

# Beyond Psychoanalysis: The Contributions of Anna Freud to Applied Developmental Psychology

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## Abstract:

Anna Freud is most noted as one of the founders of child psychoanalysis and as the daughter of Sigmund Freud. However, A. Freud made substantial contributions to other areas of psychology, particularly developmental psychology. Many of her publications in human development have either gone unnoticed or have been overshadowed by colleagues such as John Bowlby, former students such as Erik Erikson, or renowned researchers in human development such as Jean Piaget or Lev Vygotsky. This article describes research and practical applications of A. Freud's writings in child and adolescent psychology beyond psychoanalysis. Her additions to developmental psychology include: 1) the developmental assessment of young children; 2) her work in the area of attachment; 3) the four factors in which development depends; 4) the interactions between mental, physical and socio-emotional development; and 5) the developmental contexts that promote and hinder optimal development. A discussion of why A. Freud's works have been neglected and recommendations for ways to include her research and practical applications in applied developmental psychology are provided.

## Keywords:

Anna Freud; Developmental Psychology

## 1. INTRODUCTION TO ANNA FREUD'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Anna Freud (1895-1982) is best known as one of the founders of the child psychoanalytic movement [1] and the appointed heir of psychoanalysis after her father's death [2]. The youngest of Sigmund Freud and Martha Bernays, Anna was the only one of their children who devoted her life to psychoanalysis. When the Freud family had to relocate from Vienna to London in 1938, it was Anna who was responsible for all of the plans, finances and logistics of this move. This and other significant events in Anna's life have been documented in several extensive biographies [2-4]. The most comprehensive and thorough among these biographies was written by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl [2]. Additionally, A. Freud's construction of child psychoanalysis as a discipline has been extensively reported [5, 6].

The purpose of this article is not to reiterate the biographical information of Anna Freud's life nor

consider her work as a mother of child psychoanalysis because both topics have been extensively explored. Instead, this paper is concerned specifically with reporting A. Freud's contributions to developmental psychology that were beyond the scope of her work in child psychoanalysis. "In the last two decades of her life, the developmental point of view permeated all areas of Anna Freud's work" ([1], p. 114). However, even today there are no comprehensive resources that focus exclusively on the research and practical implications of her work to general child and adolescent psychology. We consider five areas that Anna Freud influenced developmental psychology through her research and practice. These include her work in assessment; attachment and social relations; the four factors in which development depends; interactions among mental, physical and socio-emotional development; and contexts that promote and hinder development. This article concludes with considerations as to why A. Freud's works in developmental psychology have been omitted from or marginalized in the professional literature and provides recommendations for ways to include her contributions in applied developmental psychology in the future.

## 2. ASSESSMENT

One of Anna Freud's major concerns was the appropriate, comprehensive, and developmental assessment of children (Edgumbe, 2000). Over several decades of direct experience with young children, she and her staff at the Hampstead Clinic constructed a template for a developmental or diagnostic profile that can be used with individuals from birth through adolescence [5]. The diagnostic profile was developed as a comprehensive framework for considering all of the available data on a particular child. "Because it is a framework for thinking, diagnosticians and research workers are also made aware of gaps or unclarity in the profile itself so that it undergoes continuous modification while retaining its basic format" ([1], p. 94).

The diagnostic profile involves multiple sources of data. For example, "the usual diagnostic procedure at the Hampstead Clinic (and now the Anna Freud Centre) is for the parents to have several interviews with a social worker, in which they present the problem and tell their story in their own way" ([1], p. 95). The child is also seen by several professionals, "including a psychologist for more formal intellectual and personality testing" ([1], p. 95). After all of the data are collected, the diagnostic profile is then developed to consider all of the information that has been made available from parents, diagnosticians, psychologists and other professionals, as well as the child involved in the process. While every diagnostic profile is unique, a profile has several standard components. These include reasons for referral, a description of the child, family background and personal history, environmental influences, and developmental assessments [5]. Through her introduction of the diagnostic profile and her insistence on the continual observation and recording of children's activities, behaviors, and stories, Anna Freud was one of the first professionals to insist that assessment was not a "one shot deal" but was purposeful, focused and included multiple data from numerous sources [5].

