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Assignment#1

Empiricism and Play Therapy: Questions for Yesterday,  
Today and Tomorrow About the Role Technology/Research  
Plays in the Field of Child Psychology/Play Therapy

Morita Child Psychotherapy and Play Therapy  
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If there is one lesson that I have drawn from my travels, it is that cultural and biological diversity are far more than the foundation of stability, they are an article of faith, a fundamental truth that dictates the way things are supposed to be. If diversity is a source of wonder, its opposite—the ubiquitous condensation to some blandly amorphous and singularly generic modern culture that I have witnessed in all parts of the world—is a source of dismay.

...We are living in the midst of an ecological catastrophe every bit as tragic as that of the slaughter of the buffalo and the passenger pigeon. Wherever one looks, there are governmental policies that are equally blind, economic rationales equally compelling. All memory is convulsed in an upheaval of violence. There is a fire burning over the earth, taking with it plants, animals, cultures, languages, ancient skills and visionary wisdom. Quelling this flame and reinventing the poetry of diversity is the most important challenge of our times.

(Davis, 1998, p. 231).

In a response to the League of Nations International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, Albert Einstein wrote to Sigmund Freud in their 1932 correspondence, Why War?

I feel elated that through a request of the League of Nations I have been given the unique opportunity to discuss with you those questions, which in the present state of world affairs appear to me to be the most important ones facing civilization. Is there a way to liberate mankind from the doom of war? Although it has become common knowledge that because of technological progress a threat to our very existence is the fundamental part of this question, the most ardent efforts at solving it have failed to a frightening degree. **Isn't it gratifying that some of those who practically and professionally concerned with this problem now wish, out of a certain feeling of powerlessness, to learn from those men whose scientific work has given them an insight into the depth of human wishes and feelings.** In this exchange of ideas, I cannot do much more than try to define the question and, by dealing with the more superficial attempts at a solution, enable you to discuss the problem from the vantage point of your profound knowledge of human instincts. I trust that you will be

able to point out educational methods which might, in an apolitical way, remove psychological obstacles at which the psychologically untrained may only guess, whose connections and nature he cannot judge.

(Einstein, 1932, p.1).

In light of recent world events, I have found this correspondence and the notions of psychology, science, technology and expertise that are relayed in terms of the threat of war to be remarkably relevant and applicable in today's global climate.

Further, I am struck by the pungency that the notion of technology and the role it plays in the social sciences, specifically child psychotherapy and play therapy, is as relevant in our discussions today, perhaps even more so than it was 70 years ago. I find myself asking if we have found any answers in the last century to the same questions we continue to pose? That being an attempt, "To discover the true causes of human behaviour-those unseen processes of the mind which take place in response to external events and other stimuli" (Hunt, 1993, p.7). I find this topic to be of primary importance in the field of child psychology, specifically in the research realm as it continues to move rapidly in the direction of a quantitative and scientifically motivated format in an attempt to categorize people in their human lives.

Empiricism is the mode of the day. As such, what role is technology playing in the field of child psychology and play therapy? George Grant notes in his essay, Faith and Multiversity that,

The 'helping' professions-psychiatrists, social workers etc.-are important means of bringing people under objective control. This is largely done by the claim that they understand families better than families understand themselves (Grant, 1986, p. 53).

In essence the individual and the primacy of their own expertise about themselves has been negated with an increasing emphasis being placed on the expertise of objective scientific inquiry. In the field of child psychology today, value and emphasis is being placed upon objectifying individuals and families. This is done by completing research based upon assessment tools. These tools are formulated to make conclusions based upon predetermined generalized factors. The importance and value of the individual and their family as an expert about themselves and the observation of that individual that was critical to Piaget's theoretical approach with children, has the potential to become virtually nullified and made obsolete by these assessment and evaluation tools.

As Einstein pointed out above, technological advancements, despite modernist assumptions otherwise, are not without their limitations. Einstein points out one pitfall as, being able to grasp the structure of an argument as a measure of success despite any hands on experience. In pointing this out, the greatest scientific mind of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century sums up the limitations of science and technology. His words have a resonance today that is as relevant in the world climate, as they were stunningly simplistic in their truth.

