

The Psychoanalytic Observation of Children
Origins and Recent Developments -- Training and Research
Its Significance for Psychotherapy and other Fields of Psychosocial Work
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Observing children at risk.
Some psychoanalytic remarks on engaging students in a research project.

Sunday, April 21, 11:00 a.m. / HS 29 / Parallel session C2

Abstract:

The paper will focus on the topic of engaging students of the bachelor- and master-course “Education” at the University Vienna as observers in a psychoanalytic research project. In context of the research project “Vienna Parent-Toddler Group Study” families at risk, who attend parent-toddler play groups, were asked to engage in this project. These groups – originally developed by Anna Freud – are a specific psychoanalytic-psychotherapeutic intervention for small children with severe social and/or emotional difficulties and their parents (Woods et al. 2011). A total of 25 students from the Bachelor's and Master's degree courses in Education conducted regular observations of the participating children according to the Tavistock approach (Rustin 2019; Datler et al. 2014;). During this time the students as well as the scientific staff had to cope with topics like neglect, confusion, being misunderstood and disruptive, powerlessness, loneliness as well as the feelings of fear and despair, anger, shame, and disgust.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, these emotions have to be understood in a differentiated way in order to (1) maintain the role of the observer in the field and (2) to be able to think about the children and families at risk in a differentiated way even in emotionally stressful situations. With reference to Bion's (1962) concepts of “Container – Contained” and “Working Group” we will discuss how this area of tension was dealt with.

Keywords:

Young Child Observation, therapeutic parent-toddler groups, YCO as research tool

Biographical details:

Mag. Christin Reisenhofer, BA MA, is member of the Research Unit “Psychoanalysis and Education”, Department of Education, University of Vienna.

Dr. Kathrin Trunkenpolz was member of the Research Unit “Psychoanalysis and Education”, Department of Education, University of Vienna. Tavistock Observation Methods are applied in different research projects, as well as in university teaching and further training. Presently, Kathrin Trunkenpolz holds a senior lecturer position at the Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Graz. She also works as a Psychoanalytic Counsellor.

Lena Gönner, BA is a former student assistant and student tutor of the research unit “Educational Theory and Empirical Education Researchers”, and a research project member of the research unit “Psychoanalysis and Education” of the Department of Education at the University of Vienna. She is currently working in freelance practice as a psychotherapist in training under supervision.

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