



# The Beginnings of Preschool: How Cleveland Became a Center of Early Learning

**Kimberly Bell, Ph.D.:** [00:00:00] Are you interested in knowing your young child in a whole new way, understanding what's really going on in their developing mind? Does your child say or do things that make you stop and wonder, where did that come from? Welcome to the Hidden Language of Children Podcast, where we explore child development and the challenges of being a parent. I am your host, Dr. Kimberly Bell, clinical Director at Hanna Perkins Center for Child Development in Shaker Heights, Ohio, where we help children learn to understand and manage their feelings so that they can become the boss of themselves.

Our conversation today is going to be a little bit different. We are going to go back in time to follow two threads of history about early childhood education and the other about wartime trauma and the field of psychoanalysis.

What's relevant about these stories is how they came together in Cleveland to foster a center of excellence that's directly responsible for the existence of Hanna Perkins and our mindful approach [00:01:00] to early childhood and parenting. My guest today is Barbara Streeter, who has been with Hanna Perkins for it'll be 50 years in 2026. She has served in a number of roles here as a teacher, a therapist, a psychoanalyst, school director, and consultant, and always a voice in the wilderness for families that have questions or challenges. Thank you for being here again, Barbara.

**Barbara Streeter, MS, LPCC:** I'm pleased to be here.

**Kimberly Bell, Ph.D.:** OK. To start this conversation, let's go all the way back to the 1880s and the Women's Christian Association of Cleveland or the WCA, what was its role in what we now call early childhood education?

**Barbara Streeter, MS, LPCC:** Back in that time there were many poor people working in the factories, and their children were left to run the streets. And the young ladies branch of the Women's Christian Association was developed out of a mission [00:02:00] to serve the poor. And these were women of well-to-do



families. They started by taking care of the young kids and providing services to the mothers, but eventually they decided the best thing to do was to develop schools, and this meant nursery schools and eventually kindergartens. And along the way they found that it was very hard to find teachers to teach at these school, in these programs, and so they eventually developed a group that would teach the very inexperienced teachers. And out of that came a series of nurseries and these were eventually put together as part of the Day Nursery Association, which was an offshoot of the Women's Christian Association.

**Kimberly Bell, Ph.D.:** OK, so let's pause there for a minute, because I think in terms of [00:03:00] people wondering why this is important, one of the fascinating things about the history of Cleveland is that it really was one of the centers of the development of what we know of with regard to childcare centers, what we know of with regard to what we would call our preschools today. This strong group of women came together and said, "wait a minute; we need to address this need." So we're talking like over a hundred years of legacy in Cleveland of supporting children in the earliest years of their life.

**Barbara Streeter, MS, LPCC:** These were smart women and they were progressive when they were really focused on helping these young students become independent and think for themselves, and they recognized the importance of relationships.

And this is carried through to what we do today in [00:04:00] early childhood.

**Kimberly Bell, Ph.D.:** So at that same time that all of that was happening, we have this young girl born in Vienna, Austria, Anny Rosenberg.

**Barbara Streeter, MS, LPCC:** So Dr. Anny was close friend of the Freud family. Her father was one of the three brothers who played "Tirro" with Freud every Saturday evening. And her uncle was the pediatrician to Freud's children. And so it was really learning on Freud's lap about psychoanalysis and having a relationship with Anna Freud, who eventually became the spearhead of child analysis—which is different than adult psychoanalysis in that it focuses more on child development, meaning progressive outward movement as opposed to focusing on looking [00:05:00] inside at the unconscious.

And as Dr. Anny, who was only two years younger than Anna Freud, grew Freud was having weekly seminar discussions, and they began attending these and



learning about psychoanalysis. Both of them were interested in teaching; Anna Freud more than Dr. Anny in the sense that she became a teacher. Dr. Anny became a medical doctor, and then a psychoanalyst.

