

**The Psychoanalytic Observation of Children**  
**Origins and Recent Developments -- Training and Research**  
**Its Significance for Psychotherapy and other Fields of Psychosocial Work**  
**An International Conference at the University of Vienna, April 19-21, 2024**

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**The value of direct child observation for students of Psychoanalysis  
and the development of psychoanalytic theory**

***Saturday, April 20, 4:30 p.m. / Kleiner Festsaal / Plenary session II***

**Abstract:**

Starting in Vienna in the 1920s, Anna Freud's first tentative attempts at observing children became a crucial component of the 'double approach' which integrated direct child observation with psychoanalytic reconstruction. This approach enabled the detailed study of unfolding developmental processes and the construction of a theory of normative as well as pathological child development. Direct child observation was an integral component in the curriculum of the Psychoanalytic Masters degree at Anna Freud's Hampstead Clinic (later, the Anna Freud Centre) in London. The process, experience and value of observing for students of psychoanalysis will be described, focussing on observers in a therapeutic parent-toddler group. The experience of being observed will be discussed from the perspective of staff facilitating the group, parents and children and illustrated by a short video clip.

**Keywords:**

Anna Freud, direct observation, therapeutic parent-toddler groups

**Biographical details:**

Inge-Martine Pretorius, PhD (Microbiology) and DPsych (Doctorate in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy), qualified as a Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist at the Anna Freud Centre (AFC) in London. She is a Lecturer at University College London and was a Visiting Professor at Vienna University in 2021-22. For over 20 years she worked at the AFC; as Clinical Lead of the Parent-Toddler service, facilitating a therapeutic Parent-Toddler Group and Observation Seminars; organising and teaching the AFC-UCL MSc Psychoanalytic Perspectives of Child Development Course and curating Anna Freud's Hampstead War Nursery Archives. She currently works in Private Practice and for the National Health Service, running a Child Psychotherapy Service in a nursery school in a deprived area of London. She has published in the field of molecular genetics and psychoanalysis.

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