Even so, we believe that some developmental psychologists whose primary concerns are scientific psychology and scientific rigor may question Anna Freud's work in assessment as salient to their profession, because she did not develop standardized measures that meet the psychometric properties of validity and reliability. However, A. Freud's contribution in developmental assessment was not in test construction but in how to use comprehensive, available data and organize it into a diagnostic profile. This was an important addition to child development and psychology because a diagnostic profile organizes, integrates and reports the data from developmental psychologists, other professionals and the family in meaningful ways as they work together for the good of the child.

Anna Freud's contribution to the assessment of children can be summarized in two basic points. She was among the first psychologists to :

1. Advocate that assessment must be ongoing, developmental, and the result of multiple data from numerous sources;
2. Develop a diagnostic profile using a developmental approach that includes reasons for referral, a description of the child, family background and personal history, environmental influences, and assessment of current levels in several areas of development.

### 3. ATTACHMENT AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Attachment is defined as an “emotional tie that unites the child to one or more caregivers and has far-reaching effects on the child’s development” ([7], p. 407). Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham studied children’s attachment and social relations in the context of war nurseries in England during the 1940s [8]. However, their extensive research on attachment over time is not as well known as the laboratory findings of Mary Ainsworth [9, 10] and the studies of John Bowlby [11–13]. Ainsworth and her colleagues studied attachment in a contrived setting using mildly stressful conditions for infants known as the “strange situation” [14]. From their research, four types of attachment were identified. These included secure attachment, insecure-avoidant attachment, insecure-resistant attachment, and disorganized and disoriented attachment [14].

Perhaps the most widely known researcher on attachment is John Bowlby [15, 16]. Bowlby became interested in A. Freud’s and Burlingham’s studies of infants and toddlers separated from their mothers during World War II. Bowlby sought theoretical explanations for attachment and relied heavily on ethology and evolutionary biology as conceptual frameworks for his studies on attachment and separation. However, Anna Freud and her colleagues focused less on biological explanations and more on the developmental, contextual, and practical implications of attachment through their work with infants, toddlers, and young children in the war nurseries of England during the 1940s [17].

Later, Bowlby and his colleagues studied young children who were hospitalized and separated from their mothers [18]. In discussions with Anna Freud and others, Bowlby “compared the observations from the war nurseries published in 1942 and 1944 with his own and James Robertson’s observations of the sequence of protest, despair and detachment in young children separated from their mothers in hospital” ([1], p. 69). Anna Freud agreed with many of Bowlby’s findings and comparisons, especially those related to the importance of the mother to attachment and the reconnection with the mother after war or hospitalization. But she believed Bowlby did not differentiate between psychological attachment and biologically based attachment (A. Freud, 1960). Anna Freud also found that a child’s development of mental representations over time was necessary for understanding psychological attachment. Anna Freud further suggested that Bowlby did not distinguish developmental levels of attachment related to ego development (A. Freud, 1960). She believed that as a child develops from birth through age five, ego and mental functioning change to such an extent that a child’s ability to deal with loss and separation is influenced by this growth in mental development. In other words, a child copes with separation from and loss of the mother in different ways, depending on the child’s age [6].

Anna Freud and her colleagues carefully documented their research on attachment in the war nurseries [2]. These “papers on the war nursery material elaborated on more details of the development of attachment to parents, and the results for all areas of ego and superego development” ([1], p. 22).

