

The Impact of Early Parent-Child-Interaction on the Transition to School

Beck, A., Meinardi-Weichhart, L., Landers, S., Quehenberger, J., Walter, I. & Brisch, K.H.

University Hospital of Munich | Dr. von Hauner Children's Hospital | Department of Pediatric Psychosomatic Medicine and Psychotherapy

INTRODUCTION

Starting school is a major transition for children and their parents. Children face major life changes including a new peer-group, a new role and identity and learning to cope with academic success or failure (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Emotional Availability (EA; Biringen, 2008; Biringen, Robinson, & Emde, 1998) in the parent-child-dyad has been shown to be a predictor of a variety of child outcomes such as attachment security (Altenhofen et al., 2013), socioemotional and cognitive competence (Biringen, 2000; Biringen et al., 2005).

AIMS OF THE STUDY

Objective of this follow-up of a prospective longitudinal study was to investigate the association between the quality of very early parent-child interactions and the child's later experience of the transition to school. We assume the one-sided hypothesis that a parent-child-interaction that exhibits a higher degree of emotional availability is associated with children achieving higher scores on the Social and Emotional School Experience Survey (FEES; Rauer & Schuck, 2004).

MATERIAL & METHODS

In a non-clinical sub-sample of the SAFE®-follow-up-study $N = 18$ fathers and $N = 20$ mothers were videotaped for 20 minutes while diapering their approximately four-month-old child. Videos were coded by a blinded and reliable coder with the EA Scales (Biringen, 2008). In a follow-up at the age of approximately 7 years we assessed the child's emotional and social experience during their first year of elementary school with the FEES survey. We controlled for the impact of intelligence (WISC-IV; Petermann et al. 2011), group effects and attachment representation (GEV-B; Gloger-Tippelt & König, 2009) at the age of approximately 7 years.



EA-Scales®
(Biringen, 2008)

Sensitivity
Structuring
Non-Intrusiveness
Non-Hostility
Child Responsiveness
Child Involvement

FEES
(Rauer & Schuck, 2004)

Attitude towards school
Attitude towards learning
Joy of learning
Feeling accepted by the teacher
Academic self-concept
Social integration
Classroom climate

RESULTS

A multiple regression analysis was performed to analyze the association between the quality of the parent-child-interaction during a diapering situation and the children's experience at school, their group membership (GM), their IQ and their attachment representation (AR). **Mothers' sensitivity** accounted for $R^2 = .30$ ($\beta = 0.598$, $p = 0.034$) of the variance in their **children's attitude towards school**. GM, IQ and AR did not account for additional variance. **Mothers' non-hostility** accounted for $R^2 = .42$ ($\beta = 0.55$, $p = 0.045$) of the variance in their **children's attitude towards learning**. GM, IQ and AR did not account for additional variance.

Mothers' non-hostility accounted for $R^2 = .37$ ($\beta = 0.54$, $p = 0.055$) of the variance in their **children's classroom climate** whereas GM, IQ and AR did not account for additional variance.

The father-child-interactions accounted for no variance on any of the FEES scales.

CONCLUSIONS

Our findings suggest that mothers' sensitivity and their non-hostility towards their baby during very early interactions have an influence on their children's later social and emotional experience of school. This finding underscores the importance of mothers' early EA for later transitions in their children's lives and the importance of early prevention programs that focus on enhancing parents' sensitivity. Additional research is needed that focuses on the influences of fathers' EA on their children's later experience of school. As noted, we found that father-child interactions accounted for no variance on any of the FEES scales.