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## Anna Freud and Observation: Memoirs of Her Colleagues from the Hampstead War Nurseries

Christiane Ludwig-Körner, Ph.D.

### ABSTRACT

Initially, Anna Freud did not wish to carry out systematic observations; rather, she wanted to be in the field while maintaining an analytical attitude with a free-floating attention. Based on memories of her employees Manna Friedmann, Anneliese Schnurman, Hansi Kennedy, and Joyce Robertson, this article discusses the way in which Anna Freud taught them to observe the children. She also observed those very colleagues who were observing, in order to be able to convey to them, a psychoanalytic view of the children.

Charlotte Bühler, the first person to lead a department of child development in Europe at the University of Vienna, conducted systematic longitudinal studies of children starting from birth. She continued this practice from 1923 until her emigration. She was supported by scientific colleagues Liselotte Frankl, Esther Bick, and Ilse Hellmann, who all later worked with Anna Freud. Ilse Hellmann (1990, p. 2) related her experience: “We went in pairs: a child psychologist who was already knowledgeable and experienced was accompanied by a student. The psychologist would put into words what she saw, and the student would write it down.”

Although Charlotte Bühler disapproved of the psychoanalytic movement and is said to have forbidden her colleagues to attend Anna Freud’s seminars, some did attend, among them Liselotte Frankl, Emmy Sylvester, and Esther Bick (Hellmann, 1990, p. 4). So it seems they either introduced Anna Freud to the idea of observing children or they at least reinforced her wish to do so.

Anna Freud, the teacher, used the experience with children she had gathered from her work at the elementary school and at the Rosenfeld-Burlingham School (established in a district of Vienna called Wien-Hietzing in 1928) where Erik Erikson, Peter Blos, and others taught. She was able to realize her wish to observe infants systematically as they developed, with the help of a generous donation from the American Edith Jackson, who brought cases to Anna Freud for supervision. This donation enabled Anna Freud to establish a psychoanalytic day-nursery for underprivileged children, younger than 2 years old. She wished to gather data from direct observation of early life, particularly of the second year, which she considered especially important in the transition from primary to secondary process functioning, as well as for the development of the super-ego, for drive control and the cultivation of object relations. In the last annual report of the Jackson Nursery, Anna Freud wrote: “We know something about infants from developmental studies, from adults’ retrospective reconstructions, and from child analysis with its microscopic view of the infant’s inner life. What we need to see now are the actual experiences of the first years of life, from the outside, as they present themselves” (quoted by Young-Bruehl, 1988, p. 218).

René Spitz also had the desire to observe children systematically. The motivation for his later systematic baby observations, for instance, his well-known research of children who lived in

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children's homes or with their mothers in prison (Spitz, 1965), was a collaboration with Charlotte Bühler who had received a research assignment in the nursery of the Kinderübernahmestelle, a children's home in Vienna. After his relocation from Berlin to Paris, Spitz taught developmental psychology and psychoanalysis at the École Normale Supérieure.

As is apparent in her speech for the 79th birthday of René Spitz, Anna Freud was one of the first to do action research, reflecting on the pros and cons of different research approaches. She did not follow a preconceived plan of observation. She highlighted the differences of her way of observing children to Spitz's practice: Spitz tried to observe the children in a more experimental laboratory situation by specifically trained personnel at defined times. She said, "Where he sets up experiments, I engage in so-called action research, i.e., activities which are geared to educational, or humanitarian, or therapeutic aims, the observations coming in as a by-product" (Freud, 1971, pp. 25–26). Anna Freud gained support for her research from those whose work involved caring for children, such as children's hospital nurses, nursery school teachers, and so forth. Anna Freud continued, "While his researchers follow a preconceived plan, I use as the basis of my investigation, apart from the analytic finding, also the accidental and fortuitous happenings as they occur in everyday life" (Freud, 1971, pp. 25–26). Additionally, she and her colleagues used another important source for their observations, which had not been considered by Spitz: the therapeutic analysis of very young children, which revealed many details and important findings about early childhood (Freud, 1971, pp. 25–26).