This yielded “extremely detailed descriptions of the many intertwining constitutional, maturational and environmental factors which contribute to a child’s development” (p. 22). Further, the monthly reports not only detailed separation anxiety of the children from their parents, but they also explored numerous other developmental and behavioral manifestations related to attachment [6]. This was especially true regarding the development of attachment and the expression of separation. During the second year of life, the zenith of personal attachment to the mother or caregiver is reached. By three years of age, the child is better able to understand what is going on, particularly in cases of war separation. Even so, children at three often develop “an intense longing which is hard to bear” ([6], p. 189).

While many parents were absent from their children at the war nursery for long periods of time due to hospitalization or war time employment, Freud and Burlingham encouraged parental and family participation at the nursery whenever possible and as much as possible. They also developed other strategies to assist infants, toddlers and preschoolers in developing attachments with other significant adults during this time of war. When parents were absent, Freud and Burlingham found that the children developed a strong preference and became attached to specific child care providers. This led to family groupings in which child care workers were responsible for specific children who were grouped to simulate the children’s original family experience [2].

Finally, Freud and Burlingham studied attachment and separation anxiety in young children (birth through age five) for many years. “Over the years these increments in understanding built up into a detailed theory of the development of the child’s attachment to objects, and the vital role of this attachment in the development of personality as well as in the areas of cognitive and emotional development” ([1], p. 24).

Still, Bowlby and Ainsworth are referenced often for their research in attachment while Anna Freud’s salient contributions remain unacknowledged. Perhaps this is because A. Freud was less theoretical, studied children’s attachment in the context of war nurseries, and relied heavily on observations and qualitative research. Her contributions to our understanding of attachment and separation anxiety deserve consideration. Her years of experience, using extensive observations and copious note taking in war nurseries, should also be included in the literature on attachment.

In summary, A. Freud’s contributions to attachment include:

1. The differentiation between psychological attachment and biologically based attachment;
2. The explanation of how changes in mental development over time influences children’s perceptions of loss and separation;
3. The description of temperamental, maturational, and environmental factors that affect attachment;
4. The explanation of the salience of the second year of life with regard to attachment;
5. The development of family groupings for infants and toddlers in child care programs to promote and support attachment with a specific caregiver;
6. A description of the reasons attachment is important to personality, cognitive, and emotional development in young children.

#### 4. FOUR FACTORS IN WHICH DEVELOPMENT DEPENDS

When Anna Freud first began researching child and adolescent psychology, the three predominant theories of development were the psychoanalytic theory of her father, Sigmund Freud [19], the maturational theory of Arnold Gesell [20], and the behavioral theories of J. B. Watson [21] and B. F. Skinner [22]. Sigmund Freud considered development to be the result of unconscious drives in the infant. Gesell believed development depended primarily on biology and maturation to the neglect of environmental, contextual, and interactional influences [23]. Watson and Skinner viewed a child as a blank slate. A child's development was at the mercy of environmental factors that shaped behavior. While A. Freud was exceptionally loyal to her father and his work, she unwittingly went beyond his theories and the theoretical explanations of Gesell, Watson, and Skinner. She developed a more comprehensive approach to child psychology than all of these men. Her approach included four factors in which development depends [5, 24].

The first factor is experience that is not too far from what is considered typical [1, 5]. A. Freud probably determined this as a factor in which development depends based on her studies of children affected by war. Atypical experiences, particularly traumatic events and contexts, often delay development in personality, emotion, cognition, and even physical development [5].

Maturation of internal agencies of personality is the second factor [5]. Like Gesell, A. Freud believed that maturation was necessary for development. However, A. Freud believed maturation involved all aspects of the individual's personality maturing at approximately the same rate of speed" ([1], p. 142).

Environmental influences and external intervention are necessary for the third factor. The nature of the context and amount of support a child receives from caring adults are salient for optimal development of a child. The environment that supports maximum development is neither too challenging on one hand nor lacking in stimulation on the other. This factor is analogous to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development [25].

Anna Freud's fourth factor necessary for development is healthy ego functioning. Has the child developed the ability to navigate both internal and external influences? A. Freud suggests that it is not just what happens to a child that determines development but also how the child processes these experiences.

