

Chapter 11

Applying the Tavistock Method of Observation and Group Reflection to the Study of Babies and Toddlers in Centre-Based Childcare

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Abstract This chapter presents new Australian research to illustrate how psychoanalytic theory and methods can contribute to early childhood educators' understanding of the emotional world of infants and children. Working with a small group of educators, the authors trialled the use of Tavistock infant observation method (TOM) in a study of children attending centre-based childcare. The TOM approach is unique in that it places emphasis not only on what is seen and heard but what is *felt* by the observer. Regular discussions led by a TOM-trained psychologist supported the group to reflect upon their emotional responses and insights, using basic psychoanalytic concepts of countertransference, projective identification and container/contained during an eight-session training programme. The authors, who came to the study with differing levels of familiarity with psychoanalytic theory, provide examples from their observational narrative records to illustrate their developing understandings and ability to use psychoanalytic concepts through the process of collaborative reflection within the seminar group. The chapter concludes by considering how the deep understanding that the TOM provides about babies' and toddlers' emotional communication can help educators reconcile opposing notions of the child as competent and vulnerable.

Keywords Tavistock infant observation method • Infant emotional communication • Applying psychoanalytic theory in childcare • Observation methods • Educator reflection

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11.1 Introduction

There is a long history in early childhood education and care of using naturalistic methods of observation as a means of providing information about young children's behaviour. These methods are based in traditions of objective methods of recording and analysing what is seen and heard, often requiring specialised training and achievement of reliability on the part of the researcher (Marcella 2015). The observer, or educator using these methods, is expected to put aside personal interpretations, yet at the same time seek to understand the experience of the child being observed. Goodfellow (2014) points out the difficulties for 'outside observers to gain insights into lived experience' (p. 202), particularly in the case of very young children who cannot report on what was experienced because of limited verbal skills. Reconciling this tension requires new ways of conceptualising observation and the process of observing infants and toddlers in group settings, in particular, by giving attention to the subjective experience of the observer.

Brennan (2014), for example, uses the theoretical framework of *perezhivanie* to emphasise the contribution that educators' subjective and affective experience makes to infant caregiving. Elfer (2010), referring to the focus in the UK on secure educator-child attachment relationships, points to the need for a 'deeper understanding of the emotional dimension of nursery life' (p. 63). Hopkins (1988, p. 110) describes a training and support programme for staff to better understand children's 'attachment, dependency and emotional expression'. Datler et al.'s (2010) detailed documentation of a child's experience of separation on starting childcare highlights the need for educators to 'understand in a deep way the emotions of very young children experiencing out-of-home care' (p. 82). All authors speak to inherent challenges of acknowledging emotions in their research in early childhood settings. For example, Brennan refers to 'taking a somewhat uneasy walk into the subjective nature of development' (p. 289), and Hopkins writes that staff found their work more rewarding and interesting, but also more painful as they 'became increasingly aware of the extent of many children's unhappiness' (p. 105). Elfer's work (2012, 2014), however, shows that psychoanalytic observation methods can not only enable staff to access children's emotional communication but also provide the structures that support staff to reflect on and discuss the emotions that affect them in their daily work.

In this chapter, we build on this work by applying a psychoanalytic method, the Tavistock method of infant observation (TOM) (Reid 2013; Waddell 2013), to a study of infants in Australian childcare centres. The aim of the study was to trial the use of the TOM and assess its applicability to infant-toddler education and care settings. By gathering empirical observations of infants' behaviour and reflective observations of our own feeling states supported by group discussions with a TOM-trained psychologist, the authors sought to use psychoanalytic understandings to develop a deeper appreciation of the emotional worlds of young children in centre-based childcare. A longer-term aim was to assess how TOM might be introduced as a new observation tool for educators in early childhood settings.