As a brilliant thinker, Einstein was given a choice of whom he wished to correspond with and which topic to address. As an objective, scientific thinker, he chose to communicate with the 20th century's most famous researcher of human instincts, Sigmund Freud. By virtue of this choice, Einstein further, conveys the inability of the scientific mind, therefore process, to understand the complexities of human nature and the human condition. At the same time, he espouses the benefits of the objectivity that science can offer when trying to filter through complex human issues.

It seems increasingly apparent that the world of science and technology and that of social or human sciences is interwoven and cannot, in a modern time such as this, be used independently to address social issues. George Grant pontificates on this topic in his essay Thinking About Technology.

The mobilization of the objective arts and sciences at their apogee comes more and more to be unified around the planning and control of human activity. What must be emphasized here is that the new technologies of both human and non-human nature have been the dominant responses to the crisis caused by technology itself. This illustrates how 'technology' is the pervasive mode of being in our political and social lives. (Grant, 1996, p.17).

Grant further discusses the domino effect the role of technology plays in our human/social and political lives, specifically during times of crisis, such as the one we are currently experiencing. Grant states that,

The political response to these interlocking emergencies has been a call to even greater mobilization of technology, which illustrates the determining power of our technological representation of reality. More technology is needed to meet the emergencies which technology has produced. (Grant, 1986, p.16).

These remarks by Grant are in sync with the thoughts expressed above by Einstein, although the time frame between the two is 54 years. In carrying this line of thought further, the determining nature of technology (science and research) on the social sciences (psychology) has been seen in attempts over

the last eighty years to professionalize and technologize the field. Grant further notes that in professionalizing the field, we have become elite experts about the people we work with. In doing so, "The profession has become a chief instrument for tightening social control"(p.16).

To summarize the discussion so far, technology exists and the creation of technology further creates more technology. Objectivity is a direct result of technology as there are tools ascribed to each technological process. Those who claim exclusive rights to the tools of a particular technology (research) are considered experts or professionals within the field of that technology. In so far as this argument goes, the people that technology is designed to work with, no longer hold claim to being experts about themselves. Rather, the professionals within the field of that technology are now considered experts about the whole of the clients' experience. This begs the question in the technological age; does the client have a voice?

The influence of behaviourism in the early part of the last century moved child psychology to be research oriented. Behaviourism concentrated on determining norms as shown by the advent of standardized mental testing (Hunt, 1993, p. 354). This was evident in Hall's "child study movement" which focused on experimentation and data gathering (Hunt, 1993, p. 354). In response to the question, does the client have a voice, Hall may have stated that the client does not have an individual voice, rather that there is a collective voice in research that determines "norms".

On the other hand, Piaget placed the highest value on knowledge based on the experiences of both the 'client' and the professional. In this belief he created modern developmental psychology. Piaget believed in utilizing the dialectic of research and theory and watched children play, while also playing with them. He developed his theories based upon this dialectic. While research, often painstaking (Hunt, 1993, p. 355) was a major component of his studies, this research was practically based upon experience. Thus, his compulsion with epistemology was influenced by both the spirit of the times, by Darwinian biological determinism combined with concepts of the cognitive process (Hunt, 1993, p.355). This belief in the advancement of human kind through metamorphosis of accumulated experience created an advancement of psychology that was unprecedented although limited by Piaget's theory that development ended in the late teen years. It was however, Piaget's brilliance in recognizing the value of the dialectic that has influenced modern psychology to combine technology/research with practical application and thus, the focus on efficacy of treatment protocols.

Of primary importance to the flavour of this essay, is an understanding of the integral part that play, playing with and the playing of children, has had in developing this psychology. While Freud had alluded to the importance of childhood experiences on the development of ones psyche, he spoke in terms of sexuality, thus alienating him from the puritans who believe that children do not

possess inherent sexual characteristics (Hunt, pp. 196). On the other hand, Piaget embraced the notion of the child as innocent, developing and influenced not only by their biological processes, but the processes of their interaction with the world, answering the age-old question of nature versus nurture. For Piaget a large part of that interaction involved his participation in the process of play.