Anna Freud stated that, as a psychoanalyst, one was less interested in manifest and behavioristic data than in the inner world, the latent, repressed, and unconscious material which has to be lifted to consciousness. She asked the question whether observation outside the analytical situation would be able to unearth new discoveries regarding deeper tendencies and processes and, by that, supplement the data collected through the analyses of adults and children. At the same time, she reminded psychoanalysts not to make the mistake of gaining analytical knowledge of children primarily through the retrospective reconstruction of work with adults (Freud, 1951, p. 18).

Anna Freud admitted there were pros and cons to both ways of observing: her method and Spitz's method. On the one hand, she said that Spitz might consider the active interference of the observer (in her approach) to be a disadvantage. On the other hand, she thought that her "action research" had two important advantages: first, the long, continuous observation for up to 24 hours and, second, the holistic capture of naturalistic life situations. She said,

What unfolds before the eyes of the observer under these circumstances are not circumscribed reaction but the whole gamut of pain, anxiety, jealousy, envy, anger, hostility, aggression, love, passion, curiosity, etc., which together convey an impressive picture of the internal happenings as well as of the interactions between the child's internal and external world. (Freud, 1971, pp. 25–26)

Anna Freud was able to resume this interrupted work, when she established the Hampstead War Nurseries in London. In addition to the humanitarian help, Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham wanted to pursue their research on early child development, seeking to determine the impact of war experiences on children.

Anna Freud (1951) described the child observation material obtained in the Hampstead Nurseries from 1940 to 1945 as a "by-product of intensive, charitable war work" (Freud, 1951, p. 18) gathered during the 24-hour care for the children and not as the result of a structured research. The youngest children in the nurseries were 10 days old and many stayed until the end of the war. As a consequence, the observational material showed a great variety with respect to the mother-child-relationship, ranging from close to nonexistent, from separation to reunion, with respect to the mode of nurturing, the relationship with their caregivers, and the relationship with their peers. The observation material was gained by deploying free-floating attention and steering attention to different aspects of the child's states and development. It was determined by the children themselves and not by the predetermined objectives of the observers. Anna Freud pointed out that the subjective influence of the observer, of his knowledge and attitudes, had to be taken into account. Therefore, the observation has to be seen as a process of "...checking the

children's behaviour against the analytic assumptions about the hidden trends in the child's mind" (Freud, 1951, p. 18). She vividly described the exciting experience of the analyst who discovers the connection between the deeper, inner occurrences and the visible behavior. However, she cautioned the reader to remember that this work was not purely analytic, nor purely observational, and so had limitations (Freud, 1951, p. 18).

The following paragraphs aim to create a picture of how Anna Freud wanted her colleagues to observe the children, by quoting parts of interviews conducted in 1996–2000 with some of the many staff who worked with Anna Freud in the Hampstead War Nurseries. Not only did she teach them how to observe the children, but she also observed them (the staff) in order to convey to them a psychoanalytic perspective on the children. The interviews were conducted by the author with Gertrud Dann, Manna Friedmann, Annelise Schnurmann, Hansi Kennedy, and Joyce Robertson (Ludwig-Körner, 2012).

**Gertrud Dann** (1908–1998), a trained nursery nurse and infant nurse, was part of the staff of the War Nurseries from June 1941. The very different way of dealing with infants and small children in the War Nurseries irritated Gertrud Dann, who had previously directed her own kindergarten in Augsburg. She remembered one of her first working days;