We begin the chapter with a brief overview of the theoretical concepts underpinning the TOM, followed by a description of the method used to apply TOM in four child-care centres. Each author then draws on her own experiences to illustrate how psychoanalytic theory (*countertransference*, *projective identification* and *container/contained*) came to be understood and applied through collecting and reflecting on their observations, as supported by group discussion.

11.2 Key Theoretical Concepts Underpinning the Tavistock Method

The Tavistock method has its roots in the early work of Anna Freud (1951) who applied it to the training of nursery workers (Adamo and Rustin 2014). It was further developed by Esther Bick (1964) for child psychotherapists and psychoanalysts, whose training includes close observation of a baby's development in the home environment each week for 2 years. Observers are asked to attend closely to the infant, not taking any written notes and putting aside any preconceptions or professional judgments. Immediately after the observation, a detailed narrative is written about the entire period of the observation, from start to finish. Emphasis is placed upon researcher reflections where what is 'seen' and 'felt' is written down and explored in a series of seminar groups (Rustin 2012, p. 57). Group discussion is led by a TOM-trained leader who 'supports the free associations, ruminations and speculations of the observer and seminar members, to see what other dimensions remain to be discovered' (Reid 2013, p. 4). The three key psychoanalytic concepts inform these discussions: countertransference, projective identification and container/contained.

11.2.1 Countertransference

Initially considered by Freud (1910) as the unconscious feelings that arose in the analytic situation between the analyst and the patient, the phenomenon of *countertransference* was later explored by psychoanalysts, Heinrich Racker (1953, 1957) and Paula Heimann (1950), who came to regard it as being all the emotional responses that the analyst has towards the patient, including responses that are held or sustained over a period of time. As such, countertransference was viewed as being key to understanding the patient. Similarly, in the TOM, observers are encouraged to take note of their own emotional responses, or countertransference reactions, while observing a child. It is the discussion of the observations and of the countertransference responses with the seminar group that allows the formulation of psychoanalytic understandings of the child (Adamo and Rustin 2014).

11.2.2 Projective Identification

How the countertransference reaction assists the observer to understand the infant's emotional communication is explained by the psychoanalytic concept of projective identification. First described by Melanie Klein (1946), projective identification is considered to be a psychological defence mechanism that supports the infant to manage difficult internal feelings. According to Klein, projective identification occurs through an interactive process in which the infant projects feelings and sensations that are perceived to be intolerable, and the mother takes in or introjects these feelings. Klein considers projection and introjection of difficult feelings to be fundamental to the development of emotional life and the personality of the child.

Similarly, in the TOM, the baby's or toddler's feelings are considered to be projected into the observer, in much the same way that they are projected into the mother, through the mechanism of projective identification. The ability of the observer to experience and notice these feelings is part of the countertransference experience.

11.2.3 Container/Contained

Wilfred Bion, a prominent English psychoanalyst, extended Klein's notion of projective identification by exploring its therapeutic implications in his notion of container/contained. Discussed in its very early stages in several articles (1959, 2013), Bion argued that projective identification was a normal part of development in the infant-mother relationship. In the notion of container/contained, projective identification enables the mother to be 'filled up' with her infant's intolerable feelings and sensations just as if she was a container. In this way, she identifies with her infant's experiences as if they were her own, knowing, for example, that her infant feels sad because it touches her own experience of sadness. For healthy emotional development, however, the infant needs to experience a sense of containment. According to Bion (1962), the mother needs to be more than just present; she needs to remain balanced while holding inside her, her infant's difficult feeling states. In this way, the mother is able to reflect upon her infant's experiences, making sense of them and giving them meaning. Her reflective capacity is considered to be a crucial function as it enables the mother to give back a modified version of what was intolerable. It is the mother's capacity to bear the emotional states of her infant, make sense of them and deliver them back in a tolerable form that gives the infant the experience of containment. This, in turn, brings about the development of self-containment (Bion 1959, 2013; Caper 1999). Bion referred to this capacity of the mother as maternal 'reverie'.

