

Before and beyond psychoanalysis: Anna Freud as educator

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Abstract

Anna Freud is known as the co-founder of child psychoanalysis and the heir of the psychoanalytic movement after her father's death in 1939. Her life has been captured in numerous biographies and her seminal work in psychoanalysis has been extensively reported. However, Anna Freud was first and foremost an educator before she became a child analyst. Her work as a teacher and her contributions to education are much less known. This article discusses Anna Freud's experiences in early childhood education, elementary education, and teacher education, paying particular attention to her contributions in each of these three disciplines.

Key Words: Anna Freud, early childhood education, elementary education, teacher education

INTRODUCTION

Anna Freud (1895-1982) was the youngest child of Sigmund Freud and Martha Bernays.

After her father's death in 1939, she became the appointed heir of psychoanalysis and was one of the founders of child psychoanalysis (Young-Bruehl, 2008). However, "Anna Freud has often been more widely recognized as a pedagogue rather than an analyst of children. Indeed, she was frequently criticized for having confused psychoanalysis with an educational project" (Stewart-Steinberg, 2011, p. 4). Before Anna Freud became a noted child analyst, she was an educator who made salient contributions to early childhood, elementary, and teacher education (Freud, 1930, 1952, 1965; Freud & Burlingham, 1944). In early childhood education, Anna Freud created an educational approach to meet the specific needs of working class children, developed a family focused, natural environments, and interdisciplinary approach to early intervention, and promoted developmental assessment through extensive observations and the use of a diagnostic profile. In elementary education she was one of the first to develop and implement progressive education in Europe. Later she developed her own private school with Dorothy Burlingham, using progressive ideas and Montessori materials, promoting integrated learning experiences for elementary children. Anna Freud was a teacher educator for most of her professional career by providing seminars for nursery and primary school teachers and spreading interest in child development in public schools. She linked teacher education with her interest in helping juvenile delinquents and promoting child guidance centers. Finally, she provided a blueprint for teacher education that is still used today, especially in Ontario, Canada.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The field of early childhood education has been dramatically influenced by Anna Freud's research and practice. The benefits of early childhood experiences for children from lower socioeconomic environments, is but one example. Her work in early childhood began during her teacher training. She "worked in a *Kinderhort*, a day-care center for children of the working class, while she was an apprentice teacher" (Young-Bruehl, 2008, p. 99). She later directed programs for young children of poverty.

Educational Approaches for Working Class Children

Through funding from Edith Jackson, Anna Freud established the Jackson Nursery in February of 1937, with the goal of observing and recording the actual experiences of infants and young children from the families who lived in the poorest areas of Vienna. The establishment of a nursery that included infants and toddlers was quite novel for Vienna in the 1930s. In fact, "a nursery for such young children was unheard of at that time" (Young-Bruehl, 2008, p. 218). A comprehensive knowledge of very young children and their development was the primary goal of the program. Freud and her colleagues investigated feeding and sleeping habits of infants and toddlers and also their interactions with peers and caregivers (Edgcombe, 2000). Children's first experiences outside the family unit were also studied, giving a wealth of information that has been useful for developmentally appropriate practices in child care and early education programs (Aldridge & Christensen, 2013).

The Jackson Nursery shared space with a Montessori preschool. Not only did they share space but also staff members and supplies. The children in the

nursery played with the Montessori wooden toys and staff members from Jackson Nursery and the Montessori School collaborated in writing articles about children's play (Edgcumbe, 2000). The adults who worked at the nursery took copious notes every day on the children's development and interests and an elaborate indexing system was developed "into one of Anna Freud's and Dorothy Burlingham's most important scientific contributions" (Young-Bruehl, 2008, p. 221). Observation and notetaking at Jackson Nursery were similar to what was occurring simultaneously in the United States at the Bureau of Educational Experiments, now Bank Street School for Children (Grinberg, 2005). Anna Freud's observations and progressive education programs for children of poverty at Jackson Nursery would have continued but she and her family had to immigrate to England in 1938.

