
The Process Play and Life Wondrous

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Résumé

Dans ce document nous explorons le thème des merveilles de la vie en fonction de parents et d'enfants en voie de changements. A titre d'exemples, nous vous présentons des cas présentement en cours. Comme indication de la théorie présentée, le jeu est ici synonyme de changement. Ces changements donnent naissance à de nouveaux moyens et à de nouvelles méthodes pour faire face à un monde nouveau. L'espoir est éternel.

Abstract

In this paper the wonders of life are explored as functions of children and parents in change. Presented are examples of cases in progress. Hinting at theory play means change. These create new means and methods in a new world. Hope endures.

Thoughts are the shadows of our feelings—always darker, emptier, and simpler—(Nietzsche, 1974, p. 203)

Play therapy is a mysterious process of two or more persons engaged in a mutually beneficial endeavour called play. This process is kept alive by the consensual validation of persons expressing, in every more perfect ways, whatever they please. And it works. It works because of faith, a determination to engage in play consisting of enjoyable and unmitigated passion, repetitive and redundant actions which coalesce into pure meaning weaving problems to processes, anger to care, and self possession to understanding. A process with much of reinforced nonsense which seeks more an enlivened means than an objective end. Where hats wear butterflies and peashooters hit nails. Where changes occur in ways feelings know. Where passion moves process and meaning moves on.

The process has mostly been understood as something creating an end not a function, a consequence not a joyful endeavour of means clarification. Means clarification is a process of play where actions produce other actions and, while they are occurring, both child and counsellor clarify with each other what the other intends. Where actions produce others and consequences emerge from nowhere. As such there are probably four distinct traditions of play therapy theory: (1) The directive camp with its contracts and interpretations is well known (Klein, 1955; Schaefer & Millman, 1977; Wolman, 1972); (2) The Axline community which is nondirective with their denial city thrust. Denial in the sense that the passivity of the counsellor is never included as agent in the self other dialectic of the client emerging (Axline 1969, 1976; Dorfman,

1958). The procedure was to relate unconditional acceptance on the child as a legitimate human being worthy of becoming whatever it can and wishes yet so often forms of the projected counsellor took shape and became law; (3) The child centred posture of Moustakas (1966) and others charts a guiding hand over the growing child. The adult guides and the child grows. Roles are distinct and the future is the child's. Early childhood education reflects these premises setting forth an enlightened educational experience for this developing human being (Miller, 1984; Ginott, 1964; Caldwell & Richmond, 1967). The fourth is the participatory approach where child and counsellor share in the play medium created between them (Lieberman, 1977; Bishop, 1978, 1983, 1986).

This paper explores more deeply this participatory participation. Infer to it as an enlightened poem of mutual composure where both child and counsellor wing it to a world neither one knows yet each share a hand in making. The process is complex; roles are fused. The counsellor, because of age, education, and training keeps the broader view, monitoring all, checking, leading and following; keeping the theme alive until it and the child change. Watching carefully for the emergence of themes which are new, the counsellor follows the flow of the child in process. This is hard to monitor, measure and account for. Both participants are playing; sometimes together and sometimes apart. The process is a means and the players are its agents. It restates the worthiness of both and gives to the child a mission for being. This is truly the theory of the future. It becomes the future.

The working stuff of participatory play therapy is a theme (Bishop, 1972). Themes are unified activities taking place over time. They consist of ongoing expressed actions, dynamically endowed, having certain features in common. These common features make up the process where change comes about. A child playing with trucks in a sand box expresses a theme. Two people talking motorcycles express thematic material in their conversation. They talk of cooling, speed, torque, style, appointments, and drive train manifestations. A child burying mommy and daddy in the tempera buckets expresses common features in all the actions shown. This theme of talking, burying, patting, and poking become the guts and sequence of the play therapy process. They paint the process with associative material which is ludic and beyond the confines of everyday. These playful themes coalesce into meanings bridging to significance the understandings and pains the child feels. The child wishes to be free of all unmanageable ideas and actions and the play themes in the process help him/her. Because when expressed through the involvement of play they become more elaborate and clean. This elaborate is health rehearsed, expressed, and evaluated where ludia carries the theme and with it the change.

When in play the child's actions become ludic and three things seem to be happening at once. The actions themselves come from the child

playing, not from some other. All actions seem to enhance themselves so that no product or goal is intended. Hence all consequences become the means which at all costs must be maintained. The process produces nothing and nothing is intended. Indirectly all processes have been fun and a whale of a good time. The third process exploding within the play sequence is the shift in reality embodied in the actions themselves. The confines of reality get shifted and ludia takes over. Realities that dill pickle being and lamplight hope change the child and counsellor's ways of talking, the shapes of their mouths, body postures and gestures besides. We frolic with the elves at spring time. The pretense of the play posture and the falsetto retort along with the myriad of tinsy sayings become the folly of play and change.

