Developmental Psychology Is Useful In Education

Developmental psychology, is a form of psychology which takes a great focus on the changes and development of humans throughout their lifespan. In this essay I will use psychological theories to explain how developmental psychology (with an emphasis on both attachment and self-esteem) are deemed to be useful in education.

American-Canadian psychologist Mary Ainsworth (1973) described attachment to be defined as “attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across space and time”. Ainsworth in 1978 developed a study called ‘the strange situation. The ‘strange situation’ experiment explored the behavior and attachment types in infants from one to two years of age. The main purpose of the experiment was to figure out the child’s attachment style.

The study consisted of a mother and a child being left in an empty room. The room did not have any other people in it however there were a collection of different toys and activities for the child to explore if they wanted to. The mother sits in the corner of the room so this allows the child to gain some independence by going to play with the toys alone. While the child is doing this, a stranger enters the room to conversate with the mother. After briefly talking to the mother, the stranger proceeds to go over to the child in order to entertain them while their mother leaves the room. Once the mother has been gone for some time, she enters the room again to reassure the child but only to leave again, this time taking the stranger with her. The child is left alone in the room for some time and then the stranger returns to the room to entertain the child, followed by the mother who returns to comfort her child.

The main aspects researchers were monitoring in the study were;

The amount of the room the child is able to explore independently

The child’s behavior when the mother re-enters the room and their reaction to both the times the mother leaves the room.

Researchers would then link the results of the two above with one of the four attachment style. This was to show how every child may have a different attachment style and also …

The initial three attachment styles Ainsworth had introduced in 1970 were:

The secure attachment also known as ‘type B’ - This is where a child tends to become physically distressed when their mother or guardian leaves them. Type B children also tend to show happiness and positive emotions when their mothers/carers return to them. Main & Cassidy (1988) stated that “such children feel confident that the attachment figure will be able to meet their needs. They use the attachment figure as a safe base to explore the environment and seek the attachment figure in times of distress” (Main & Cassidy, 1988).

Insecure avoidant attachment also known as ‘type A’ - Children that are known as having the type A attachment style are fairly independent and do not depend on their mother or guardian to

comfort them when they are upset however they still become extremely distressed when their mother/guardian leaves. According to Benhrens, Hesse & Main (2007) “The children are very independent of the attachment figure both physically and emotionally” (Benhrens, Hesse & Main 2007).

Insecure ambivent attachment also known as insecure resistant - This is the third form of attachment Ainsworth (1970) introduced. When a child has an insecure ambivent attachment, they potray a needy type of behavior that shows some form of dependency and vulnerability they have. Once they receive the attention they appear to have been wanting, they reject it. However, this does not mean they do not struggle when leaving their parent figure, in fact they do get quite distressed and are not easy to console as they do not associate comfort or reassurance with their parent or guardian. This usually is hen there is an inconsistency in the parents reactions to their child’s need for comfort.

As time went by and more research was taken out on the attachment theory, researchers introduced a fourth form of attachment called the disorganized attachment style. The disorganized form of attachment is also known as ‘type d’. The children with ‘type D’ as an attachment type, have dealt with constant disappointment and lack of comfort from parents when they are upset or in need or reassurance. This type of attachment could be a result of parents using fear as a way to reassure their child. Not all parent figures use fear, some may comfort their child by speaking to their child however they will not go as far as physical contact as a way of reassurance.

Ainsworth’s (1978) study, the strange situation had a number of limitations and strengths. One of the main limitations of the study was the fact that it was taken out on a hundred white middle class Americans and their children, this means that methodologically the study is unable to speak on all people generally as a whole. Main and Cassidy (1988) also introduced the idea that Ainsworth’s (1978) original three attachment styles are not applicable to all attachment styles. They suggested and proved this by developing the fourth attachment style (the disorganized) which is very relevant and applies to many people today.