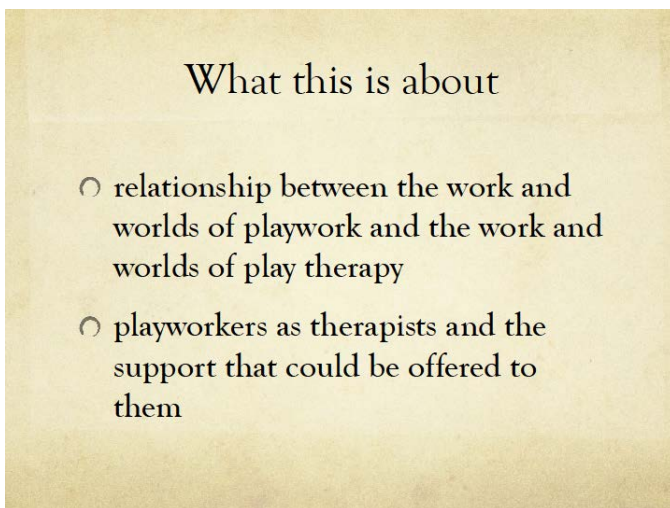


This paper has two distinctly separate components. Both fit the title perfectly. Firstly I am going to look at the relationship between the work and worlds of playwork and the work and worlds of play therapy and then secondly I am going to talk about playworkers as therapists and the support that could be offered to them.



This is the first presentation of some exploratory thinking.

Let's take as our starting point that it is not just about play as a right for the child but accept that play is a fundamental need and through their play children will develop and grow in all aspects of their physiology, psychology, social encounters and play becomes the primary method by which a child engages with and understands their world.

Needs and Rights

- Play is a fundamental necessity
- Play is a need
- From that need the right is constructed to mandate being able to meet the need

It can be argued that when a child does what they want to do in their own way and for no other reason than they want to do it, that this is play.

I believe it is now universally accepted that there can be no one, single, all encompassing definition of play. Indeed in 2009 Brian Sutton-Smith said "I have spent my whole life studying play, and I still don't know what it is".

This lack of definition doesn't mean that there are no mechanisms that help us identify if a child is playing. There are many academics who have presented a set of characteristics which need to be met for the child to be playing. Catherine Garvey

Catherine Garvey

- Play is pleasurable, enjoyable. Even when not actually accompanied by signs of mirth, it is still valued by the player.
- Play has no extrinsic goals. Its motivations are intrinsic and serve no other objectives. In fact, it is more an enjoyment of means than an effort devoted to some particular end. In utilitarian terms, it is inherently unproductive.
- Play is spontaneous and voluntary. It is not obligatory but is freely chosen by the player.
- Play involves some active engagement on the part of the player
- Play has certain systematic relations to what is not play.

Patrick Bateson

Patrick Bateson

- Intrinsically motivated
- No immediate benefit
- Novel combinations of actions
- Sensitive to well-being
- Most often seen in the young



Gordon Berghart

Gordon M. Burghardt


- Limited immediate function
- Endogenous component
- Structural or temporal difference
- Repeated performance
- Relaxed field



Peter Grey

Peter Gray

- Play is self-chosen and self-directed; players are always free to quit.
- Play is an activity in which means are more valued than ends.
- Play is guided by mental rules.
- Play is non-literal, imaginative, marked off in some way from reality.
- Play involves an active, alert, but non-stressed frame of mind.



and whilst not presenting a specific set of characteristics Huizinga has a list that can be extracted from *Homo Ludens* as does Callois from *Man, Play and Games*.

Many children are able to happily get on with their play lives but some struggle to access what Professor Fraser Brown calls a rich play diet.

This inability to engage fully in play may be due to a number and range of factors from limited access to environments that support a range of play narratives, a lack of resources to stimulate and support play to health, trouble and trauma that prevents engagement.

From this arises different professions and approaches that aim to support the child at play.

For playworkers we are guided by the Playwork Principles and for this discussion the first three are relevant.

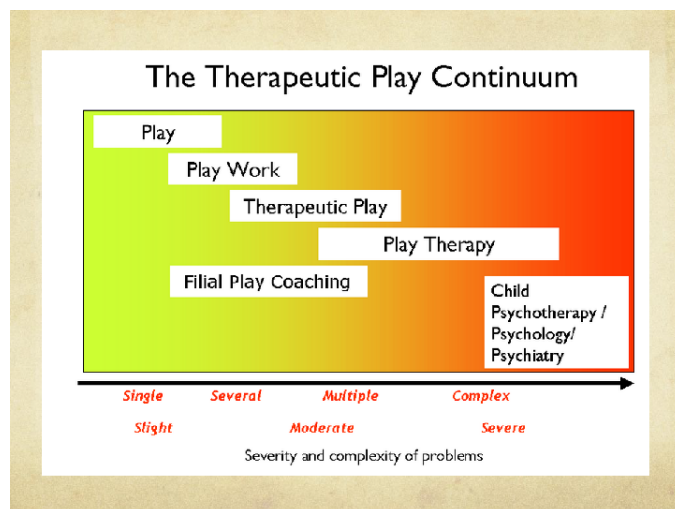
- 1) All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well being of individuals and communities.
- 2) Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.
- 3) The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.

[Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, Cardiff 2005



Playworkers do whatever they need to do so that the child can play in the way that playworkers understand play to be and for playworkers of primary concern is the ability of the child to engage in play that is personally directed and intrinsically motivated and where the adult intervenes as little as possible.

For some the view is that the setting, supported by adults, becomes a therapeutic play space...



Let me explore that a bit more. All play has the possibility of being therapeutic and so conceptually all playwork provision is therapeutic. So what makes the difference between playwork and therapeutic playwork?

Therapeutic playwork is where the playwork practitioner is working in a context where the children are 'broken'. We could argue that most adventure playgrounds work with 'broken' children but for it to be therapeutic playwork the playworker needs to be aware of the nature of the work they are doing and the additional potential needs of their client group. This self realisation is part of what makes it therapeutic playwork as does the increased level of reflection for the playworker of their own practice.

Now to look at play therapy.

Play therapy can be seen as the complete antithesis of playwork for in play therapy the therapeutic practitioner creates a specific space where the child is able to play out issues of concern and where the therapist is able to work with the child in their play to help resolve the problems.

This is seen by many in the playwork world as being adult controlled and therefore not really play. Remember – play is only play when the child is in control of the content and intent of what they are doing and they can choose to engage or not to engage

I think though that this is too narrow a view of Play Therapy. A bit like the stereotype of play therapy.

The didactic approach of playworkers has not allowed for any engagement with play therapy and this is a shame as some simple delving into play therapy theory soon reveals that one of the founding figures of play therapy, Virginia Axline said, and I paraphrase 'The assumption is that given the opportunity to express themselves freely, children will reach solutions and resolve their own emotional difficulties themselves', and this is not so far distant from an understanding that playworkers have.

Axline's approach is called 'non directive play therapy.'

The therapist:

- Must develop a warm and friendly relationship with the child.
- Accepts the child as she or he is.
- Establishes a feeling of permission in the relationship so that the child feels free to express his or her feelings completely.
- Is alert to recognise the feelings the child is expressing and reflects these feelings back in such a manner that the child gains insight into his/her behaviour.

- Maintains a deep respect for the child's ability to solve his/her problems and gives the child the opportunity to do so. The responsibility to make choices and to institute change is the child's.
- Does not attempt to direct the child's actions or conversations in any manner. The child leads the way, the therapist follows.
- Does not hurry the therapy along. It is a gradual process and must be recognised as such by the therapist.
- Only establishes those limitations necessary to anchor the therapy to the world of reality and to make the child aware of his/her responsibility in the relationship.

Virginia Axline (1969) Play

What this play therapy sets out to do is to create a space where the child feels safe, is able to play in the fullest understanding of the word play, but within a limited environment

Cattanach talks about the role of the play therapy in this way "Play therapy is a way of helping troubled children cope with their distress, using play as the medium of communication between child and therapist. The child plays, and tells stories about the play and the therapist listens, perhaps asks questions to clarify meaning, and

contextualises the story around the social circumstances which exist for that child in their world.

The method is based on the central assumption that play is the place where children first recognise the separateness of what is 'me' and 'not me' and begin to develop a relationship with the world beyond the self. It is the child's way of making contact with their environment."

But it was in my observation of a play therapist using the Jungian sand play method that I finally came to the realisation that the playworker could learn much from the play therapy theory.

Sandplay is hands on psychological work. In a "free and protected" space provided by the analyst, a client creates a concrete manifestation of his or her imaginal world using sand, water, and miniature objects.

The therapist will encourage the child to engage with the sand play and small world characters and from observing this, the therapist is able to gain an understanding of the child's psyche and able to go deeper by moving into talk therapy alongside the sand tray.

How can the playworker learn from this?

The knowledge that in the play of the child are hidden messages that the playworker who is only trained in playwork might struggle to see but the playworker who also has an understanding of play therapy is going to be able to translate to the creation of more specific environments and targeted interventions with the child's more specific but unstated needs being met.



We are not turning the playworker into a play therapist – that is not the point - but what we are doing is teaching the playworker how to be more sensitive and more aware in their settings so that they are more able to meet the child's play needs.

Now let us turn to the part where we talk about how playworkers need play therapy!

If we recognise playwork as a healing profession and that playworkers are indeed akin to therapists then we should note that therapists also are often required to undertake personal therapy for themselves

There is no built in official mechanism for playworkers to have therapy. But an informal system exists for some. The 'going down the pub' after work and the reliving of what happened today, the telling of stories about what you did leads to how you felt and the empathic responses of your colleagues starts that process of working out.

Sometimes when we work bad things happen. Like a child getting hurt; a parent / carer berating you or something happening that you are uncomfortable with. We need processes to help resolve our unresolved feelings and emotions. We don't have a therapist to see for personal therapy but the reflective processes that are part of the practice of playwork will help in the process of healing.

Let me finish with some stories: Pete was working as part of a team on a multi day programme. On day one a child fell and unfortunately hurt an arm and was sent off with the parent as it was a suspected break. The next day the parent came back and angrily started shouting at Pete. Not so much about the arm being broken but more 'why didn't you say it was broken'; 'we've been in the hospital all night trying to get it sorted' etc. It was a traumatic experience and so in the daily reflection we spent a substantial amount of time discussing it to help Pete heal

A woman 'off her face on drugs and alcohol' The experience of physically escorting her away in a restraint lock was horrific

Thank you for being part of this two tiered approach to thinking about why playworkers need play therapy

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