To start a productive thematic sequence with a child is tricky. Effective starts become difficult and careful planning is called for. To be frightened and angry or numb and passive upon entry proves common. First steps are fraught with a frightened delight. Often the whole family is brought in although they may not stay. The parent living complex is often the best base to start from. Themes are not, however, systematic but thematic and functional. Where themes of relationships cluster and group together in dynamic patterns. In change these patterns shift and new ones emerge. The sequence supports itself with itself and the wonder of a shared ludic exchange lives on.

Parents may come into the room with their children, stay a few minutes, then leave. In some cases, the child leaves to go back to the waiting area while I may work with his or her parents. With the parents in the waiting area I engage the child into a rousing game of soccer, bean bag toss, or sword fighting. The child often responds quickly and rapport emerges. The sequence may last until the child tires or suggests some new activity. Then he or she may grab the cars and trucks then skip over to the sandpile or go to the easle and paint or put on some hand puppets and begin talking. After about 35 minutes of shared action and ludic delight we clean up the playroom and return to the child's parents for a conference. This chat keeps the parents posted on events and allows a fresh look at mutual perceptions and their dynamics. The parents then ponder my questions and findings. They add concerns and we plan future sessions. In many instances I become an advocate for the child.

In subsequent sessions children manage on their own where conferences with parents take up the entire time. Sometimes the child carries but does not own the problems of the parents. When the child changes, parents' needs increase and focus so conferences with them unfold. Many times we have helped parents modify their attitudes and feelings while the child lives productively on. This play process has become an avenue through which the parents change. Families are helped too, as parents are often taught how to play with their children. My starting point is with the child. When the therapy is complete, my

preview is with the new child winging it to the next time warp of emergent meaning. However, many of the children we serve are lost, alone, angry, and disorganized so that extra help is called for. Here families cannot deal with the problems indicated. Some children need a therapy of play. It is called for and legitimate. The play has an authenticity for their care.

As the play continues children change. Transfer processes continue and herald themes of clearer meaning within the child and in his family too. Successful children do better in school, are healthier, feel more worthwhile, and develop a keener sense of humour both in the family and without. The dynamics of profound function are always complex; all is not known, however, all participants do seem happier.

Take Pete for example. He and his mother have been battling for his freedom to be. She finds him stubborn and unmanageable. She is a lovely woman, hard working, bright, and efficiently motivated. Pete is gifted, inordinately interested and challenging to everyone he meets. His mother cannot keep from being stimulated or stimulating him. The case is textbook familiar from a psycho-dynamic perspective. What needs to be done is to help each component of our tempestuous dyad achieve a freedom from each other and stay whole besides. After a few sessions Pete plays well, is interested in relating to the counsellor and achieves his independence easily, whereas Mom does not. She is a busy woman. She carts her two children everywhere, manages her husband's needs and supervises a girl guide troop. In one of our sessions I asked her how she managed the time to drive, cook, sew, keep house, be intimate with her husband and, in addition, manage the throes of two healthy children. She answered, "Well, I do it . . ." Then I asked what about herself, i.e., the self of a person wonderfully alive and competent, interested in experiencing a complex and worthwhile life. "Who me? I never really thought of it," she said meekly. Our society leaves many women in this dilemma. Home, career, house, lover, faun, and paragon of the future captures hiddenly the modern woman yet convention fails to release her. She is untapped and unknown even unto herself and what is done touches on the immortal. The process is creating a living human being and helping another. Through further discussions, this mother came to realize more clearly the paradox in her life. Her needs for freedom tied to her hidden desire to be free and alive in a young and vibrant world, provided a hope she was just beginning to see. Here on the video tape frame we find a sandbox drama with Pete and his mom playing. Mom is behind Pete laying a supporting hand on his shoulder and Pete plays, telling her what he is doing. While he plays, good vibes are shared between them. This is session four and some success has been achieved.

The next two pictures are about timid and insecure Alexis, depressed and alone. Her parents have separated and her father is disturbed, rigid,

FIGURE 1



authoritarian, and angry. A fundamentalist minister doing and undoing for others compulsively, compelled to hasten a future Armageddon. Alexis' mom fears his sexual involvement with her daughter during the daughter's visits with him. Alexis' paintings were all of the apartment buildings where dad lived. So, in the playroom, we're playing a visit to the dad's apartment. Mom was playing Alexis and I was playing dad. Alexis gave us the roles, checked our movements and had us sit on the couch, eat peanuts and watch television. While mom played "Alexis" and I played "dad", Alexis sprang to life running back and forth, up and down; giving body checks, slapshooting, launching power plays, and stopping pucks: a hockey game was in session. She was the game and we were its watchers. She moved quickly back and forth for several minutes then got tired. Puffing, she regained composure and moved on. The play sequence allowed her to play all of us and the hockey game besides. In her play she was filling our thoughts with meaning, a meaning she wished to understand.

