a measuring scale which indicates the frequency of these behaviours performed by the child. There also some comments when it is necessary to specify a special characteristic that attracts attention. The semi-instructed interview.

This interview is one of the instruments that is being used in order to explore the attachment bond that the mother has with her child and her perspective on her motherhood experience. In this interview will be described the essential elements that express the mother attachment.

The questions, used in the interview, are structured in such a way to provide a sufficient amount of information on mother’s feelings from the moment of the detection of pregnancy until the child’s actual age. Each of the questions follows a chronological line. They are encrypted in order to analyze the findings of the study. These filmings gave me the opportunity to process better the data received, to have more facts and I can also have more information about the verbal and nonverbal aspects, reactions, concentration, time of the activity, ways of interaction with me, and the eye contact that the child has with the toys and even with me. Moreover, what it’s more important, to observe how they have changed their behaviours and reactions from the first to the last game. During the filming, children did not know that they were being filmed and the camera was put in a place where it could not be distinguished by the child’s eyes. Games are played in one corner of the class, without the presence of other people, except me and the child. It was needed a circle table, two chairs and toys and items of the game.
I think that there are several factors that have influenced (positively/negatively) on the realization of the experiment which are as following: the child’s desire and its pleasure that gets from these games; the change of their daily routine; the child’s emotional state before the experiment; the sound/noise of children in the kindergarten, because it was impossible to completely isolate them.

The games were selected after a careful and constant observation of the children’s preferences and also based on the information received from the teachers of the group, because they have more experience on working with them. For each of the games there are measured different elements that constitute the child’s exploratory behaviour, as well as their application purpose was to bring a clearer profile for each children and a detailed description of their behaviours during the games which leads us to the analysis and conclusions related to the research question.

It is very important to emphasize that through this game, which is one of the activities that provides opportunities for the child to have fun and to learn in the same time, it can be explored more to obtain real and objective data. There are chosen the exact games to make the experiment real, by referring to various studies that have been presented in the literature review in the chapter 1.

6- The review of data, analysis

There are collected all the data from the checklists, the experiment and the interviews with mothers which were received from this study.

The checklist, this useful instrument divides the attachment in its four types and each of them has ten specific features. Its measurement scale is divided in two groups: Yes and No, if it is in this way or not for each child. The data accumulated and will be presented in the table for every child.

Table, Nr.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nr of checklist</th>
<th>Positive answers (total)</th>
<th>Negative answers (total)</th>
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<td>I</td>
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<td>VI</td>
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The table no.1 shows the total number of the answers (positive or negative answers) accumulated during the fulfillment from the children’s mothers. The collection of all these answers create a general idea about the style of the attachment that these children have with their mothers. There will be a summary of the responses for every child in each category and put in the checklist, if they are positive or negative answers. The denomination of each checklist will be created on the basis of the numbers that they have in the table.

Referring to the given answers, it is confirmed that mothers were objective and they did not avoid the main goal of the study. This is evaluated by the time of the questions and this means that the answers were immediate and in a short time. These responses written above, are compatible with the results obtained from the checklist completed again from the mothers and from the observations that I have done during my stay in the kindergarten.

The interview was valid for a better understanding of the child’s attachment with the mother and how it has influenced on the general growth of the child. Moreover, with this instrument (interview) it is also obtained the emotional aspect that the
mother presents during the interview. It was actually a fact how these important stages as a mother, are transmitted even to the child because some of the emotions distinguished to the childcare quite compatible with the mother’s emotions (for example: showing enthusiasm for new things, do not experience high levels of fear and better management of emotions in stressful situations).

The hypothesis set in the beginning of this study was reinforced and confirmed from all the data received. This instrument has enriched the study with real elements as expressions and emotions used by the mothers. This gives me further impetus to achieve new concrete conclusions. Working with children during this period, has made me think that there is a lot to discover and to learn about them because they are also selective when they choose what to show to the others. My goal was to see how it affects the mother-child attachment in order to reflect assurance and encouragement for interaction. I was also interested to explore their behaviour inside the kindergarten, how they could create relations with others, how to approach strangers, how much do they want to learn and how curious or persistent are they in order to achieve their own goal. The kindergarten is an environment that offers natural ways in order to see how these elements are combined to every child. However, there are differences among them because everyone is unique, everyone has his own individuality on how he behaves and reacts in different situations. Every child in this study presents his personal characteristics and how similar they look, but in fact they are so different from each other.

They are almost in the same age, are part of a group, can interact (some less and some more) with each other, they exchange their experiences and they also come from different family backgrounds, occurrences and dynamics. All these features have effected on the children’s personalities and in what they present or show themselves. Remaining to family dynamics, one of the conclusions of this study is the potential that the family has in order to influence strongly on a child’s life and which can alter his development.