But they became then part of a movement of young analysts who were both socially conscious and interested in education and how to help young children and to work with parents.

**Kimberly Bell, Ph.D.:** So we're really talking here turn-of-the-century stuff, right? So then Anny grows up. She gets married to a Dutch neurologist named Maurits Katan; moves [00:06:00] into Holland at the time where she's studying psychoanalysis and just as the Nazi era was coming into...

**Barbara Streeter, MS, LPCC:** They were occupying Holland at the time, and her husband, who was Jewish, had to go into hiding and she survived with false papers. And she also became socially conscious in the sense of helping people get out of Austria and Germany away from the Nazis. And she was brave to the point of traveling on trains through Germany with information that she was not supposed to transport regarding the people that needed visas to get out, and she would get the information and take it back and send it to people that she had contacts with in England and the US to [00:07:00] help them get what they needed in order to get visas. And she rescued a number of child analysts in this manner.

And a number eventually came to the States and in their own communities, tried to start education programs for children. And Dr. Anny was invited to Cleveland. And the reason she was invited to Cleveland was because Doug Bond, then the chair of the Department of Psychiatry at University Hospitals, had gotten a grant to develop their program, both on the adult level and the child level to become more psychoanalytic. He had spent some time in London with Anna Freud, and she recommended Dr. Anny as somebody that he could use.

And so she came with her husband, who was also an analyst, and began working in the Department of [00:08:00] Psychiatry. She was specifically asked by many different professionals in Cleveland to help them with their work with children, and she, consulted in childcare centers and ended up consulting in the Day Nursery Association childcare centers. And that's where she met Eleanor Hosley. And Eleanor Hosley was a progressive social worker who trained in New York City and practiced in the streets of Harlem and the Bowery and other impoverished areas and had come to Cleveland because she was invited to be part of the work with



these day nurseries. When Dr. Anny arrived, Hosley met her and said "this woman is unique." That she was the one who talked in a practical, realistic [00:09:00] human language while being brilliant about child development and what's going on inside the children in terms of their inner life. They realized they both had an interest in therapeutic preschools, and they worked together to develop Hanna Perkins. The first class was in 1951, which was only about four years after Dr. Anny arrived.

**Kimberly Bell, Ph.D.:** Yeah. So the, I think one of the most important things that you said there in terms of just talking about our history and how far back it goes, that, when people think of psychoanalysis, they think of whatever they've seen in like a cartoon or an Intro to Psych book or something along those lines.

What Dr. Anny Katan really did when she came to Cleveland is – I always think of it as applied psychoanalysis – that she took that deep [00:10:00] understanding of the development of children and applied it not in just a treatment room, but in a classroom. And I remember reading an interview where she talked about the need for the therapeutic classroom because that when she came to Cleveland, there were so many children who needed help with, feelings and symptoms and difficulties, and she was only one person, and that she saw two paths. She needed a way to work with more kids at a time, and then she needed to train others to do what she could do.

**Barbara Streeter, MS, LPCC:** An additional piece to this if I can interject, which happened in Holland and what she brought with her... during the occupation by the Nazis there was a threat of war and bombings and many of the families had relocated their children to the countryside, and so it was much harder for [00:11:00] the children to get to her office. She found herself one day telling a mother of a 4-year-old, don't bring your daughter in. Bring yourself in twice a week and you and I can talk about your daughter's concerns, and then you can go back and talk to your daughter so she doesn't have to come the long distance in from the countryside, which included a walk and a train and a bus .... this was a very successful treatment. It was a very brief treatment really a a, a child who had a wetting problem and they linked it back to an experience she had and it, the wetting problem went away. But she thought about that, she'd done it with some other children too, and she thought, you know, it's so much more efficient to have the parent be the one talking to the young [00:12:00] child who's still in the process of developing their personality. They have that close relationship, that 24/7 relationship with their parent, and they're much more apt to open up to their parent



than they would be to some strange lady in an office. This was an approach that she was very intrigued to implement in a school setting where therapists could work with parents on behalf of the children and observe the children in the school setting. And therapists could also help the teachers with the children whose parents they were seeing. And this way they developed really a partnership: parents, therapists and teacher working together on behalf of the child to support the child's personality development...