Throughout her lifetime, Anna Freud continued to develop programs for children from in lower socioeconomic environments. In the 1960s, the Hampstead Clinic in London, founded by Anna Freud, provided services for young children that resembled Head Start programs that were just beginning in the United States. In fact, the Hampstead Clinic received a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health in Washington DC. The children of Hampstead Clinic were also children of the working class, many of them originally from Jamaica (Coles, 1992). Over the years, Anna Freud and her colleagues developed comprehensive, holistic, and developmentally appropriate programs that have served as exemplary models for child care and early education programs with children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Peters, 1985).

Innovations in Early Intervention

Shortly after Anna Freud arrived in London, World War II began to adversely affect all of Western Europe. Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham developed a war nursery program for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who were separated from their mothers or caregivers during the war (Coles, 1992). Through the war nursery, Anna Freud developed numerous contributions in the field of early intervention, many of which are still considered innovative in the 21st century (Aldridge & Christensen, 2013). Specifically, Freud and her colleagues provided early intervention that was family focused, in natural environments, and interdisciplinary (Edgcumbe, 2000).

Anna Freud developed and implemented what is known today as family focused early intervention

(Gargiulo & Kilgo, 2014). Anna Freud believed that parental and family involvement were necessary for optimal development of young children (Peters, 1985). Because this was not maximally possible during war times, Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham set up a war nursery for infants and toddlers who, for whatever reason, were separated from their mothers or caregivers during World War II. Still, parental participation in the nursery was encouraged. As often as possible, Freud and her colleagues encouraged frequency and intensity of family interactions within the nursery. From her own research, Anna Freud found that children who stayed with their mothers and caregivers did much better in all areas of development with some exceptions regarding physical development (Burlingham & Freud, 1944).

While children were absent from their parents due to war time employment, hospitalization, and other circumstances, Freud and Burlingham developed family groupings in the nursery (Burlingham & Freud, 1944). This was an arrangement in which one adult was responsible for the care of specific children in a simulated family setting that resembled a child's relationship with the mother and family. The adult caregiver served as a surrogate parent for her group of children (Edgcumbe, 2000). This mirrored the natural environment of the child's home as much as possible.

Interdisciplinary services for young children with special needs were also provided in all of Anna Freud's early intervention programs. Social workers interviewed parents concerning problems their children were having and worked with families to reintegrate their children after the war. Diagnosticians assessed each child and psychologists conducted more formal personality and intellectual testing. The interdisciplinary team then developed a comprehensive Diagnostic Profile on each child (Edgcumbe, 2000). This was used to develop appropriate plans for each child. Freud and her colleagues were pioneers in developing what today would be referred to as an Individual Family Service Plan for infants and toddlers, and an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for preschool children (Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005).

Thus, Anna Freud was one of the first to determine that family focused early intervention in natural settings through interdisciplinary services was vital and necessary for optimal development of young children (Freud & Burlingham, 1974). It was several decades before the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children developed guidelines that also reported the importance of family focused early intervention (Sandall et al., 2005).

Implementation of Developmental Assessment

We have already mentioned that Anna Freud utilized an interdisciplinary team consisting of parents or caregivers, a social worker, diagnosticians, psychologists, early childhood specialists and other professionals who were responsible for the implementation of developmental assessment that was compiled into a Diagnostic Profile. Each Diagnostic Profile consisted of several standard components. These included reasons for referral, a description of the child, family background and personal history, environmental influences, and developmental assessments (Freud, 1965). She promoted and used the Diagnostic profile because she believed that assessment of infants, toddlers, and preschools should be ongoing, developmental, and the result of numerous observations and data collection procedures from multiple sources (Edgcombe, 1965).

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Anna Freud's childhood school experiences were filled with boredom because of mundane teaching methods and rote memorization. Her Hebrew lessons were the same. She learned the letters and words but was not taught what they meant. "Anna remembered writing and reading as the great antidotes to her boredom and restlessness in school. She became as intense a writer and reader as she was a knitter and weaver" (Young-Bruehl, 2008, p. 49). Needless to say, when she became an elementary teacher, she wanted to avoid the unchallenging methods with which she had been taught (Peters, 1985).