In the cases that are presented in this study, two of the children who were not grown in the same way, as a result of the absence of one parent, manifested different characteristics from the other four children who live with both parents. If we relate this with the attachment, I would add that the absence of one very important figure (the father) and having another one as the primary attachment figure (the mother) complicates the child’s life. This happens because the mother has too many responsibilities such as: to think and to earn the incomes, to take care for herself as a woman and she has also to think of her professional background. All these elements complicate more that healthy “survival” of the child and they do not give him the neseccary safety to meet other development and needs. In this case these children used to show a lot of uncertainty and this reflects them on their behaviour.

Moreover, based on their behaviour it is easy to notice instability, fear, and hesitancy. The theory used for this study is based on the way how the attachment influences the child’s life, starting from the detection of pregnancy from the mother to all stages of child’s development. I decided to focus deeper to these two mothers, based on their interviews conducted with them and how they perceived their pregnancy (in fear and anxiety) and this also presents unhealthy attachment with their children. These two mothers felt scared and lonely as the result of the partner’s absence because they could not have psychological support. Their young age and the economic uncertainty, which are part of a very important role, made these two concerned mothers to live with fear, anxiety and uncertainty that stage of life that is most beautiful experience for every woman. This anxiety is reflected during the growth of the child and her attachment bond with it.

As it was stated above, all these factors inevitably affect on the children’s behaviour who have a a huge differentiation from their peers. They are less interactive, not curious to explore the surrounding environment and they have difficulties in socializing. Consequently, they are also more unapproachable and more insecure. All these behaviours and all the methods I have used give a clear view in order to reach these findings. The children did not get the role of initiator at any moment during the activities, but they were acting more as observers and more passive. Uncertainty in theirselves made them to have difficulties in getting the initiative, in facing the unknown situations and facing challenges. Their reactions are uncontrolled, full of confusion and they often react with anger. Their ongoing efforts to get the attention of the people who are around them, the attention that has been missing in their families, make them “unsocialble” and not active or interested in the activities.

Therefore, even in the reactions and relations with their peers these children emerge the above characteristics. During the games in groups, they show lack of exploratory skills because they get more confused, can not concentrate and they are not ready for cooperation with their peers. Furthermore, they have the tendency to follow the rules set by the others without negotiating before with them and without showing their interest and their preferences. This is even showed during the game
activities in groups because when they were assigned a role, they accepted it in silence without expressing their preferences. This shows the lack of exploratory skills of the child. Fear, uncertainty, not very high self-esteem and the lack of concentration make them to be less interested towards the new things. They feel intimidated for the new things and when their daily routine changes. I think that this happen because of the mother’s early experiences. For instance, her fear during the pregnancy period and the fear that she felt and experienced during the growth of her child. An uncertain mother, who dedicates less time to her child, can not transmit certainty and confidence even though she would like to do it.

Below, there will be presented the data obtained from each group of children and gender differences regarding the relevant exploratory skills. These data are accumulated according to the strategies and manners that the children used to meet with the lego game.

The characteristics of girls:
- Not very active with each-other, less focused on the game’s elements, and more concentrated in secondary details.
- During the game activity, they show more verbal communication and express more enthusiasm.
- They are more persistent and have more patience in finding the solution to unify the parts of the game, so the lego parts.
- They maintain eye contact with each-other.
- They failed to finalize the game. They got involved in the game for 25 minutes and began to distract and wanted to leave.
- During the game, two of the girls, who came from regular families, without social-economic problems, were more concentrated in the game whereas the girl who had divorced parents tended to communicate with me about the game and she asked frequently: “Will we make other games after this one?” The girls also referred to the game instructions, but they found it difficult to negotiate with each other for finding solutions.

The characteristics of boys:
- Boys were more interactive and willing to help each other.
- They were concentrated in the activity that they were doing and persistent to find the solution.
- Boys had less verbal communication during the game and less eye contact with each other because they observe more the elements of the game.
- They built the lego for 30 minutes and they were very enthusiastic about it.

Eventhough there are similar family dynamics, there are also some differences between the girls and boys’ behaviour. What was observed during the game, was the lack of concentration and initiative that was more evident from the girls than from the boys. The girls were less persistent in achieving the good result and they got easily distracted from the environmental stimulus. They girls were more focused on talking with each other than on achieving the objective of the game. The boys had great exploratory skills, were more concentrated, maintained more eye contact with toys and they were not distracted from the environmental stimulus. This study can be enriched even with some other researches that can confirm or disprove its hypothesis.

7- The study findings

Based on the research we concluded that the mother-child attachment, or the attachment with another person who takes care of the child, is a significant process which effects on the child’s psychosocial development. It was also found that in the process of the healthy attachment to the mother with the child, there are other factors which affect the emotional state of the mother. There are several social situations such as the economical situation, unemployment, divorce, difficult relations in the family which effect negatively and burden the mother’s emotional state. All of these factors create an
unhealthy relation with the child. An insecure mother, without a regular or a normal family, without an economical support and the one who dedicates less time to her child, can not transmit certainty, confidence, love and warmth to her child.