Similarly, in the TOM seminar discussion group, observers engage in the experience of reflection through the facilitation of the TOM psychologist and the other members of the group. By reflecting upon the observer's feeling response, the dis-

cussion provides a way of understanding the infant's emotional communications. The process of group reflection helps to make sense of the observer's countertransference experience in a way that makes the child's behaviour meaningful. The child's behaviour is reflected upon as a communication or 'story' about what he might be feeling and what he might need. The observers are supported by the group to understand their own feelings, regain their curiosity and be emotionally attentive to the child's needs. Within the seminar discussions, group members themselves experience containment through the 'reverie' of the group and are helped to have space in their minds to hold the child in mind.

11.3 Applying the Tavistock Observation Method to Childcare Settings

In designing the study, we drew on research by Datler et al. (2010, 2014) in Vienna and Elfer (2010, 2012) in the UK. In the present study, a TOM-trained psychologist provided training for seven participants: two early childhood tertiary educators, two long daycare centre directors, two psychologists with a long record of working with educators in childcare centres and an early childhood educator enrolled in a post-graduate degree. The authors were included in this group.

Ethics approval to recruit children to be observed and discussed, using the TOM approach, was gained prior to commencing the study. With parent consent and the consent of the centre directors and educators, seven children (aged between nine and 42 months) were recruited from four different childcare centres. The directors in two of these centres were among the seven participants described above. Observations of 30 min were collected by the participants at regular intervals over a 4-month period. Observations were made without taking any notes and written down from memory as soon as possible after the end of the observation period. Participants recorded their objective observations of what the child did and felt, as well as the thoughts and feelings that were evoked during or after the observation.

Training consisted of a series of eight 1-h seminar meetings with group and the TOM-trained psychologist. In these seminar discussions, each participant had the opportunity to read from her narrative observation record, which was then discussed by the leader and the group. Participants made their own written notes during the seminar group meetings and added further reflective notes after the meetings.

In the following section, the authors (who were members of the group) provide extracts from their observation records, their reactions and feelings about what was observed (in italics), the interpretations and comments that were made during the seminar meetings and any personal reflections. Each presents a case study to illustrate the process of the TOM observations and discussions and the experiences of each author in coming to understand and apply psychoanalytic concepts of the TOM.

11.4 Case Study 1: Tuan Aged 18 Months – Countertransference

The first author's observations were taken during outdoor playtimes.

11.4.1 First Observation

I arrive, in the late afternoon, when all the children, babies to 5-year-olds, are outside. Tuan is following an older girl along the path. They each have a bucket on a string that they are pulling along. The girl trips and stops, bending over to rub her knee. Tuan also stops, watching her. She starts to cry and turns to go to one of the educators. Tuan watches her, standing still as she leaves. He stays in one spot, watching, without any expression. Then he picks up both strings and starts to walk along the path, pulling the buckets. Another girl, also older, comes behind Tuan and pushes him. He falls and drops the strings for the buckets. She takes them away. He gets up and makes a cry of protest, looking at her as she leaves. Then he picks up the last remaining string toy and walks away, pulling it along.

I continue to watch, following him at a distance as he moves around the large playground, mostly alone, finding different things to do or paths to walk along.

He moves his small body confidently and purposefully, quite self-absorbed, his arms and legs active and well coordinated. There is a rhythm to his movement, punctuated every so often by reaching his right arm up in front of him.

I am puzzled about this movement, which he does over and over again. I wonder if he is trying to get someone's attention, but he isn't looking at anyone. I watch carefully and then see that the cuff of his sleeve is too long and covers his right hand. He is reaching up to free his hand. Then I wonder why none of the educators have noticed this and, also, why he doesn't go to any of the educators for help.

11.4.2 Seminar Discussion: My Introduction to Countertransference

I read my long and detailed description of Tuan's activities throughout the 30 min of observation. The other members of the group listen, and when I have finished, one of the members said she felt sad that Tuan seemed isolated. 'He was walking around to keep himself going'. Another member of the group says 'I feel nothing'.