... and I realised that someone watched me and that this someone did not like what I was doing. I thought that I just cannot do anything different. I fed that baby as any other baby and this someone then came up to me and said: "I am Anna Freud." I did not ask "What actually did I do wrong?", but I was absolutely sure that something was wrong. Much later in a meeting, people talked about children's nutrition, and then it came up. It is totally wrong to hold children in a way, to educate them that they should not touch the food. The children should be allowed to 'smack into' the spinach, into the millet gruel, that this does not matter, and one should not hold the babies in the way we had learned in baby-care. The baby holds the thumb and then one can [spoon]feed. Sophie said: "But the spinach and the fresh overalls..." Then Anna Freud said: "Does not matter. The fresh overalls—you can replace and wear another one, but the babies need to know what they eat." And the 'Junior Toddlers' did eat really terribly. With the hands. [But] it did not take long, and then they learned quite fast to eat with a spoon. Yet then without drill. Then they, the children, learned voluntarily. And when they wanted, one would help them. Yet very soon they wanted to eat alone. And it was very interesting—that's what Miss Burlingham wanted to try—if a child, about one and a half years old, was able to decide for himself what the right food would be for the child. Thus, there were ten or twelve Junior Toddlers, sitting in a circle, though in a way that each of them saw the back of the other one. Each had a small table, on that table was a board with, I think, about 10 small bowls. In each bowl was something different. A piece of meat, a piece of chocolate, a piece of cake, a salad leaf, totally different and in the middle there was an adult, who each time, when meat had been eaten, could add another piece into the bowl. We did this—don't know—perhaps three weeks. And then it was already absolutely clear that those dumplings had eaten the chocolate, the cake, the cookies, the others the meat, the piece of apple. That was quite interesting, but not yet necessarily proven. And then came the flying bombs, and one had to bring the children in the middle of the meals down into the cellar, and one had so much annoyed the children, and they were so furious that the meal was interrupted. There was no sense in starting this again. And Miss Burlingham sat always apart and was recording which child took meat or cheese. It was a very interesting experiment. (Gertrud Dann, interview on July 14, 1996)

Gertrud Dann remembered that in the beginning she was annoyed, wondering what she was supposed to note, until Anna Freud told her, "Write down what is getting your attention as being 'particular,' particular because a child behaves differently than you expect or behaves differently than before" (Gertrud Dann, interview on November 21, 1996). Anna Freud delivered theoretical explanations, but above all she transmitted her analytical attitude to those young colleagues and students, most of whom in the beginning understood nothing of psychoanalysis.

**Manna (Martha) Friedman(n)** née Weindling (1915–2013), a kindergarten teacher, who later became a social worker, first joined the staff of *Weir Courteney* in Lingfield, Surrey, and worked there from 1946. After the closure of the War Nurseries and the establishment of the Child-Therapy Course, Anna Freud started a Kindergarten for up to 12 children (the Hampstead Nursery School), led by Manna Friedman, until she retired. Initially, this Nursery School was also established to enable training candidates and staff to observe the normal course of development. In the first 10 years it "offered a half-day program for children of a largely middle class clientele" (Kennedy, 1982, p. 133)

and thus also included some psychoanalysts' children. There was also the well baby clinic for infants, toddlers, and their mothers. The medical responsibility was carried by Dr. Josefine Stross, who had previously been a doctor in the Jackson Nursery.

Gertrud Dann remembered:

She needed children for training, for the training of the students. There are often students with great academic education and a lot of theories of just about anything (...), but they've barely seen children. They have to learn that (...), and they enjoyed it very much, too. And it is still the same; even now, there's always people in the Anna Freud Houses. (Gertrud Dann, interview on November 11, 1996)

When Manna Friedman was told by Anna Freud that she would be observing children, she asked her:

Well, what should we observe? Children, what is there in particular to observe? As I also had students, I had to tell them what to observe, too. Although we always had these meetings, where everything was carefully noted and reports had to be written. And then she said—just like that—but that was her skill anyway, to just bring everything down to a simple point. It wasn't particularly academic. She could be academic with academics, very academic. With kindergarteners she could speak a kindergartener's language. That was the great thing. And then she said: Just write down everything where you think, "Oh I have to tell that to my husband later, that's so sweet." Or "that's a bit weird; that a 4-year-old child should act like that, that would fit to a younger child." Or "this little 2.5-year-old can already do that and that, that's quite a thing."

And so every week another child had to be looked at with a magnifying glass. And the students brought their observations, and Anna Freud was always there. So you can imagine how much one could learn there. And we always said, she will drop a few pearls. Something that you wouldn't expect, just random. Like, we had a 4-year-old child, she had enough of everything at home, it wasn't a disadvantaged child, but she was so greedy, yes, she always wanted to have everything and took it from other children, although she had probably lots more toys than most. And when I was telling her about that child, I said, "That child irritates me, and I'm not always nice to her. Well, you could do that, you didn't have to have perfect reports, and that was very nice. And because she's so greedy I become angry with her and then I have a bad feeling. I should know better, especially with these things." And then she said this, "Imagine, if she were a 2-year-old, and she'd act like that, you'd find it pretty okay and you wouldn't be angry." Which was true of course. "If she's like that at that moment, treat her like a 2-year-old child in that area, but in the intellectual area, treat her like a 4-year-old!" Great. Not always easy to execute what she was easily saying. She simplified things very often, made it easier than in reality. As a teacher she was outstanding that way. (Manna Friedman, interview on March 19, 2000)

