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Winnicott's "Squiggle" Archive: Chronicling the Unconscious of Childhood History

In this paper, I draw on Winnicott's visual archive of "squiggle" drawings to explore the status of unconscious conflict in making and representing childhood history. To make a "squiggle," the analyst sketches something like a doodle that the young patient can use, or "turn into something" (Winnicott, 1965, p. 82). Winnicott used the "squiggle" to help children symbolize un-resolved conflicts that had become manifest in a range of symptoms: speech impediments, not reading, outbursts of anger and phobias, to name just a few. Research on "squiggle" drawings tends to focus on the therapeutic quality of drawing, the "language" of visual forms and the possibility of mimicking Winnicott's "therapeutic consultations" (single treatment sessions) as opposed to embarking on a full-blown analysis. I bring these little drawings to the context of education to consider the status of unconscious conflict in the making of a childhood history. The "squiggle" archive does not offer a transparent view of either the child or the past, but rather, chronicles the limits, anxieties, defenses and fantasies that emerge between adults and children in the work of representing self experience. This paper explores examples from Winnicott's "squiggle archive" to explore contemporary questions on the status of the unconscious in archives of childhood, the child's uses of fantasy in making historical reality and learning as a problem of symbolization.

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