

Child Developmental Theorist Paper

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Introduction

Many different child developmental theories have contributed to the better understanding and development of the child. This paper researches the theories of Margaret Mahler. It first aims to develop an understanding of her background and the different elements of her theory. Then, it compares Mahler with Daniel Stern, and finally it will understand the relevance of the theory in today's world.

Discussion

Background

Margaret Mahler is one of the renowned theorists in the child development who had her focus on child psychiatry. She had experienced a distant relationship with her mother in her childhood which had guided her towards investigation into the mother and infant relationship. After starting teaching, she had moved on to open Master's Children Center where she had developed tripartite treatment model. This centre acted as a platform for her future development in the area as she had participated in various different researches, publishing several theories which had brought revolution in the psychoanalytic developmental theory. In the appreciation of these efforts, Mahler had received several awards which include the Barnard Medal of Distinction.

Before graduating, Mahler had experienced an event which was career defining. A terminally ill child was brought to her when she was working in the later hours at clinic. The child had later died which had urged Mahler to study the relationship between

parents and their children. She had developed a Separation-Individuation Theory which outlined the three different phases for development of a healthy infant (Mahler, 2000).

Elements of the Theory

The Separation-Individuation theory developed by Mahler comprised of the different stages which are the normal autistic phase, normal symbiotic phase, separation, hatching, practicing and Rapprochement. The theory focuses on the strong beginning of the relationship as the child demands care, nurturing and sense of security which can be provided by the mother, rather than the mother being distanced from the child which acts as a barrier between them.

The first phase, normal autistic, begins from the birth and goes until 1 month. In this phase, the infant is only aware of its needs and detached from the world, due to which spends most of his time sleeping. Due to this reason, the child needs more attention and care which the mother needs to provide. The normal symbiotic phase starts from the 1st month till the 5th month. In this phase, Mahler had identified that in this stage the child begins to understand the world and develops human bond with their mothers. The basis of building confidence and security can be achieved through the creation of trust that their needs will be met. The positive stimuli such as smiling and cuddling allow the development of trust. The fulfillment of other needs such as providing an environment of peaceful sleep and feeding when the child feels hungry allows further strengthening of the bond (Pine, 2004).

The other phase by Mahler is the separation face when the child starts developing an understanding of the environment around him. The child begins to interact with

different people in this phase as such this phase is further broken down into four sub phases. The sub phase one is hatching of differentiation which lasts from 5 to 10 months. Mahler has research that in this phase, the baby develops an interest in the world as well as the outside world but lacks understanding about his existence outside. This is evident from the fact that they express signs of anxiety which is relieved when the child gets assurance of her mother's presence. She explains that when the baby is in child's arm, he is able to express more interest in the world outside as he feels more secure. In this manner, continuous access to the mother adds to the emotional betterment of the child.

In the next sub phase of practicing, the child starts experiencing more independence as he is able to attempt to crawl and walk. This sub phase lasts between the 10 to 16 months of the child. The ability to move by choice allows the baby to carry out actions which were previously not possible. The theory mentioned that the child may often separate from the mother for a short period so that he could explore the environment. However, he would return back to the mother when he needs security and comfort. This process is also known as hatching as the child develops sense of not having direct connection with mother.

Following the practicing phase, the third sub phase is Rapprochement which occurs between 16 to 24 months. In this phase, the child experiences opposing needs and desires where they refuse the attention of their mothers but still return back to her. This behavior was referred to as ambivalence by Mahler. In this sub phase, the toddlers also realize that they need to demand their mother's attention as their needs are not felt automatically. This often leads to their aggressive behavior when their needs are not understood and catered. The final sub phase is consolidation and object constancy that is

existent from 24-36 months. At this point, Mahler has expressed that children are comfortable in leaving their mother as they know that will return to them at some point. Therefore, they adapt to the different environment with absence of their mother (Blum, 2004).

Comparison

Compared to the theories by Daniel Stern (1985), Mahler can be criticized. The view point of Stern can be used to criticize the view put forward by Mahler where she believed that the infant is not able to distinguish self from the other. In his study, Stern had given the consideration that human beings have structures built in them from birth that allow them to develop cognitive schemas of themselves and of others at an early age. Stern had mentioned that the normal infant is capable of adjusting to different requirements for independence or interdependence. When carrying out observation on the children, Stern had stated that as the children move away from their mother and return back for mirroring. It implies that this action does not always mean that the action is for self regulation. In this manner, Stern's view is similar to that of Mahler (Stern, 1985).

Relevance of Theory Today

The influence of the theory presented by Mahler had a far reaching impact and her different theoretical formulations have been revised by many researchers. Many different books on the subject continue to use the theories for the effective child development. It continues to be relevant in the present world as its foundations are made linked with the evolution due to which it is used along with different theories (Mahler, 2000).

Conclusion

The theories by Margaret Mahler had a significant impact on the way which the child development was understood and carried out. This had allowed the different practitioners and psychoanalysts to further research into the subject, resulting in an improved understanding and development of children. Despite the criticism, her study was similar to the beliefs shared by many different researchers and it continues to be relevant in today's world.

References

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