

Psychoanalytic Schools: A Piece of History Flourishing Today

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The origins of the technique of treatment-via-the-parent practiced at the Hanna Perkins Preschool in Cleveland can be traced back to the work of child analysts in Europe during the Second World War. At the time, Anny Katan (Dr. Anny), a colleague and family friend of Anna Freud, was living in the Netherlands and was consulted by a mother who had gotten to her office first by walking, then taking a bus, a train, a streetcar, and then walking again. The mother was concerned because her four-year-old daughter had started to wet the bed after having been dry for two years. She proposed bringing her daughter to see Katan two times a week. Katan, thinking of the distance the child would have to travel, found herself saying, "Why don't you come to see me instead, and you and I will see what we can understand together."

The mother accepted this proposal and used Katan's help to go home and talk with her child. Through the work, the child was able to let her mother know of her observations of a neighbor boy urinating in the yard and her concern that she was not made right. She worried something was broken and that was why everything flowed out of her. The symptom stopped after this. "That was my first treatment via the mother," Katan said. "It was an easy one."

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REACHING AS MANY CHILDREN AS POSSIBLE

When Katan founded the Hanna Perkins Preschool in 1951, she hoped the school would provide a setting within which the technique of providing treatment-via-the-mother for young children could be studied. She invited Erna Furman, Elizabeth Dauntton, and other child analysts trained by Anna Freud to join her in the endeavor. In order to have more therapists available to carry on the work in the school, she also established a training program for non-medical child analysts. This eventually involved the development of a sliding-scale-fee child analytic clinic and the establishment of community outreach programs. The latter consisted of consultations to child care centers and courses for early childhood educators, which were informed by the work in the school and clinic.

It has been 61 years since the preschool was started and it still operates as it did at the outset, with the addition of a kindergarten and Parent/Toddler Program. Every parent who has a child in the school meets weekly with a child analyst. The child analyst also observes the child in the school and meets weekly with the child's teacher. In this way the teacher, parent, and therapist work as a team to support the child's ego, super-ego, and drive development.

In keeping with Katan's article, "On Verbalization," published in *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* in 1961, there is a particular emphasis on helping children "move from bodily expression of feelings to mental recognition and verbalization of affect." The teachers remain educators, primarily supporting ego masteries, while the parents are the ones to address their children's inner feelings, confusions, and struggles. The child



analyst works as a partner with both, bringing his or her metapsychological understanding to the collaborative efforts to understand the reasons for a child's particular challenges and symptoms. Weekly case seminars provide a forum for all therapists and teachers involved to consider the particulars of the work and study factors impacting the progress of each case.

The clinic is available to those children for whom the treatment of choice is an analysis. This is offered to some young children with severe and early disturbances and to kindergarten children who have internalized conflicts that are no longer accessible to treatment via the parent and interfere with progressive development.

ADDRESSING SEPARATION AND AFFECT TOLERANCE

Knowing full well what it takes for adult patients to manage separations from the analyst during breaks and vacations, I continue to feel privileged to work together with the Hanna Perkins teachers and parents around their efforts to assist three-year-old children master separation. With the understanding that the goal is to provide children the opportunity to choose school while still keeping Mommy in mind, an ability that requires working through of many associated feelings, parents remain available for as long as necessary, often six weeks or more. In helping children with the feelings that emerge, the teachers do not reassure the anxious child, scoop up the sobbing child, or placate the angry child.

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In this “wild” dream, he is most identified with Carol who, like Max, wants to believe that the Wild Things can be one big happy family, that they can always sleep in a pile, that he can create a world where all the things you want can happen. Like Max, he is threatened by change, rejects KW’s new “friends,” and spends a lot of time breaking and rebuilding homes. Like Max, he is deeply wounded and disillusioned when he realizes that he cannot fight the tide of growing up and cannot be bigger or more powerful than he is. Through his reign as king, we gain insight into Max’s fantasies: that he caused his father to leave through his “badness,” that if he tries, they can be one big happy family again, that if he can build a strong enough kingdom, he can insure foreverness, and that, most importantly, big people in charge can make it right again.