Anna Freud developed a more comprehensive theory of development than many of her predecessors and contemporaries. She expanded the knowledge base of what affects development by:

1. Incorporating experiential, maturational, environmental, and ego processing factors that went beyond the prominent theories of Sigmund Freud, Arnold Gesell, and B. F. Skinner;
2. Examining different contexts in which development occurs and how these contexts interact with experience, maturation, and a child's ego functioning to support or hinder development.

#### 5. INTERACTIONS AMONG MENTAL, PHYSICAL AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Anna Freud was always mindful of the interplay between theory and practice in developmental psychology. She and her colleagues at the Hampstead Nursery studied children directly and "put to the test certain ideas concerning an all-around training for workers with children. . . . which does not unduly

stress either the bodily or the mental side of the development of children” ([2], p. 255). Through her direct experience with children along with the training of her staff, “she put a great deal of effort into clarifying and justifying her methods theoretically” ([2], p. 180). Thus, she focused on the interplay among areas of development, especially the interactions among mental, physical, and socio-emotional development.

Although she never referred to Piaget’s studies on object permanence and rarely discussed Erikson’s psychosocial theory, her own observations of infants connected both Piaget’s and Erikson’s views without explicitly acknowledging this. Piaget’s research and writings on object permanence are well known in developmental psychology (Piaget, 1983). Similarly, Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development is also renowned and a frequently referenced framework in research on human development (Erikson, 1963). A. Freud’s studies in infancy connected the object permanence of Piaget’s theory with the basic trust issue in Erikson’s framework. Specifically, A. Freud explained “the development of basic trust in the object is important for the balance between narcissism and object love” ([1], p. 172). In psychoanalytic terms, object relations is the infant’s connection to the mother or another love object (human or material). A. Freud explained that as a child develops object permanence, the understanding that the mother exists even when out of perceptual range, is intertwined with the child’s development of trust in the mother or caregiver. This is as important to the child’s emotional and social development as it is to cognitive development.

This knowledge of object permanence and the salience of early object relations in infants and young children led A. Freud and her colleagues to implement family grouping contexts in the war nurseries that promoted the development of attachment and social relations [8]. In summary, Anna Freud and her colleagues:

1. Incorporated the view that object permanence was necessary in infants for development attachment and object relations;
2. Explained how object permanence was necessary for developing trust in the mother or primary caregiver.

## 6. Contexts that Promote and Hinder Development

After Anna Freud and her colleagues had studied children in war nurseries for over six years, they were in a position to discuss the types of contexts that promote development and contrast these with environments that hinder development. They found that “physically, most of the children were better off in the residential nursery where they were better fed even on wartime rations than those from poor homes had been before the war” ([1], p. 31). Psychologically, the children were better off with their mothers no matter how dreadful the situation was. “For these children, sleeping in underground shelters next to their mother is the state of bliss to which they all desire to return” ([1], p. 31).

During World War II, A. Freud and her colleagues had to move the children from the London nursery to a country setting for safety reasons. During this move they noted that children had preferences for specific caregivers. This prompted the development of a family grouping in which each adult who worked at the nursery was responsible for a specific group of children, based on the children’s preferences. At first, this evoked chaos as the infants and young children competed for the attention of their caregiver. Over time, as children began to develop more trust in their family grouping within the nursery, their progress in all areas of development improved [6].

At the same time, the actual parents were encouraged to come to the country nursery and maintain as much contact as possible with their children. “The nursery social worker, James Robertson, gave much time to working with parents in order to maintain contact between parents and children, and careful planning that went into finally reuniting children with their parents at the end of the war” ([1], p. 39). The war nurseries were never meant to take the place of the parents nor become a permanent facility. A. Freud had learned early on that children always do better with their original families than in institutions, with the exception of physical development in the case of lower income families [6].