I am surprised by their responses and recognize with a sense of disappointment that I had not paid any attention to my own feelings during the observation.

Facilitator ‘I admire him, he’s capable, but he’s separate from the others. He has his own way of managing the world, in an “automatic pilot” sort of way.... “He gets the last bucket”. He seems quite resigned; he doesn’t put up a lot of fight’.

The facilitator went on to explain the *countertransference* experience that members of the group had experienced as I read my narrative. ‘Children make us feel what they feel; it’s their primary way of communication. For example, children who are enjoyed project joy and liveliness. We love to watch them. Use your *countertransference* to wonder “what does this tell me about the child”?’

11.4.3 *Second Observation*

Tuan is outside in the babies’ play area on his own next to a large cardboard box that has been squashed flat to be a slide. He is throwing himself down on his tummy and sliding, smiling and talking to himself. Nearby is a large rubber cow that he climbs on. He has trouble getting his leg over the cow, but persists. He bounces on it, falls to the ground and onto the box. He repeats this again and again, using one leg and then the other to climb over the cow, pulling it down on top of him and laughing.

I think how much he is enjoying this, but I also see that he doesn’t share his pleasure with anyone. He doesn’t look at or vocalize to any of the staff or other children.

Later I see Tuan at the fence between the babies play area and the large playground where the older children are. He is pressed against it, reaching through to the other side. His sister is on the other side, with her arms through the fence around him, but he is also pushing her away.

I feel drawn into Tuan’s attempt to be with his sister, which doesn’t feel comfortable or satisfying.

She asks the educator if she can come in, but she is told ‘not just now’. Tuan becomes upset, crying and trying to get closer to his sister through the fence. She stays there and he holds on to her for a bit. Then he sits on the ground.

It feels like an emotional collapse.

Tuan goes over to the educator who is sitting nearby with a group of children. He puts his face close to her face, holding onto the keys she has around her neck, but she is talking with the other children and doesn’t respond. He moves behind her and lies down, very still, one arm down to his side, looking away to the fence.

I find it hard to watch Tuan lying there. He feels defeated and depressed, no longer the self-reliant toddler I’d seen absorbed in his own play.

Later, when it’s time for me to leave, Tuan is nearby and seems to want to leave with me. I wave goodbye to him and check to see that an educator is with him.

I find myself thinking a lot about the episode at the fence, how hard it was to watch. Through my own feelings (my countertransference) I start to appreciate how alone Tuan was at that time, having no one who could help him to manage his distress. It makes me feel profoundly sad.

11.4.4 Third Observation

Tuan is outside in the babies' playground with another toddler, Erin, and Nina, an educator I haven't seen before. Tuan and Erin are playing in the sandpit, and there is a tussle over a scoop. Erin leaves the sandpit to go and sit with Nina. Tuan plays on his own, but then something distresses him; he cries and looks towards Nina. She calls out to him to 'come for a cuddle'. He gets out of the sandpit, somewhat clumsily, almost tripping as he steps over the sides of the box, and walks slowly and awkwardly to Nina.

I am worried for him; he might fall and collapse.

He gets to Nina's open arms and sits comfortably on her lap, facing away from her. She talks to him, brushing the sand off his legs and rubbing his tummy. Then Tuan gets up and walks a few feet away, looking to the fence.

I am puzzled. Why did he leave the comfort of Nina's lap so soon. Is it hard for him to be in close? And I remember that I have seen him look to the fence, away from the others, so many times before.

Tuan turns and goes back to Nina and Erin and sits close to Nina, on the side away from Erin. Nina attends to each child individually as she talks about the pictures in the book. Tuan sits quietly, his hand on Nina's knee, Nina touching his hand.

I find this image of Nina, sitting cross-legged, her large-brimmed hat covering her face, her head bowed over the two children, so calm and beautiful. I feel reassured and happy that Tuan has been able to make and maintain a close connection with Nina.