Every afternoon, while the children were sleeping, there were regular team meetings where observations on the children and new problems were discussed. Anna Freud strongly emphasized precise observation of the children, that is, how they reacted to separations from their mothers and/or fathers, how they dealt with each other, their level of development, and so forth. All colleagues, be they educators, nurses, or students, were asked to note their observations on children on small cards. With that, Anna Freud followed her research interest on the one hand, and on the other she met her obligation to deliver monthly reports to the financial "mother organization," the Foster Parents' Plan for War Children, Inc., in New York. Later, she used these records with Dorothy Burlingham in their books *Young Children in War-Time: A Year's Work in a Residential Nursery* (Burlingham & Freud, 1942) and *War and Children* (Freud & Burlingham, 1943).

Manna Friedman remembered the meetings with Anna Freud:

We had a conference with her every week, where one teacher had to present on one child, only on one child. We had 12–13 children in this kindergarten, and these children were observed in the nursery by students as part of their training in the first year. They had to learn what a so-called normal child looks like and learn to distinguish whether it was a passing problem or if the child is really in trouble and maybe needs another sort of help. She was always the one not directly running to a therapist. I had previously worked in a lot of kindergartens, also in Israel and other places, in much bigger ones. It seemed really weird to me at first in such a small kindergarten with 12 children, and then this observing. I thought, good Lord, that's much ado about nothing. But in the 21 years I worked there as a kindergartener, I learned a lot. (Manna Friedman, interview on March 19, 2000)

During her daily work, training candidates were often present:

They observed what and how I was working with the children. And how, for example, I was dealing with a child in a certain situation; did not interpret it, what you would perhaps be doing in a therapeutic session, but just being pedagogical. (Manna Friedman, interview on March 19, 2000)

Anna Freud delivered theoretical explanations, but above all she transmitted her analytical attitude and perspective to those young colleagues and students, most of whom initially understood nothing of psychoanalysis.

Manna Friedman, in turn, learned much from the regular reporting that had to be done on the children. Those reports were then discussed in depth by Anna Freud with the training candidates. Manna Friedman recalled, “That was, in fact, my training on the analytical level. There, I have learned a lot. Furthermore, I participated in a Montessori-course, because in the beginning I did not open that nursery alone” (Manna Friedman, interview on March 19, 2000).

Manna Friedman also recalled:

In the beginning, it wasn’t easy for me, in a clinic, where everybody was psychoanalytically trained and I was the only one there in educational work. But this thinking, this empathizing deep into the behavior of the child, I was ... to learn, what it actually means, if a child is aggressive, in order not to say, “So that, one doesn’t do!” That way I anyway did not work like that. I always said I did not work in this nursery in a different way than I had worked in the kindergarten in Israel with 50 children... The pedagogical part, that’s what I am good at. And naturally, I like to mother people and children, hence this work with these children offered me a lot of satisfaction. But sure, I have learned why I do something, how I do it. (Manna Friedman, interview on July 12, 1996)

Manna Friedman related:

She (Anna Freud) came to the Nursery very often. If she had spare time, she came in, sat down, and she left without us knowing, with a collection of observations. A visitor there asked her, “Miss Freud, what is your favorite past time? You do so much!” And she said—she had that way where she thinks a bit before answering—and then she said, “What I’m doing at the moment.” (Manna Friedman, interview on November 21, 1996)

When Anna Freud opened the War Nurseries in 1941, 18-year-old **Hansi (Hanna) Kennedy**, née Engl (1923–2003), started working there. She was part of the first group of training candidates on Anna Freud’s training course in child analysis. She enrolled in courses at the university and studied psychology during the evenings and weekends. When the War Nurseries were closed in 1945, she had just completed her degree in psychology. Years later, Hansi Kennedy became the director of the Anna Freud Centre.