In the end we see Carol clinging to hope and Max sailing off, knowing that sometimes separation is the right thing. They howl together; harmonizing in mourning and resolution. Max leaves the island after realizing that the Wild Things need a mother.

Through the stories of Max and his Wild Things, Sendak works through his own early helplessness and survivor guilt. He could not reverse his family’s tragic history, but strived to keep his immediate family unburdened and intact, and then extended that to a world of families through his writing.

Max’s ego is challenged beyond its capacity when his family life crumbles, leaving him in the too weak and too powerful position. Through turning passive to active and the transformative relationships with the conflicted Wild Things, Max is able to make room for his wishes, losses, and the limits of his power. He is able to return to his home where his dinner is waiting. Max reunites with his mother, eating with her, rather than eating her up.

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Instead, they empathically label a child’s feelings, let the child know that “it’s just a feeling,” and that “soon it won’t feel so hard.” They then assist the child in finding ways to cope with the feelings, early on by sharing them with Mommy in the waiting room and later through a phone call, holding Mommy’s picture, or writing a note. The confidence the child exhibits at the other end of the process is remarkable, a sign that he or she has mastered an emotional skill that will carry the child through life.

FROM OHIO TO MICHIGAN, NORTH CAROLINA, AND TEXAS

In the mid 1980s Robert Furman, then the executive director of Hanna Perkins, initiated the annual Hanna Perkins Symposium and Forum in response to a number of child analysts’ expressed interest in learning about the school. Some of the child analysts who attended the meetings went on to form their own psychoanalytic schools in their respective communities. This includes the Allen Creek School in Ann Arbor, the Lucy Daniels School in Cary, North Carolina, and the New School on the Heights in Houston. Each school has its own character and approach, ranging from one serving typically developing preschoolers to one for very troubled school-agers and adolescents. The founders of these schools, Jack and Kerry Novick, Donald Rosenblitt, Arthur Farley, and Diane Manning, eventually collaborated with Denia Barrett and Thomas Barrett, Robert Furman’s successor, to form the Alliance for Psychoanalytic Schools (APS).

APS is currently a group of 11 member schools and additional individuals interested in the interface of psychoanalysis and education. It was organized to provide support to existing psychoanalytic schools and those in various stages of development. One of its goals is to disseminate psychoanalytic ideas and demonstrate the practical applications of psychoanalytic principles. These principles can be described in a variety of ways, but, in general, they have to do with respect for the inner life of children, respect for the role that

parents play in their children’s development, an understanding of mastery as it applies to ego and super-ego development and affect tolerance, and the importance of assisting with drive development.

The school directors and involved analysts have produced many publications for both professional and lay audiences. Two of the more recent are Jack and Kerry Novick’s book, *Emotional Muscle: Strong Parents, Strong Children*, and Ivan Sherick’s *Introduction to Child, Adolescent, and Adult Development: A Psychoanalytic Perspective for Students and Professionals*. APS hosts an annual conference; the most recent one occurred as part of Hanna Perkins’s 60th anniversary celebration.

Among the reminiscences shared at the 60th anniversary were the following comments from a graduate of the Hanna Perkins Preschool Class of 1959:

As a four year old, there were a lot of places I found myself where I didn’t know what was going on, but Hanna Perkins was definitely not that kind of place. It made sense to me. I felt taken seriously, trusted, and comfortable and I’ve taken that with me for the rest of my life. When I was looking for a preschool for my son, I noticed friends who were attracted to dynamic, charismatic teachers. I wasn’t. I wanted my son to have a teacher who would pay attention to where he was at, someone who would grant him his inner life and uniqueness, someone who would give him an experience similar to the one I had at Hanna Perkins.

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