

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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The importance of child observation and child diary research in the early history of scientific developmental psychology

Saturday, April 20, 9:15 a.m. / Kleiner Festsaal / Plenary session I

Abstract:

This lecture will trace the early roots of the systematic observation of children in the context of diary studies and their significance for the emergence of scientific developmental psychology. In 1882, William T. Preyer presented the first comprehensive and differentiated description of early childhood development in his book "Die Seele des Kindes" („The Soul of the Child“). This was mainly based on observations he had made of his son Axel during the first three years of his life. With the support of his wife Clara, William Stern later continued and refined this tradition. His work "Psychologie der frühen Kindheit bis zum sechsten Lebensjahre" („Psychology of Early Childhood until the age of six“) (1914), based on careful observations of his own children Hilde, Eva and Günther, represents a further milestone in developmental psychology. We also find at that time already a differentiated method-critical discussion on the requirements to be met by a scientifically fruitful form of child observation. The way in which Sigmund Freud collected and interpreted observations of children and used them to illustrate and refine his own theoretical concepts is just as incomprehensible without this scientific-historical context as the later efforts to develop a psychoanalytic infant and toddler psychology, for example by Siegfried Bernfeld or Anna Freud.

Keywords:

Early history of developmental research, child observation, child diary research, historical contributions to the method of child observation

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