Hansi Kennedy recalled:

(...) I was pretty young back then and so I hadn’t done anything before, had left school—and then spent four years very close, I mean long hours, with those children. And then we had a training, and a very interesting one. You learned directly from the observation of the children about psychoanalysis. Then we talked about it, at first without theory. And that was so easy for me, I mean, it was in my bones somehow. (...). We held on to that later, that the students had to observe. (Hansi Kennedy, interview on July 11, 1996)

Anna Freud noted that apart from about five or six highly qualified staff, most of the War Nurseries workers were young people whom she described as “eager for adventure in education and observation, untrained for this type of work, but also untrained in methods hostile to it. While being taught how to handle the children, they were taught as much psychoanalytic child psychology as the material demonstrated” (Freud, 1951, p. 19). She added that the experience of working in the Nurseries motivated many of the young staff to enter personal analysis and complete child psychoanalytic training.

**Joyce Robertson**, née User (1919–2013), grew up in a large family. According to her, this gave her the intuitive understanding of what children needed for good development. She worked in the War Nurseries and was eager to learn everything new. She observed and told Anna Freud about her findings, and the latter brought in the appropriate theories and found the right explanations. Since Joyce Robertson was the only Briton in the War Nurseries, Anna Freud asked her to research the different methods of child care, to find out whether there were different practices. Previously, Willi



Hoffer brought in a small, neglected baby called Josef and wanted Joyce Robertson to care for him. Anna Freud and others joined in and wanted to see how she handled the baby. She soon managed to reach that little baby with her warm and hearty nature, so much so that he became lively and kicked with his feet and hands. She had managed to interact and engage with the baby.

The children in the War Nurseries were looked after by a young staff in family groups of three to five children to facilitate the need for individual attachment. The groups were formed according to the affections of particular children for a caregiver and vice versa.

Joyce Robertson had also taken care of a little boy from when he was 5 month old. When he was about 15 months old, she left him temporarily to have lunch, but was summoned by Anna Freud because nobody could calm the little boy. Because the boy had by then formed a strong attachment to Joyce, she was able to soothe him immediately. She had often taken him on walks together with her husband and cared for him lovingly. That was the beginning of attachment research, in which people began to recognize that children form attachments to those people who care for them, and that others are unable to calm them when they are distressed.

Anna Freud supported Joyce Robertson to further explore the observation of the mother-child relationship. Joyce Robertson continued to discuss her observations with Anna Freud, when she was working with John Bowlby. Joyce Robertson remembers kneeling on the floor with Anna Freud to sort through the observation material from which she and her husband would write their paper, “Reactions of small children to short-term separation of the mother, in light of new observations” (Robertson & Robertson, 1975) (Joyce Robertson, interview on April 25, 1997).

**Anneliese Schnurmann** (1908–2009) started her work in the department of infants and toddlers in 5 Netherhall Gardens in November 1942 and continued until the War Nurseries closed in 1945. From 1952 onwards she worked at the Hampstead Child-Therapy Course and Clinic, participated in research, and engaged in teaching.

She reported how closely they had to observe all these children in order to write their observations in their reports. She remembered,

It wasn't enough to just write down that the boy was upset, one had to describe the situation. It had to be described so accurately as if you were seeing a movie and could experience it. And, and that was so hard, one had to write down how it looked in the inside of that boy. So from the outside and from the inside. Well, you learned that as you went. (Anneliese Schnurmann, interview on June 28, 1998)

It was Anna Freud who developed her psychoanalytic view of children from the direct observation of normal and neurotic children and from clinical experiences. Anna Freud was convinced of the value of what became known as her “double approach,” that is, direct observation combined with psychoanalytic reconstruction. This formed the basis of the Provisional Diagnostic Profile and of the developmental lines which she published in *Normality and Pathology in Childhood* (Freud, 1965). The clinical material on the children, together with her observations and those of her colleagues, were systematised in the Hampstead Psychoanalytic Index (Sandler, 1965).

It was important to Anna Freud that, as opposed to the mainstream of child psychiatry, the developmental profile of the child is assessed to gain a picture of his or her holistic personality incorporating the normal aspects of the child's mental state as well as its pathology. (Freud, 1967). In this way, even as early as 1967, Anna Freud opposed a one-sided “medical view” and can be considered the trail blazer of a resilience-oriented approach.

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