**Kimberly Bell, Ph.D.:** yeah.

**Barbara Streeter, MS, LPCC:** ...and to help them master the [00:13:00] challenges that they were facing at each stage of development.

**Kimberly Bell, Ph.D.:** yeah, so I think the other thing that is important is how the work that we do with children came out of this need and necessity to find a way through the most difficult of times to support children in crisis through difficulty under immense disruption to consistency and things of that nature.

And then just as an aside to put these pieces of a triangle together, you have Dr. Anny coming out of Holland who had this relationship with the Freuds. And at this time during the occupation Anna Freud is out in the countryside of England with the war nurseries where children were sent who had to be away from their parents, and there was much work on how to support children when [00:14:00] they are separate from their parents and the things that go wrong and the things you can do to help that. That eventually will also come around and feed into our consultation style. So there's these three things that are happening, the stuff in Cleveland, stuff with Dr. Anny, stuff with Anna Freud that really end up being consolidated, if you will, in Cleveland as a city in a way that was not happening anywhere else in the world.

Not really, not like this.

**Barbara Streeter, MS, LPCC:** Cleveland was progressive. One of the things that Doug Bond spearheaded was bringing Anna Freud to Cleveland to talk to the medical school and revamp the approach that they had in teaching medical students. One of the practices they implemented is that each medical student would be introduced to a pregnant mother on during their first year, [00:15:00] and they would follow this mother through the birth and this child through the first three or four years of their life.



And this was a real human kind of practice in comparison to what had been done before in the medical school. And so it wasn't just Hanna Perkins; we were developing in an environment that was increasingly appreciative of the importance of addressing early childhood issues in their making to prevent difficulties down the road. And just as a sidebar, you have Benjamin Spock and (Marshall) Klaus and (John) Kennel also at the hospital around this time. Klaus and Kennel being the ones that were, in some ways the originators of attachment theory.

**Kimberly Bell, Ph.D.:** So when we say that we've just celebrated our 75th anniversary, this is [00:16:00] what we're talking about, right? We're talking this evolution of, which has gone under slightly different names here and there, but the evolution from the Cleveland Day Nursery Association and then the development of Hanna Perkins as its own entity and as a nonprofit, a private nonprofit as it was and has always been and is now that is supported heavily by the philanthropic nature of Cleveland, which continues to be true. And you bring in these brilliant women. So you have Dr. Anny. Then there's the relationship with Anna Freud who started coming to Cleveland to lecture at the medical school and to spend time speaking at Hanna Perkins. But we haven't woven in yet, Erna Furman, yet another brilliant woman. How did she get here as you understand it? [00:17:00]

**Barbara Streeter, MS, LPCC:** My understanding is that she was one of Anna Freud's prize pupils and Dr. Anny wrote to Anna Freud and said, "you know, we've trained two child analysts to work in the school, but we're going to need more and we're going to need to build people who can work in our childcare centers as well." Dr. Anny recommended first Erna Furman and then several other people that essentially got imported from England to develop the programs at Hanna Perkins.

**Kimberly Bell, Ph.D.:** Yeah. Let me just outline what all of this coalesced into as you bring in all of these women who worked at the war nurseries, as you bring in Erna Furman and obviously her husband, who is a physician also, Bob Furman. And what they developed at Hanna Perkins endures to this [00:18:00] day, which is the school – where we bring children who are having difficulties in, and they all have a therapist that we call a family helper, and we have specially trained teachers that work with the family helper. And they wrap around the child as a team to understand their development and where their struggles are.