Perhaps it was Piaget's lack of formal training in psychology and his interest in natural science, further combined with his role as a father, which allowed him to view the cognitive development of a child as a unique yet quantifiable experience. However, maturation remained an unexplored area for Piaget although today, modern neuroscientific research is providing further information in this field. With the advent of developmentalism, child psychology became a legitimate area of scientific inquiry. This led to further study within infant development on topics such as: maturation (Dennis), perception (Franz), personality & attachment (Bolwby & Ainsworth) psychoanalytical development (Anna Freud) behaviourism (Klein & Tustin), (Winnicott), lifespan development (Erikson), moral development (Kohlberg)

Play therapy and studies with children have focused on the social learning views and the role of play in the developmental process. (Sroufe and Cooper). Sroufe and Cooper speak about play as a forum for learning self-control in a social context (Hunt, 1993, p.374). Piaget also believed that morality developed within the context of game playing (Hunt, p.379). And so the field began to develop as a unique, independent area of inquiry.

## **PLAY THERAPY**

Play Therapy has its roots in a plethora of disciplines including: Anthropology, Sociology, Social Work, Education, Psychiatry and Psychology. With Freud's psychoanalytical approach to therapy and the discovery of the psyche, combined with Jung's unconscious and symbolism, the stage was set for the inevitable development of play therapy.

The turn of the twentieth century was a milestone in the development of western 'civilized' society. Charles Darwin had written his Origin of the Species and Sigmund Freud was discovering the inner workings of the human mind and spirit. The impressionists were alive and thriving and the surreal movement was developing out of the notion that inner symbols could be expressed through the medium of art. The western world was ripe for the advent of play as therapy.

Piaget's theory of cognitive developmentalism was established and with it, a man not formally educated in psychology, discovered the enormous and far reaching implications of play as a way of tapping into the inner self through external expression in a realm that was taken for granted for centuries, the realm of play.

He began the empiricist approach to studying the validity and reliability of play as a medium for expression and analysis and the therapeutic components inherent in play. In my opinion, Piaget was most successful in his ability to balance nature versus nurture. Perhaps this came out of his perspective as a father and a scientist. From these early beginnings, psychology has branched out into many areas including, psycholinguistics, neuropsychology, clinical, academic and social psychology to name a few.

With the advent of Bowlby and his theories of attachment, child psychology and play therapy became firmly entrenched as sound and relevant areas of study. Separation and attachment theories use play as one of the primary areas of assessment with respect to parental meeting of needs. Bowlby's theories have had far reaching implications for child psychology and play therapy, as he laid the foundation for much of today's continued work on the importance, relevance and validity of meeting a child's need throughout the initial stages of development and the implications of not doing so on later mental health. Today studies in topics such as: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders, Anxiety Disorders, Behavioural Disorders, Developmental Disorders, Physical, Sexual and Emotional Abuse, Substance Abuse, Gender Identity Disorders, Eating Disorders, Communication Disorder, Abuse and Neglect, Depressions, Anxieties and Fears, all point to the role of attachment, pre and post natal in the forming of a healthy person. Even the Diagnostic Statistics Manual IV is now inclusive of childhood disorders. Developmentalist approaches created a milieu in which that theory is inherent in today's psychology, whereas prior to Piaget it was not.

Within the field of play therapy there are different theories that form the basis of a practitioner's involvement with their client. These theories include: psychoanalytical, release and structured, client centered, focal, behavioral, gestalt, Jungian, filial, theraplay, humanistic, cognitive/behavioural and eclectic. Determining the value of directive versus non-directive approaches also influences one's work with children. Choosing tools to use when working with children also influences our level of involvement in the play therapy process.

However, according to Russ in her article, Play Psychotherapy Research State of the Science, despite the existence of these theories, the literature, "Need(s) to be integrated into a theoretical framework that leads to the establishment of a systemic program of research and clinical practice" (pp.366).

In our modern world where funding is based on facts, there is a necessity for play therapy research that creates assessment and diagnostic tools. There is a necessity for valid, rigorous, methodologically sound research that will encourage play therapy to develop as a field of intervention that is proven to be effective. This can be accomplished by developing a formatted and well-documented approach to meeting the needs of children. In response to this need, the development of interventions that have universal application will ensure service implementation that is appropriate and effective. This is the major goal of

empiricism. This also allows for assessment of practitioner's interventions and ultimately will lead to implementing the most appropriate and effective interventions for each client, while ensuring individual accountability for therapists.

