

# What Does a Good Child Observation Entail?

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Without time, quiet, and undivided attention, the individuality of the child cannot be illuminated in a child observation [child study]. Even the school doctor must set aside his professional side in the conversation.

If I feel the child study has been successful, when I leave with two experiences: First of all, with an actual spiritual experience, which cannot be proven, but is so concrete that any discussion would be moot. Something has taken place between me and the spiritual individuality of the child whose being was illuminated in the child study; soul contact has been made that gives me a joyful lift. Secondly, surprising new ideas emerge for the aid, treatment, and possibly further diagnosis for this child.

In my opinion, whether or not a College of Teachers thrives depends on these two experiences. If the College shares such experiences, then it grows together, is able to nourish itself in a soul-spiritual way, and can resist burnout. When the math teacher, a professed agnostic and a formidable cynic, declares with sparkling eyes after the child study that he has just had an idea of how he can now approach the youth who has been the subject of their conversation—this good man has had a flash of inspiration, an intuition, whatever he might call it in his own words, and he has participated in the process.

To be able to have a meaningful part in a child study there are, however, certain obstacles to be overcome. The most difficult obstacles are erected by the participants themselves, when they come to the meeting with opinions or with subjective judgments that they would like to exchange and have confirmed. It is not about these opinions, but rather the child study has to do with something completely new. Many participants express a lack of interest as well as a lack of discipline because they have no relationship to the child under observation. Lack of interest and lack of discipline are two aspects of subjectivity that can disrupt every group process.

### **Really join in or leave the room**

In order for something new to arise, all such subjective things must be overcome. Opinions are old, subjective judgments that one brings along. Even if they have just come up in the last few minutes, they stand in the way of what is truly new. These opinions will be most easily overcome when one makes for oneself a comprehensive picture of the child. The comprehensiveness of this picture can be achieved only by the College of Teachers as a whole, for individuals lack the perceptions and perspective of the other members.

Whoever is not concerned or involved in the process must involve himself, that is, develop an interest in and attention for the child or he should leave the room. A sermon in a church might perhaps continue even if someone is snoring in the first pew, but a child study cannot endure if someone snoozes, whispers, or only quietly corrects notebooks. It is like many other accomplishments in our culture: A single person cannot bring it about, but he can definitely disturb it.

Whether the picture of the child becomes so clear that it attains illuminating power and allows the spiritual individuality of the child to be glimpsed depends on the working together of all those present. After many decades of participating in such presentations, I have asked myself if this way of working really lends itself to a College of 30, 40, or 50 teachers, or if it is more often a matter of good luck when it happens to be successful.

### **Under the pressure of time the big talkers assert themselves**

Perhaps the most unpleasant disturbances arise from the subjective experience of being pressed for time. Most teachers of both genders express the feeling that they have no time; there are always an endless number of things to be done in every school! At the same time, there is nothing more important than what is happening now, in this moment.

Only in light of a completely newly-developed perceptive picture can one come to any judgment of the child, and to start looking for solutions, from which all concerned might expect something new. This also requires time and peace. Under the pressure of time, the most brilliant speakers immediately assert themselves, the most ingenious characterizers and interpreters of children's capacities and parents' faults. Perceptions of the child under consideration cannot be expressed. The participants go home with information instead of an intuition. Meetings of class teachers or subject teachers, in which smaller numbers of teaching staff who are directly involved, might more easily find their way to this goal, if they give themselves enough time to work methodically, and not merely exchange opinions.

The combination of medical-therapeutic and pedagogical points of view in the child study is only fruitful, in my estimation, when these two experiences come about: the inmost contact with the individuality of the child and the

intuition for completely new ideas. If these things do not happen, one [the doctor] remains in the realm of one's know-how, gives tips and information of a medical nature, but nothing that could really change a life.

### **The parents also need intuition**

It also happens often that a successful child study ends up in bitter disappointment. As a teacher or doctor, one would like to discuss the results with the parents—and [then] they do not go along with it! They are not able to agree, because one has simply given them the new insights, instead of helping them to find their own way to these ideas. [When we do this] the parents miss out on the process which could release them from their own subjectivity in their hour of need—for when do child studies take place otherwise?—the process that could have helped them come to intuitions, to be ready for unprecedented new ideas about their child and, above all, for impulses for action. [That being said], should one involve the parents in the child study? Nonsense! All the participants would be overwhelmed. These conversations live within the methodical discipline and competence of the participants, and require intimacy; I hope I have clearly expressed this.

This dilemma can be solved when one arranges “helping discussions,” round-table discussions to which all are invited who feel themselves directly involved with this child: parents, class teachers, the school doctor, perhaps certain subject teachers, perhaps also other family members and therapeutic professionals from within as well as outside the school. The parents stand in the middle of this conversation, and they decide, with the class teacher and school doctor, whom they would like to have present.

### **A father sees himself**

Usually the conversation circle consists of five to seven participants, who work amazingly efficiently together. Basically it is a spontaneously arranged spiritual-pedagogical self-help group. Since the participants are not used to working together, they need to take more time to create a picture, approximately ten minutes per person. The total time required to create the picture, work towards an understanding, come to the closing phase and a looking back over what has been experienced, would be at least ninety minutes. For all steps the group should observe the proven ground rules for all self-help groups. First of all: no questions; secondly: no advice.

Finally [it is recognized that] the parents are more involved than all the rest of the participants, and they rightfully react with sensitivity to those instances where the limits are crossed through leading or probing questions, as well as pedagogical advice. If one does not overwhelm them with incomprehensible vocabulary, all parents are actually more spiritually open and resilient than one

might expect. One time a father, a hardcore car salesman in a high-end market, declared with moist eyes after a session that the whole time he had seen himself as a young boy in this case. He has had his intuition. ... Whatever he calls it, it will have beneficial results. To be sure, such round-table conversations are time-consuming and are not necessary for every child. But in many problem cases they prove to be worthwhile, and it does not really matter whether the problem is located with the child or with other participating adults.

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