And they work with the family in what we call "**treatment via the parent**", which is to help the parent work directly with the child. And then you have the training program, to specifically train social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists we've



even had a couple of speech therapists who have come through the program to learn to do this kind of treatment. And that treatment does not look like what people see in cartoons.

This is very much working with children and their parents as a team, and even in the therapy room it's a play-based treatment. It's about [00:19:00] understanding the **hidden language of children**. There's a reason that this podcast is called that. It's uncovering the language of their behavior and what it's expressing. And then we have our consultation division to this day that go out into the community and they educate teachers in other classrooms, preschools. We teach social workers, we do parenting classes, and we consult to other childcare centers that are having difficulty with a behavior of a child in the classroom. And we were really one of the first ones to do that. And this was before universal pre-K. Preschool never used to be something that was offered to everybody through public schools.

If you were going to go, you had to go private. And so our foundation is that we never turn anybody away based on ability to pay. How we've managed that has evolved over time with society, but [00:20:00] as a nonprofit organization we want everyone regardless of income to have access to the kind of help we offer and to the kind of understanding that we, bring to our work with kids. Anything to add to that piece of it?

**Barbara Streeter, MS, LPCC:** The young ladies back in the late 1880s... what they really fought for is the dignity of children and listening to what the children have to say.

At base, the respect for children, the understanding of the importance for relationships, the recognition of how important mothers are in children's lives, coupled with understanding that children go through stages of development with each stage entailing the need to master [00:21:00] very particular conflicts and struggles. And the simple way to describe that is the struggle of a toddler with its mother. That's a necessary development for the child to begin to oppose what mommy wants it to do, because that's part of becoming independent. But that's a developmental step that is fraught with anxiety both on the mother's part and the child's part.

And I think it's the understanding that this is going on inside the child and inside the mother.... it's not just a what-to-do when your toddler says no. It's, let's



understand what the child's saying and feeling and why they're needing to go through this stage of development that makes the crucial difference.

And so many of the programs that have these social emotional curricula, are very effective in sort of this mass way, so you [00:22:00] have children looking at posters pointing to the different feelings they're having, but that's a real guesswork on the part of the child and on the part of the teacher. They, they can't really know unless there's a teacher who has a close relationship with them and has the support in really listening to the child as opposed to teaching the child about feelings.

And that's what distinguishes us in the things we do.

**Kimberly Bell, Ph.D.:** And I think that answers the question that we often get, which is, when we talk about, we've been around for 75 years, we've been doing this for 75 years. People say yeah, but now there's medication and there's, understanding of biological predisposition to certain developmental issues and all of those kinds of things.

And the answer to that is yes. That doesn't change the underpinning of what [00:23:00] it takes to go from being an infant to being a human. And all of us can understand that we have certain circumstances that we have to drag through our lives . All of these differences are what we bring to those struggles, but those struggles that human beings have getting from infancy to adulthood, those remain very stable.

And that kind of brings me to a little bit of a commercial because we have a group of early childhood development experts that we call The Grandmothers..

And Barbara has coordinated with them for many years. They are childcare providers who between them have helped raise hundreds of children and they used to put their wisdom out into the world through a column, in the local newspaper. And then it went through some other iterations, but it now exists in a book. That's the important thing. It is a [00:24:00] book called ***Timeless Advice for Parents of Young Children***, and it is a really gentle and loving offering of strategies for so many of the different challenges that parents face. It's in short chapters that are organized by common situations, and it is a book that can bring out that nurturing patient, resourceful parent that lives in all of us. It makes a great gift. Plus we are a nonprofit. Every purchase supports the Hanna Perkins Center for Child Development. You can find it at amazon.com. And it is a wonderful introduction to



the ways that we think about children and how we handle certain situations in a very broken down, plain language, usable way. So it covers everything from toilet mastery. How to manage Santa, separation anxiety, nightmares. [00:25:00] Like it goes, like it's really day to day struggles that everybody has with children and ways to think about them and understand them and help children with them.

