

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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Jenifer Wakelyn (UK)

What is psychoanalytic about the *Watch Me Play!* approach?

Saturday, April 20, 2:30 p.m. / Hörsaal 30 / Parallel session B3

Abstract:

This paper discusses psychoanalytic aspects of *Watch Me Play!* (WMP), a programme for parents or caregivers to support and enjoy being with their baby or child. Developed in 2011 and manualised in 2019, this approach is now used in children's services in the UK and internationally (www.watchmeplay.info). Parents are supported by a practitioner to allow their child to play freely, to give their full attention to watching the child playing, and to talk with the child about their play - or with a baby, echoing their sounds. Then the parent and practitioner reflect together on their observations of the child's play and the experience of watching the child play.

Research has found that WMP is helpful for families and can improve children's communication and parent-child interaction. Parents have fed back that giving their child their full attention allows them to get to know their child better, notice more about their child and feel more confident about their parenting and about their child's capacities.

Case studies illustrating the power of joint attention to the child's play and the impact of parents' enhanced emotional receptivity are linked to the focus on free play in Freud and Klein. Discussions of attention by Freud and Bick frame a consideration of Bick's thinking about the importance of seeing something new and the theme of transformation in the writings of Bion.

Keywords:

Attention, child-led play, family support, surprise

Biographical details:

Jenifer Wakelyn, Dr., worked in early years education before training as a child psychotherapist. She was lead child and adolescent psychotherapist in a mental health service for children in care in London and a tutor and lecturer in the Tavistock child and adolescent psychotherapy training. The *Watch Me Play!* approach derived from clinical research starting in 2007. She currently provides training and supervision in the UK, China, Italy and Japan.

E-mail:

jeniferwakelyn@gmail.com, jwakelyn@tavi-port.nhs.uk