11.5 Case Study 2: Estelle Aged 42 Months – Projective Identification

The third author undertook her observations at the end of the day when children are making the transition from childcare and reconnecting with family.

11.5.1 First Observation

When I arrive, Estelle is part of a group of three in conversation with Helen, one of the four educators in the room. They are inside and the afternoon sunlight reaches in to where they are. The light outlines Estelle's face. Her hair is pulled back with a clip in the shape of a red bow with silver diamonds. Her expressions are lively, like the sparkle on her clip.

They sit down to read a book. Helen sits on the floor with her back against the sofa. Estelle lies along the length of the sofa. The other two children tuck in beside Helen on the floor. The children appear to know the book very well and join in some

of the lines in unison. Estelle changes position. Henry is sitting below her next to Helen. I notice that Estelle seems to take care that she doesn't bump into Henry with her feet. In a tender gesture, she lightly strokes his hair as she changes position.

I imagine that Estelle's care toward Henry comes from feeling cared about in this small group.

The outside door slides open as the first parent comes in. This mother enters quietly and goes to the lockers to collect her child's bag before coming into the room. As she comes in, Estelle gets up and moves to another teacher (Karen). She asks her to read to her in the same moment that Karen is comforting a child who is very upset and sitting on her knee. Estelle leaves as quickly as she came. She moves around the room and does not go back to her quiet reading 'nest' with Helen and the other children.

I feel a bit jolted: I'm trying to work out what prompted Estelle to leave Helen and go to Karen. I'm struck by her mis-timing: why would she ask Karen to read to her now, when she is attending to a child who is upset? Just a moment before she was exquisitely sensitive toward Henry.

When Karen is free again, she approaches Estelle and offers to read to her. Estelle accepts, but Karen's reading doesn't hold her interest. Instead, she hands a toy phone to Karen and says that her mother is on the phone. When Karen takes hold of the receiver to join in, Estelle stops the plan and puts the phone down. She goes to the art table, draws a picture, brings this to Karen and tells her that she has done the drawing for her dad, but leaves it on top of the bookshelf instead of putting it in her bag. Karen comes to the bookshelf to say goodbye to Estelle at the end of her work shift. Estelle does not acknowledge Karen's goodbye; after Karen leaves, she gives a small look towards the door that Karen leaves from.

I think about Estelle's focus on Karen and her telephone and drawing play. Perhaps I'm seeing Estelle's preparation for the afternoon transition – how her mind is starting to think about family and getting back to them as well as saying goodbye to her educator, who always leaves at this time. If this is a good guess, I'm struck with how her preparation begins as soon as the first parent arrives in the afternoon. I notice how restless she is and I feel this way too.

11.5.2 Seminar Discussion. How Projective Identification Was Experienced

What I take to the discussion group are my disgruntled feelings: restless and dissatisfied in myself for not being able to make sense of Estelle's play. I tell them that when another child called Henry announces to his teacher, 'I have an idea', I wished I was observing him.

This became the key piece of my observation that the facilitator and group helped me to stay with. Instead of implying that I shouldn't be having these negative feelings, members of the group were very curious about what I was feeling. 'Why did I

get that feeling? What does this tell me about this child'? Psychoanalytic theory asks us to be interested in the transference, interested in what gets projected onto us. Was Estelle projecting feelings that she was having (perhaps her struggle with saying goodbye to her educator and reuniting with her family), and was I taking these feelings in and identifying with them rather than being able to puzzle about them?

Facilitator: 'Perhaps Estelle is wanting you to know what it feels like to be her. You were hopeful that this girl was going to be a joy to observe, and she turns out to be the girl who wants you to know what it feels like to struggle.

I feel my curiosity return. I am no longer stuck with my disgruntled feelings. The group discussion opened up a space for me to feel more at ease and open in my own feelings towards Estelle.

11.5.3 Observation 2

Estelle and her peers are in the foyer in small group time with Karen. As I walk in, Estelle immediately stands up and looks at me.

