

Ensuring Young Children are 'heard': Purposeful Infant Observation principles in assessing 'good enough' parenting

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Background to the Study

- * Brief introduction of Presenter
- * Creswick Foundation Fellowship:
 - * The initial ideas and concerns
 - * The Fellowship objectives
- * Why the Tavistock?

Key Objectives – Study Tour

3 themes:

- * Infant Observation and its wider application – training modules
- * Social Work in the current UK climate
- * Tavistock ‘Group Discussion Model’ supervision and its application for Frontline Supervisors / Managers

Neurobiology of Attachment

- ASCA Guidelines and research
- Resurgence of both psychotherapy and talking cures
- Affect regulation, physical, somatic and bodily oriented processes

Introducing Infant Observation

A brief history

- * Began as a tradition in 1948 when Esther Bick introduced Infant Observation to the Tavistock course for the training of Child Psychotherapists, a course that was overseen by Dr John Bowlby.
- * Initially very structured and available as 2 year programme.
- * This still exists but principles have also been applied to enlarge and enrich the training of therapists, psychoanalysts, but also teachers, doctors, social workers....

Process - pure

- * Allocated a family for one or two years from just after birth
- * 'Normal' family. Same time each week for an hour
- * Record observations and feelings
- * Discuss in a work group of 5 or 6, led by an experienced analyst
- * Hypothesize, apply theory, reflect on own reactions

Expanded out

- * Observation in child care settings
- * With slightly older children, siblings
- * Fathers
- * *“To observe and notice the behaviours, intensity of the bonds and speculate on what is behind these observations”* – to attribute motive, intent, reasons

Key Principles

- * Based on the systematic, intensive and concentrated work of psychoanalytic psychotherapy of children – however in the UK at least it has moved from the particular to the general – with many professionals benefiting from the intimate, careful attention to the individual.
- * Turning an eye to the ‘ordinary process’

Key Principles Cont.

- * The idea is that we all do this – we just don't all examine our meaning making or our level of attunement
- * In UK, linked to effects of transference, but also 'Errors in Reasoning' ideas influencing child protection decision making

How do we apply these principles

- * Idea that we need to slow down and notice in order to encourage parents – but first, its us who need to slow down and notice.
- * Need to keep in mind child development

Stance

- * How do we position ourselves? Expert vs. curiosity, knowing vs. not knowing
- * What our professional background and experience allows or foregrounds
- * Expert Stance - What does it mean if we take this role without examination OR don't take this role for a pre verbal child – who else does or doesn't interpret for them?

Asks participants to:

- * Pay attention also to your feelings, reactions, thoughts, hypothesis, when you tune out
- * Examine the roles you have had with children in your life – degree of closeness, ages, what ages you were. And reflect what that means for your attunement or what your knowledge gaps are...
- * Sit with and examine emotions

What you have seen and what you felt

Describe:

- * room, child, carer
- * Interactions
- * Steps / sequences
- * Physical movements / Body language
- * Duration of a behaviour / frequency/ pattern and intensity

Pay attention also to your feelings, reactions, thoughts, hypothesis, when you tune out



THE 'TRAUMA AND ABUSE' LENS

- * Do we at times reduce a child to their experience of abuse? A parent to their action / failure.
- * Why do we try to simplify? Is this understandable? OK? How to we re-adjust our baselines?



'NORMAL' IS RELATIVE –

- * The 'Optimal / Good enough' Disconnect
- * The complexities of actual work

How can we guard against observational bias?

- * Benefits of group discussion
- * Good supervision and challenging
- * What is the difference between biases and opinion – and when do we want to have an opinion?

Further Application

- * Contact Supervision
- * Matre Meo
- * Watch, Wait, Wonder
- * Video vs. live observation
- * More pure Infant observation

Owning your views

- * The difference between expert and expertise
- * If the worker doesn't speak up and give the child a voice, who will?

Bion's idea of containment

- * “accepting but not passive, thought-provoking without being directly challenging, inclusive without being seeming to make everyone say or think the same thing, if this is achieved – something transformative can happen”
- * Reflective space allows empathy to become real

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