As a novice elementary school teacher, Anna Freud taught third through fifth graders at the Cottage Lyceum (Young-Bruehl, 2008). Early on she began using the project method recommended by John Dewey (1902) and William Heard Kilpatrick (1917, 1918). Using the project method, Anna Freud integrated all school subjects around a specific topic. In 1918 she began a project on Hungary. As part of this study, her class went to Hungary to experience the country first hand. "When they returned to Vienna they were to continue their research in the library (Young-Bruehl, 2008, p. 80). Even though the project method had been employed in some progressive schools in the United States as early as the late 1800s, Anna Freud pioneered the project approach in Europe through her integrated curriculum and extensive explorations on a topic with her classes.

Beyond her own classroom, Anna Freud's work as a teacher extended to volunteering at Baumgarten

Home for children who were homeless or orphaned due to war. This was a far cry from the children from wealthy families with whom she had been accustomed to teaching. At Baumgarten she was able to get a glimpse of her future, life long work with children who suffer the ill effects of war or who are challenged by poverty (Peters, 1985).

Later, in the mid-1920s, A. Freud and Dorothy Burlingham began their own private school for children from seven through thirteen years of age. The children were instructed by Peter Blos and Erik Erikson. Similar to her first years of teaching, Anna's private school incorporated the project method and other progressive ideas (Peters, 1985). All subjects centered around a specific topic that became the focus of study (Erikson & Erikson, 1980). "The students went on trips throughout the city to visit museums and attend concerts, always following out a theme" (Young-Bruehl, 2008, p. 179). Throughout her life, Anna Freud continued to work with teachers in elementary schools, encouraging them to employ integrated learning experiences and advocating for what is known today as developmentally appropriate practices (Aldridge & Christensen, 2013).

TEACHER EDUCATION

Anna Freud was also a teacher educator (Freud, 1930, 1952, 1960). Unfortunately, her own teacher training did not "include instruction in child or developmental psychology that would have furthered Anna Freud's own effort to learn" (Young-Bruehl, 2008, p. 65). In her own work with teachers, she sought to correct this by providing knowledge of both normal and exceptional child development that was lacking in her own experience (Edgcombe, 2000). Anna Freud first became a teacher educator at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute through her lectures to school administrators and teachers. This "spread concern for child development...into the Viennese school system" (Young-Bruehl, 2008, p. 175). This also inspired an interest in helping juvenile delinquents and in the development of child guidance centers (Peters, 1985).

Finally, Anna Freud's work with teachers has served as a basis for foundations of education in some teacher education programs, particularly in Canada. Deborah Britzman (2003) uses Anna Freud's writings and research in her pedagogy courses at York University. She says, "I find myself lecturing on Anna Freud's lectures, perhaps because I have both the hope that new ideas can influence old worries and the wish that something I say might animate their weary interest" (Britzman, 2003, p. 78). In a chapter called, "Why return

to Anna Freud?” Britzman says she goes back “to make room for the ambivalence that also is a part of learning” (p. 95). Even though Anna Freud’s research has much to offer novice and veteran teachers, her writings are not part of the mainstream literature in departments and colleges of education today.

DISCUSSION

Before Anna Freud was a child analyst and the delegated heir of psychoanalysis she was an elementary teacher. Beyond her work in psychoanalysis she was also an early educator and a teacher trainer. Still, her research and writings in early, elementary and teacher education have gone virtually unnoticed (Aldridge & Christensen, 2013). She has been marginalized because she worked quietly and tried to make a difference in the lives of children by avoiding controversy in the political arenas of psychology and education (Edgumbe, 2000). Some of her works have also been attributed to her father Sigmund Freud, and her former student and employee, Erik Erikson. In the 21st century we still have to ask why the theories of dead white Western men are the ones that inform educational practice, while the writings, research and practical experiences of women like Anna Freud are forgotten (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007).

We believe Anna Freud has much to offer contemporary educators. Her contributions to the understanding of young children in poverty, family focused early intervention in natural environments, and comprehensive assessment in early childhood education should be standard readings in teacher education coursework. Further, knowledge of her experiences as a progressive elementary teacher using the project approach would be useful to future elementary teachers as they learn about philosophies and theories that inform educational practice. Anna Freud’s extensive research on normal and exceptional development should also be included in foundations of education classes as well as her emphasis on interdisciplinary and collaborative intervention between educators and other professionals from various disciplines.

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