Me: I am walking through your room.

Estelle: This is not our room.

Me: I am in your group.

Estelle: This is not our group

I sit down quietly. Estelle sits down and rejoins her group. Every so often, she looks across at me, as if to see that I am taking notice.

What I notice is that Estelle notices me the moment I walk in. Is her feisty response to my entry her way of telling me she is not comfortable with being observed or it is just the opposite? I remember the facilitator's words, 'Your interested eyes will help to bring her story up'. When Estelle looks across at me, her expression is open. I have the feeling that she is looking to check that I am with her and interested in her. In myself, I feel at ease, more prepared for and more curious about what I will see. I wonder if this what Estelle is drawn to, is she feeling that I can be with her in her feelings?

11.5.4 Observation 3

I sit down to observe, and Estelle immediately comes over and sits opposite me at a small table. She gets a rope and she threads beads on it. She lays the rope across the table from her to me. She threads on more beads. She comes over to my side of the table and pulls on the rope to make it touch my knee. Then she sits back on her side of the table and threads more beads. Her stillness has returned.

I wonder about what she is telling me in her play. One possibility was that she was saying, 'My story is about making a connection. I need to build a bridge at the

end of the day from my educator back to my family. I can do it really well, if someone is right here with me. You get it; you understand'.

Later I talked with the director about how I noticed that when the first parent arrived at the end of the day, this coincided with Estelle becoming more restless and unsettled in her behaviour. I shared the story of Estelle making a 'rope of connection'. The director, who also was Estelle's educator at the very end of the day, took a decision to invest in stillness. She invited Estelle to sit with her saying that this will be where 'mummy knows to find us', and she invited Estelle's mother to sit down with them when she first arrived, to give Estelle the time and closeness she appeared to need to make the connection back into her family.

11.6 Case Study 3: Donald Aged 12 Months – Container/ Contained

The second author undertook her observations during the morning playtime.

11.6.1 First Observation

I sit on the couch alongside Elly, a childcare educator. Kate, another educator, changes Donald's nappy and then puts him down. Donald cries, reaching for Kate, but she is busy. Instead, Elly picks him up and tries to settle him. The director of the centre enters the room. Elly says to her, 'You know what? I think Belinda's upset Donald'!

Immediately I am overwhelmed with the feelings of 'I shouldn't be here', 'I've caused a disruption. Donald has been good all morning and my arrival has unsettled him'.

Elly hugs and kisses Donald. He remains disgruntled.

I feel uncomfortable, as though I am being intrusive, so I tell Elly that I will give her and Donald some space. I move off the couch.

Elly offers a bottle to Donald, but he fusses and refuses the bottle. Donald reaches for Kate. She takes him and he immediately settles. Elly says, 'ah... he wanted Kate'. Kate offers Donald the bottle and he quickly guzzles the milk. Donald points to me.

I begin to feel very conspicuous and I worry that my presence will disturb and unsettle Donald. I am surprised at how strong my feelings are (my countertransference).

Kate then attends to some waking babies. Donald cries. Elly picks him up and takes him to watch Kate soothe the babies. Other babies begin crying, so Elly puts Donald down. Donald cries more.

It feels stuck. Donald is upset and I feel like I'm hiding so as not to unsettle him. I wonder whether my leaving will upset him more.

11.6.2 Second Observation

I enter the babies' room and see Donald relaxing with Sue, another educator. Changing his clothes, she warmly says, 'you're all wet'.

This moment feels wonderful to watch.

Donald then moves towards Oscar, a boy with autism. Oscar cries when Donald comes close. Donald subsequently cries. Sue moves to settle both children, but another educator takes Donald for his nappy change. He cries.

11.6.3 Third Observation

Donald is looking at the toy cars as if he has a play idea in mind. Felix goes over and pushes Donald away from the cars and then attempts to hug and rumble him. Donald cries and tips over the box of cars.