In these sessions Alexis moved out of her depression and into the life of someone wonderfully human and alive. Having us be her, having her be our thoughts and feelings gave deep meaning to her play. As we were playing, the setting was changing giving pretense to meaning, developing the many levels of reference emerging within her. She was reforming the little girl reference system she used in relationships with others. Relating levels and meaning within the visit to dad, as did her play in

play as the session bore on. Several sessions were held with mom alone, helping her regain the confidence and sense of self-determination healthy women share. Alexis and she are now well.

FIGURE 2



The final series shot is of Mark and me in a paint-talk sequence, contemplating what is real and not real in a world where real and not real elements plague the emerging reality between us and between him and the world outside. When Mark came to the clinic he was impulsive, angry, sexually precocious, and fought instead of shared in all contacts with peers. In the paint drama Mark is being helped to realize the responsibility he has for himself. Responsibility about the consequence of his own behaviour in relationships with others. As he paints I maintain a banter about the playroom, about the paints, the picture emerging and Mark in progress. At one point Mark asks, "Where did the blue paint come from?" I tease saying, "Before the session we called your mom to see what colour pants you would wear to the clinic and she said 'blue.' We then matched the blue colour to your pants; see! We do this for all children who come," I added with aplomb. Still continuing, Mark turns his eyes this way and that; they then focus on me. He winks slightly then asks, "Are you fooling or did you re-ally call...?" He continues painting and looking at me. I answer, "What do you think Mark?" He shot back with, "Sometimes we fool others and make not real things real, but when we do we're just pretending. Aren't you just

pretending?" I answered, "Sometimes we have to let others know when we're fooling or not. Knowing the difference helps," I added. He pauses then goes on painting. In a later session Mark went first to the paints. Looking them over he said, "Hey, the blue is now gone . . . Are you still teasing?" he asked with a wink.

This paint-talk dialogue restated his involvement with the room and picture emerging. It linked my pretentious prattle with his pretense and his pretense unfolding with my own person of emergent being and the two of us played on. In this sequence many levels of meaning were exchanged. The setting was safe; acceptance was mutual and the future was ours. He saw my tease, added his own through the wink and query, then he heard and pondered my retort. All this was combinatorial and alive. Meaning was in process. What do we mean when we tease? Is teasing a way of living? Many such things happened following this paint sequence. He played and shared and lived beyond and within the fringe of a good social exchange. Efficient exchanges come easily now. He relates constructively with everyone in ways six-year-olds do. His mother now could not be bothered with worrying about Mark's misdeeds. She is now living her own life. The real not real tease not tease drama provided countless settings for reflective exchange. His ability to deal effectively with the complexities of social being continue to challenge him. Although piquant and complimentary his relationships are all good. So self-assured, he is well.

FIGURE 3



What do the cases of Pete, Alexis, and Mark tell us about the process and its consequence? All were helped yet each in a different way. The pretense in the tease I direct at Mark becomes memory for what he needs for more complimentary performance on the outside. This chide was to provide him a metaphor for more refined discourse with others. When he teases he must learn to subtly disclose the intent and solicit with this recognition understanding. Then both the teaser and the teased are playing. To help children monitor more closely the genuineness of intentions before they occur becomes a noble goal for all of us. Here play prophesizes its end, an end rather wondrous and mysteriously unknown.

Alexis' drama within a drama set the stage for rehearsing her visit to dad, mom's separation from Alexis while visiting dad, and it also showed dad's redundancy in the peanut eating, sofa sitting vigil side by side experience of the whole hockey endeavour. Her game "hockey" watched us watch, filled us with her game while she looked on and played the game. She was television, the game, and us all at once. The pretense of play with hockey all day completed this consecrated repetition and the typical visit with dad. The chances of sexual involvement seemed remote at best.

Pete's problem was the constrictions set by his felicitous mother. Once he had the freedom to admit these, the flow of the play moved easily to her and she played too. In play she found herself as woman and mother and paragon of the future besides. Her help came from seeing Pete become more focused in all he did. Both are now more industrious, competent, separate, and involved. Pete really did not need my help, but she did. The three cases form a triangle of confirmation. Participation is help and play binds the two. The process of play and life wondrous moves on.

Was all suffering not time? Was all torture of self and fear of self not time? Was not everything difficult and everything hostile in the world vanquished and gone as soon as one had vanquished time, as soon as one could think time out of existence?

(Hess, Baumer, F., p. 72)

Baumer, F., *Herman Hess*, Fredrick Unger
New York, 1969, p. 119.

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