Just a few years before A. Freud and her colleagues considered environments that were conducive for young children during wartime, Skeels and Dye [26] reported contexts that promote and hinder development of children in residential care. In their study, 13 infants who lived in an orphanage, classified at that time as mentally deficient, were moved to one-to-one care with adolescents, also classified as mentally defective, who lived in a residential institution. The surrogate mothers were provided training concerning how to care for the children. The 13 children also received child care experiences every morning. In contrast, 12 children remained in the orphanage and served as a contrast group. Two years into the program, the children placed with the surrogate mothers had gained an average of 27 points on IQ tests, while those in the contrast group lost 26 IQ points. Skeels followed the children in the original study for 25 years. The experimental group was found to be remarkably successful in terms of education, employment, and marriage [27].

While Anna Freud was not the first to research contexts that support and delay development, she was one of the first to study the influence of the environment during war time. Her studies complemented earlier findings, including research conducted in orphanages [26]. Anna Freud’s specific contributions to the understanding of contexts that promote development include:

1. The need for parental contact and guidance of young children, especially during war time;
2. The importance of family grouping and the support of a primary surrogate caregiver when young children have to be separated from their families.

## 7. DISCUSSION

Anna Freud deserves recognition for her contributions to developmental psychology that go beyond her work in child psychoanalysis [28]. The purpose of this discussion is two-fold. First, reasons for her exclusion from the professional literature in developmental psychology will be explored. The second purpose is to propose ways to include Anna Freud’s seminal works in the canon of child and adolescent psychology.

### 7.1 Reasons for A. Freud’s Exclusion from the Professional Literature in Developmental Psychology

Many of Anna Freud’s contributions to human development have been marginalized or attributed to others. What are the reasons for her omission from the literature in developmental psychology? There are at least five possibilities. First, A. Freud is often remembered more as an educator than a psychologist. Another possible reason is her use of qualitative research methods instead of experimental design. A third reason is her loyalty to her father’s theories and devotion to his legacy. A fourth possibility may be due



to the “Klein Wars” and the criticisms she received by Lacan (1981). Finally, Anna Freud was not as politically active in professional organizations and politics as contemporaries such as John Bowlby.

**Anna Freud as educator.** “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 “ ([24], p. 4). A. Freud was an elementary school teacher before she became a psychoanalyst [2]. During her years of teaching in Vienna, she was a progressive educator, using the “project method” recommended by John Dewey [29] and James Heard Kilpatrick [30, 31]. In the 1920s, she and Dorothy Burlingham started a small progressive school. The lead teacher was Peter Blos and the assistant teacher was Erik Erikson who later became famous for his research on psychosocial development [2]. Even after A. Freud became a child psychoanalyst, she was intent on “making sure that psychoanalysis was not just a therapy for the rich and that its applications were tied to progressive education and child guidance institutions” ([2], p. 255). Throughout her life, her work with children involved education. In the 1960s, the Hampstead Clinic, begun by Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham in 1952, received National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) funding to support her Diagnostic Profile research at a time when the Hampstead Clinic looked more like a Head Start program than a clinic. Hampstead supported educational experiences for children from diverse backgrounds. “By 1966, the nursery children were predominantly poor. . . and often from homes of recent immigrants, particularly from Jamaica” ([2], p. 379). Further, throughout much of her career, Anna Freud was also a teacher educator, providing seminars and programs for teachers of young children for many decades [32, 33].

**Anna Freud as qualitative researcher.** Anna Freud was first and foremost an innovator and a practitioner. She did not use experimental research for ethical reasons. She believed that it was immoral to set up experiments to provide services for one group of children, while denying these supports for a control group in the name of research [2]. A. Freud relied more on observations of children, copious note taking and record keeping, and qualitative methods of research. For this reason, many of her findings and contributions have been marginalized or ignored in developmental psychology [28].