I feel really annoyed and upset for Donald because his play idea has been interrupted. It feels like Donald can never get settled, even in play.

Kate comes in with Donald's bottle. He sits on her lap and hungrily guzzles down only 20 ml of milk from a full bottle.

I feel confused. He gave the appearance of being so hungry yet he only drank 20 ml.

11.6.4 Post-observation

Elly and I chat in the staffroom. Elly asks me with great curiosity 'what can you tell us about Donald'? I say 'I can't work out what is going on for him. It always feels unpredictable. I never know what is going to upset him next'.

I felt helpless, as I did not have an answer for her about why he was so upset.

Elly responded with 'Oh my goodness. That is exactly how I feel! I can never tell what's going to upset him'. Elly and I looked at each other as if a light bulb had just gone on. By sharing our emotional experience, we had a shared awareness of our experiences about Donald. We had been in isolation with our experience of him, and it was not until we shared our feelings that we were able to realise that our emotional response to Donald was the same and perhaps reflected feelings that he was transferring into us (*projective identification*). By articulating our shared feelings, we were able to recognise Donald's own experience.

11.6.5 Seminar Discussion: How Containment Was Experienced

I had to wait many weeks for my turn to present to the group, and I felt very full with the experience of Donald and what he brings to the educators. The group suggested that perhaps Donald too has felt that he has been holding on for a long time with his feelings, trying to manage what he cannot yet understand on his own.

I describe Donald's unpredictable distress and the strong feelings that I had about interrupting him and not wanting to disturb him. I tell the group about Donald not drinking a full bottle of milk even though he seemed so hungry and how Felix kept interrupting his play. They reflected on how Donald struggles to find a full, uninterrupted moment. Much in the same way that he could not drink a full bottle of milk, they suggested Donald finds it difficult to receive a full moment of connection with an educator or a full moment just to be. There are many transitions in his day and perhaps he is 'starving' for a consistent, fulfilling connection where he is noticed and observed.

The space created in the seminar group for reflection provided new insight into Donald's distress. Reflecting upon my experience in the group helped me to better understand Donald's projected feelings of distress. The group experience provided me with containment by helping to make sense of my emotional response to Donald.

The centre director, who was also a member of the seminar group, took the ideas from the group discussion back to the educators who cared for Donald. In this way, they too received containment. They then offered more uninterrupted moments with Donald. This led to Donald experiencing containment as staff were more able to remain balanced in their own feelings when they were with him.

11.6.6 Final Observation

Donald has just come inside. I smile and say 'hello', and Donald bursts into tears. Kate then settles him. Another educator comes to change his nappy. He goes along willingly and happily, but returns crying. Sue settles him and they read a book. Sue looks at me and says, 'He just seems to be upset with change, and changes happen a lot here. He needs a lot of uninterrupted time'.

I think to myself. 'Yes, she's right'. There seems to be a shift in the staff. They are calmer and less overwhelmed by Donald's distress. They are trying to give him 'full moments' when they can.

Donald gets up and begins to play. He appears relaxed, calm and settled. He continues like this for the rest of the observation. Sue spent time with Oscar and Donald went and sat near them. While Sue nursed Oscar, Donald rolled over her legs. They both seemed to enjoy the comfort, closeness and sensory experience.

It felt to me as if he was now able to tolerate the presence of a third party in the relationship that he had with an educator and that this presence was not experi-

enced as an interruption. Instead there seemed to be warmth and delight in everyone being together and getting to know each other.

Sue put Oscar to bed. She sat next to the door so that Oscar could see her while he went to sleep. While Oscar dozed off, Donald and Sue looked at books together. Occasionally, Donald got up to look at Oscar. As I go to leave, Sue turns to me and says 'I think Donald is receiving his full moment'.