Eventhough there are similar family dynamics, there are also some differences between the girls and boys’ behaviour. What was observed during the game activity was the lack of concentration and initiative that were more evident from the girls than from the boys. The girls were less persistent in achieving the good result and they got easily distracted from the enviromental stimulus. They girls were more focused on talking with each other than on achieving the objective of the game. The boys had great exploratory skills, were more concentrated, maintained more eye contact with toys and they were not distracted from the environmental stimulus. This study can be enriched even with some other researches that can confirm or disprove its hypothesis.

The relation with the mother, which is founded since the conception of the child, is decisive for the development of the child and its perspective in the future. This relation, called attachment, means adaptation and emotional support of the mother for the child. Having a healthy relation with the mother gives to the child more capabilities and competencies in order to be an active agent in the environment that sorrounds the child. The healthy attachment of the child with the mother is an important factor in the formation of the child, to be more social and explorative in its behavior. From the study conducted in the preschool children we got the following conclusions:

- Security and time dedicated (qualitative and quantitative) that mother invests in her child gives the child more self confidence, giving the possibility to live the new situations with enthusiasm, to accept them and get easily adapted.
- Strengthening the capability of saying “I love you”, “I want”, “I do not like” is a clear indicator of a healthy child that has a high self confidence and self estimation.

Children that have poor attachment relations with the mother do not express curiosity in knowing and interacting with same age children and display behavior of distrust and unstable, expressing anger in specific situations.

The emotional state of the mother as well influences in the healthy attachment, security for life, her social and economic support.

In the explorative behaviours the gender roles of the children influence as well, bringing different features for the case studies, seeing that have a special influence in the development of the explorative behaviour of the children around the age of 5-6 years old.

During this study, it was found that children need the attachment bond with the mother or another caregiver, in order to have an easier communication with the world that sorrounds them, to be more explorative in their daily behavior. The social, economic or psychological problems that the mother or the caregiver of the child goes through, are emotionally transmitted to the child and negatively influence on the healthy attachment of the child with the mother. This situation brings problems and difficulties in the psycho-social development of the child, becoming a barrier for the explorative behaviors of the child, through which it knows and studies the world sorrounding it. Relations with the child can create it a “basis” with which it helps him explore the enviroment around. As Bowlby explains in his attachment theory regarding the relationship mother-child, in this occasion as well there cannot be a valid exploration if the child is not safe with the person that supports it. The child needs the initiative by simplifying the meeting point between its activity and the purpose of the adult; this way the probability for a good alliance with the child is increased. If it is the child who takes the initiative we will have a greater opportunity to achieve positive results because it will be interested in staying with us.

When we respond to the child’s undertakings we will help it to develop the sense of security. The child who learns with us is a unique being that is in a very decisive moment of its cognitive, linguistical and affective development. The child’s development moment is different from that of an adult and it is necessary to have a form of adaptation by both the parties in order to have an effective communication. It is necessary for the adult to detach from his adult-centralized vision and penetrate in the world of the child. To achieve this, we can get the help of the child and what we know about it. Children have difficulties in adapting to the adults and their world, therefore often they have the feeling of the uncomfortability. This thing was identified during the study in the creation of first relations among us, so it is required discretion and care in creating friendship with them so that they be as active as possible in their behavior.
9- Recommendations

Looking closer at the problems viewed regarding the attachment of the mother with the child and the huge role that this attachment plays in constructing the emotional world of the child in practicing the explorative behaviors which are necessary for its development and formation, we are giving the following recommendations:

- The attachment of the mother with the child needs to be done in adaptable psychosocial conditions from the mother or from the carer of the child.
- Sensibilization of the family with the importance of the healthy attachment process of the mother with the child.
- The mother should be aware of the importance that her communication has with the child, which starts since his conception.
- All the negative emotional loads shall be avoided during the communication of the mother with the child.
- Enough qualitative and quantitative time shall be devoted to the child. The figures attached with the child, who could be the family members, especially the mother, need to show love, affection and support for the child. During the time they stay together it is needed to be devoted to the child’s desires, questions or looks.
- The physical contact, especially with the mother, needs to be present in the child’s life. The mother needs to show love through hugs, touches, caresses, smiles, and support so that the child feels safe.
- Different conversations shall be conducted with the child regarding its daily activities with its friends, in the kindergarten or other environments. During the conversation shall be shown attention, devotion and love for the child.
- Cooperation with the child in different activities, games, visits in interesting places, sport activities to better discover the nature and the possible problems.
- We need to behave naturally with the child during the communication process or any type of relation it be.
- We shall support and encourage the children in their explorative behaviors, independently of the result that they achieve with their actions.

Bibliography