There is much merit in science and research, there is also much potential for dehumanizing the experiences of children. An awareness of this potential pitfall is integral to providing interventions that are developed based upon individual needs. Mark Barnes reminds us that, "Healing occurs below jaw level. Getting stuck up in our heads only serves to stop or delay the process." (Barnes, 1996, p.141.). Science and empiricism remain important tools that will promote the growth of the field, let us not forget that intuition, feeling and empathy for the client are equally important.

Despite the value of empiricism and the necessity for it to receive funding for programs, there remains an inherent dilemma in child psychology and play therapy. This dilemma is in the importance of recognizing the uniqueness of the individual while recognizing and utilizing the gained knowledge through research and technology/empiricism. This is not a new dilemma, but a pervasive and persistent one. This responsibility falls to individual practitioners. While human beings share certain aspects of the human condition, each experience, like each person and child is unique unto himself or herself. It is this challenge that makes the field endlessly interesting and infinitely ripe for study.

If the inherent goodness of technology/empiricism is questioned, then an examination of the growing trend towards its use of technological tools within the field of child psychotherapy/ play therapy is critical if the field/profession is to remain reflective and just. As post-modern theories question the core of the human sciences, so did modernism question the practice before its time. In 70 years will the same questions be asked of today's practice and of future practice?

In a world in which the foreseeable future holds the continued exponential growth of technological intrusion in the lives of human beings, recognizing that technology creates connections between agencies in society on many levels is of vital importance. Utilizing technology to make connections with clients is an increasing challenge within the field of child psychology and play therapy.

Despite the integral role of computers and the tools that accompany them in the field of psychotherapy, the therapist can still maintain a subjective and pivotal role in determining the nature of the relationship with the client. There is optimism in this fact. The future of the field will be determined by the continued ability of individual therapists to retain this power as well as, the ability of agencies and governments to encourage this. Observation, questionnaires, data collection, experimentation, correlation analysis, mental testing, emotional development, morality testing, must also be used to accomplish these goals.

Despite efforts to place people into categories and even within the constraints that these categories impose, the individual therapist can continue to value the primacy of the therapeutic relationship and the uniqueness of the individual client. This can be done in an effort to determine services for children and their family that takes into account their individual needs. Working for the good of the whole by working for the good of the individual.

Freud reiterated this sentiment when he replied to Einstein's inquiry regarding war. He did so by speaking about human nature as dichotomous, love and hate, pacifism and destructiveness. These forces, like those of technology and human beings are interwoven and rarely act independently of one another. The field of play therapy will continue to develop within its own dialectic or dichotomy, empiricism and clinical intervention. Although this may be accomplished conversely, by working for the good of the individual by working for the good of the whole. This will be accomplished through relevant and valid research within the field related to specific areas of inquiry.

Freud also says that through the process of civilization continuing to prioritize the intellect over instinct, we maybe able to eradicate our inherent tendencies to aggression and destruction (he was clearly a pessimist). In other words, utopia through intellectual supremacy. Will science, research, empiricism bring us to this utopian state of being? Can science and technology continue to move us in this direction? If we use it to dehumanize and objectify people while concurrently increasing the rift between the professional and layperson, history has and continues to show us that the end result will not be successful.

If we follow Piaget's notion of cognitive development, play therapy does not appear to be in its infancy. It is a toddler who is influenced today by therapists, academics researchers and the children and families it serves. It will be critical for all of these parties to play a role in creating a body of research that quantifiably establishes, "How play helps, what it helps with, can we teach good play skills, and how the therapist can use play most effectively to help the child (Russ, pp.366).

There is a necessity for assessment and diagnostic tools that can be used in a systemic fashion. There is the need for a consistent assessment of when intervention is needed for children. To date, there exist some assessment tools, yet they are not broadly used. Russ (1995) mentions some of these scales including the Affect in Play Scale and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children. More often than not, however, when a child is referred for therapy there is no valid assessment of whether therapy will in fact be helpful and if it is in fact a necessary intervention.