11.7 Commentary

Through the leadership of the TOM-trained facilitator and the group discussions, each of the participants came to appreciate the ways that psychoanalytic concepts could bring new insights to their work with children in centre-based childcare. They became more alert 'to the possible meanings of very young children's behavioural and emotional communications' (Elfer 2012, p. 236) and began to be more attuned to the difficult feelings that children were trying to manage.

The participants were not only helped to open up to and feel children's difficulties but were also provided the *thinking space* to reconcile opposing notions of the child as both competent *and* vulnerable. The process of coming to this understanding, through the close observation, reflective interpretations and sensitive actions, was illustrated by the narrative records and reflections of the authors during the TOM training. The first author became more attuned to her feelings about Tuan and, by reflecting on her own and the feelings of the group, was able to acknowledge not only his self-reliance and competence but also his separation and sadness. Through the experience of *countertransference*, she was able to 'feel' the difficulties and struggles he felt. This experience, of what Daniel Stern (2000) called 'affect attunement', provided her with a deeper and more accurate understanding of Tuan's experience of relationships at childcare.

The third author focused her observations on 'going home time' which has particular emotional significance. Through *projective identification*, she recognised how her own feelings of frustration when observing Estelle could be telling her something important about how Estelle was feeling – the uncomfortable feeling of 'not getting things right' – as she worked out how to manage the goodbyes to her peers and educator and the reconnection with her family. Through the seminar group discussion, she was able to accept her disgruntled feelings, feel more open to Estelle and appreciate the emotional challenge she faced. When Estelle received the still attentiveness she was looking for from the adult, she was able to build the bridge back to her family, so she could think about being 'back together' with them again and loved.

The second author, by sharing her experience of *projective identification* with the educator, was able to help both of them reflect on their feelings of helplessness evoked by Donald's distress. Further, she described how the collaborative reflection that continued in the TOM seminar group led to a sense of the group providing containment for her feelings. The centre director, through her experience of contain-

ment in the seminar group, was able to provide a similar experience for the staff, giving them the *thinking space* to reflect on what Donald was communicating through his behaviour. They were then able to provide containment for him.

11.8 Concluding Thoughts

This chapter has described the theoretical underpinnings of the Tavistock observation method and how it was applied during an eight-session training programme with early childhood educators and clinicians working together through a process of supported collaborative reflection. Only a small selection of the observational narratives gathered and discussed during the programme have been presented, but they illustrate the experiences of all the participants, who found within themselves a growing ‘capacity ... to be receptive to and contain intense communications of emotion from the children they observed’ (Elfer 2012, p. 229). The insights into children’s emotional communications were able to be taken back to staff by the directors who participated in the programme. This resulted in a greater appreciation on the part of educators of children’s experiences of difficult emotions and the introduction of new approaches that helped them understand and support children.

Our experience as researchers and practitioners has shown that psychoanalytic approaches, such as the TOM, can provide guidance for educators to ensure young children’s well-being. It also provides a means to help educators acknowledge and reconcile opposing notions of the child as competent and vulnerable. The notion of children as both more and less competent was introduced by Kalliala (2014) whose observations in Finnish daycare centres found ‘a rich variety of children ... who need adults in many ways’ (p. 14). Similarly, Salamon and Harrison (2015) discuss the contradictory images that educators hold of young children, seeing them as less competent in their emotional and social development and more competent in their physical and cognitive development. While these contradictions may challenge the prevailing view in early childhood of ‘the competent child’, they also reflect the reality of educator-child relationships, particularly for infants and toddlers. In discussing this tension, Kalliala (p. 6) writes: ‘the more fearful adults are of limiting the rich potential of the competent child, the more difficult it becomes to find a positive and active adult role ... (and) to trust in his or her abilities to offer the child something valuable’. The benefit of the TOM is that in developing understandings of children’s emotional communication, it addresses adults’ fears and difficult emotions, through reflection and self-awareness within a supportive group environment, and through that can build a sense of trust and strength. Our hope is that the results of this initial trial of the TOM will provide the basis for further extension of the method into early childhood settings more broadly.

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