OK.

This was fun. Documenting all of this with you . We're going to change it up though, and go into our regular segment that we like to call **Let's Rephrase That**. So this is where we talk through things grown ups, say to children, and come up with alternatives that are more useful. And now that we've had this conversation as we go into this, we can know that we are standing on the shoulders of giants, as they say, with this sort of timeless advice . So you ready Barbara ? Here's this scenario. A child in preschool is drawing with crayons. He's a bit too hard, and the crayons are breaking. When the third one cracks, he yelps in frustration and then swipes his arms across the table, sending crayons, paper and other art supplies flying. The classroom aide has seen it. She rushes to the table and says, "That's not how we behave. What do [00:26:00] you have to say?"

How would we gently instruct other people to maybe rephrase that?

**Barbara Streeter, MS, LPCC:** You got frustrated. I can see, and things got a little out of control. Let's figure out a way to fix it.

**Kimberly Bell, Ph.D.:** Isn't that it, right? Like the advice can seem so simple, but what you said, and what the example said, one of them speaks to compliance and to this idea – I'm assuming that when the person said, "what do you have to say?" they wanted some sort of an apology or something, right? I'm not even sure if I were a child and somebody said, what do you have to say?

I'd be like, I don't know. Which is oftentimes, interestingly what kids say. So it speaks to the conscience, which is already very harsh as it develops. And it speaks to this idea of compliance, but it does nothing to help the child recognize [00:27:00] the feeling, manage the feeling, identify what started the feeling, and give them something else to do.

Your response in just a few words like a "oops," which manages the level of frustration, right? In today's world, they would call that regulation co-regulation.



You stay calm for the child. You use very few words to let the child know that mistakes happen, that the feeling doesn't have to be so big, and that they can try again.

**Barbara Streeter, MS, LPCC:** And that, you know, the child didn't mean it, that something happened and the feeling got so big they lost control, which is a much more empathic way to address it than like you saying with the conscience and to rub it in that they did something bad. They know they did something that was not appropriate, you know, and they [00:28:00] probably feel bad about that.

On top of feeling bad about breaking the crayon. And yeah. And then you unpack it little bit by little bit over time as the child is available to talk about it.

**Kimberly Bell, Ph.D.:** And Barbara, I would say even if they did know, not that they were breaking the crayon, but even if they did know that they were swiping everything off the table. It still was a big feeling that was not in their control. It was a...

**Barbara Streeter, MS, LPCC:** they didn't know what to do with that feeling.

**Kimberly Bell, Ph.D.:** Yeah. They knew what the feeling was. They didn't know what to do with the feeling. And so it came out in the only way that it could come out. That was beautiful. I just wanna leave that because it doesn't have to be difficult. Not everything has to be punishment and reward. It can be understanding and helping a child manage their big feelings.

So if you have... as we wrap up, Barbara, thank you so much by the way for coming.

If [00:29:00] you have questions about parenting or child development, we are happy to answer them. You can send questions by email to [Hiddenlanguageofchildren@gmail.com](mailto:Hiddenlanguageofchildren@gmail.com). In addition I want people to know that a lot of what we have been alluding to, if this is the first podcast you're listening, just go back onto our previous podcasts where we go into much more detail about the struggles of becoming a grownup human.

We hope you enjoyed this conversation and found something to take away from it.



The Hidden Language of Children Podcast is a production of the nonprofit Hanna Perkins Center for Child Development in beautiful Shaker Heights, Ohio. Our producer is Bob Rosenbaum, and Dan Ratner is our consulting producer. If you like this podcast, please subscribe to hear future episodes and share it with all of your friends and family. We welcome your comments and your questions. For more links and information about our approach to healthy [00:30:00] child development, you can visit our website at [hiddenlanguageofchildren.org](http://hiddenlanguageofchildren.org). I am Dr. Kimberly Bell, and we will see you next time.