**Anna Freud’s devotion to her father.** Another reason A. Freud’s work is not reported extensively in developmental psychology has to do with her father. Anna Freud was exceptionally loyal to Sigmund Freud, devoting her life to his care in his last years, and insisting that her home become a museum for her father after her own death [2]. While Anna would not object, many of her additions to psychology have been attributed to her father. For example, Sigmund Freud is most often referenced for his research on defense mechanisms. However, it was Anna Freud who actually did most of the early work on defense mechanisms. It was A. Freud who wrote *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (1936) and presented it to her father as a present for his 80th birthday. Further, Anna attempted to preserve and promote Freud’s original theories, which were heavily based on unconscious drives of the id. However, according to many of her critics, she developed her own ideas about psychoanalysis, moving away from unconscious drives and developing a form of ego psychology (Lacan, 1981).

**Anna Freud and the “Klein Wars.”** Unfortunately, Anna Freud was a target of what has been referred to as the “Klein Wars.” Melanie Klein and Anna Freud had vastly different views and practices regarding child psychoanalysis [24]. When Anna immigrated to London in 1938, Melanie Klein was already established there as the leader in child psychoanalysis. Soon after the Freud’s arrived in London, the British Psychoanalytic society became embroiled in the controversy as to what constituted the true child psychoanalytic approach. This was particularly difficult for Anna. She had done everything to see her father through his death and now her understanding and loyalty to her father’s legacy was being questioned. The Klein Wars developed into what many have referred to as a religious frenzy. Many of those in the British Psychoanalytic Society were already followers of Melanie Klein or connected with her when



Anna Freud came to England. John Bowlby [11] and D. W. Winnicott [34] are but two examples. Some researchers believe that the politics of the Klein Wars did much to damage A. Freud's reputation and legacy [2].

**Anna Freud, professional organizations, and politics.** Even beyond the Klein Wars, A. Freud shied away from professional organizations and political conflict. This was another reason why her work may not be widely known in developmental psychology. Edgcombe provides a discussion that may explain why John Bowlby's work on attachment is more known than Anna Freud's. Bowlby "played a major role in the establishment of the Association of Child Psychotherapists, and was keenly involved in the National Health Service. Why has Anna Freud achieved less impact? She chose to keep the Hampstead Clinic outside the Health Services, fearing... that involvement would mean a loss of freedom" ([1], p. 72). Anna Freud removed herself from many of the major professional organizations of her day and worked to avoid political conflict. This, ultimately, could have played a part in the marginalization of her work.

## 7.2 Ways to Include A. Freud's Work in Child and Adolescent Psychology

Finally, we propose the following ways to include Anna Freud's contributions to developmental psychology in courses and seminars, as well as through publications related to child and adolescent psychology.

1. Examine the diagnostic profile A. Freud and her colleagues developed for use with individuals from birth through adolescence.
2. Include Anna Freud's research on attachment along with Bowlby's and Ainsworth's in child psychology and human development texts.
3. Compare Anna Freud's four factors in which development depends with the factors that influence development proposed by others who have historically been reported in developmental psychology texts, including Arnold Gesell, B. F. Skinner, Sigmund Freud, and Urie Bronfenbrenner.
4. Consider how Anna Freud's explanation of how mental, physical, and social development interact with the explanations of other theorists, including Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson.
5. Examine the contexts that promote and hinder development based on A. Freud's work in the war nurseries. Compare and contrast these findings with those of Skeels and Dye [26].

## 8. SUMMARY

Anna Freud wrote extensively about developmental psychology, providing numerous suggestions of ways to support and enhance children's development. Still, her works remain virtually unknown in child and adolescent psychology beyond her studies reported in the psychoanalytic literature. We have briefly described five of her contributions to developmental psychology beyond psychoanalysis and considered why her research and practice in child and adolescent development have gone virtually unnoticed. We also have suggested ways to incorporate the name of Anna Freud, beyond the fact that she was Sigmund Freud's daughter, in the professional discussions and publications of developmental psychology.

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