There is a need for the development of creative, effective service-delivery models. Trained child psychotherapists/play therapist could implement these.

Part of this process is the need to assess each child, before, during and after the therapeutic process takes place. There have been studies that show the effectiveness of play therapy interventions, yet the methodological soundness of many has been questioned. Interestingly many have historically failed to have a control group as part of the study. In attempting to avoid this type of invalid or questionable research Weisz (1993), in Russ (1995) refers to studies that show positive results as those that, "Zoom in on specific problems with careful planning of the intervention" (Russ, pp.379). As well, there is notation of the value in, "Including children (in research) who are not clinic-referred, having homogeneous samples, and by having a focal problem that the therapy is focused on" (Russ, pp.380).

It appears that the future direction of the field of child psychology and play therapy is in the area of cognitive-behavioural treatment. This is proving to be an area of research where valid studies have shown the effectiveness of play therapy interventions. This is as result of the nature of cognitive-behavioural interventions and their focus on specific treatment goals (Russ, pp.379). Conversely there has been limited research into the affective benefits of play therapy interventions (Russ, 1995). The future assessment, diagnostic and clinical models will also need to be inclusive in the area of affect.

Research in child development, specifically infant mental health and attachment regulation, speaks to the importance of play in the development of the executive functions. It does not take a huge leap of faith for those in the field of child psychotherapy to realize the implications of this on the field of play therapy. However, there must be a leap taken in the area of research to fill the gap between what is known in the field of child development as empirically sound and effective and what will be proven to be sound and effective play therapy interventions.

This research must also include evaluation methods in identifying and determining the effectiveness, beyond the most obvious and widely used tool to date, which is observation of a positive change or elimination of the concerning or challenging behaviour. Doing this will mean implementing longitudinal studies that track the behavioural, cognitive and affective changes over the course of time. Where will the money come from for this type of research? It is a cyclical debate.

Completing research that determines the efficacy of play therapy interventions will create increased funding for future research? Scholars can conduct research, but this can exclude the input of the hands on clinician in the process. As such, it would be most efficacious for individual case studies to be completed by therapist practicing in the field. While this is not practical for all, due to realistic constraints, for those who can accomplish such studies, the benefits will be great. A corollary of the benefits will be in adding to the limited literature that is empirically based and sound. In doing so future meta-analysis will prove to have a more profound impact on verifying the validity the field as a whole.

And so we return to Freud and Einstein, yet another dichotomy. Freud, a man of the humanities, Einstein, a man of empiricism, everywhere we turn there is a dialectic. However, there is no such dialectic when these two men discuss war. Despite Freud's belief that human nature strives towards its own destruction (the death instinct), both he and Einstein are clear that civilization and culturization move us away from this destructive mode. In my interpretation, Freud is saying that knowledge creates positive change. In doing so, the knowledge that children can gain through the play therapy process, be it directive or non-directive, internalized or externalized, is a knowledge that will move them towards healing. Let us combine the dialectic of technology and research with practical application and thus develop an efficacious treatment protocol. Let us not forget how effective Piaget was in balancing the value of empiricism with the value of hands on clinical intervention. Of all of the things he has contributed to the field, in my opinion this was his greatest achievement.

We are currently waging a war on terrorism. A war that has resulted in despairingly huge rifts between the ideals and realities of different cultures. As Marx put it, the have's and the have-nots. Desperation leads to fanaticism and to a disregard for human life. Separation of people through many means, but through technology and science specifically only works to further the differences amongst people. The contradiction of technology in human services is that it means to move people to integration while conversely acting as a mechanism of categorization and separation.

This notion is applicable on a global scale, on a governmental scale, on an agency and field scale and on an individual level. Separation of the client from the service and the service provider only exacerbates the already cumbersome division that can exist between them as professional and layperson. While it is possible for individual clinician's to utilize technology while maintaining a sense of humanism in their work, this is not an expectation or requirement in the field as a whole. It is important, fundamental in fact, that this humanism not be lost, but rather fostered into the technological processes by which we perform our jobs. If we are successful in accomplishing this task, technology will look very different. Let us not forget the "poetry of diversity" rather, let us use technology and research as a tool to improve application without losing the art of play as a creative endeavor that cannot be put into a formula.