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Analysis of a Journey:  
An Exploration of One Child's and One  
Therapist's Experience of Individual Drama Therapy

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A Research Paper  
in  
Creative Arts Therapies  
(Drama Therapy Option)

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

September 1999

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0-612-43682-9

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Analysis of a Journey: An Exploration of One Child's and One Therapist's Experience of Individual Drama Therapy**

**G. Zeeva Benathen Weisz**

This case study retrospectively reviews the processes of a therapist and a nine-year-old child in individual drama therapy. The goal of the therapy was to help the child sort through experiences of abuse and abandonment in order to develop a more positive self image. The paper provides a qualitative description of the therapy as seen through the eyes of the therapist.

The treatment method was informed by the client-centered theories of play therapy developed by Axline. It combined the techniques of drama and play therapy, incorporating projective play with toys, story-making, role play, art work, and games. These activities generated symbols and metaphors that provided the chief means of communication in the therapeutic relationship. In the course of the treatment, the therapist was forced to redefine her understanding of the client-centered approach in order to maintain safe boundaries.

The treatment was evaluated according to the criteria of trauma resolution developed by Gil and Johnson. The child made progress towards separating Self from the abusive Other, thereby developing a clearer sense of his identity, but did not achieve the final stage of reconnection to his environment.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am grateful to my supervisors, Christine Novy and Elizabeth Anthony, for their ongoing support, as well as for their generous and constructive feedback. My understanding of the therapeutic process described in this paper was enriched and to some extent shaped by the insightful guidance of my clinical supervisors, Christine Novy and Yehudit Silverman. I have learned much from all my peers in the Concordia University drama therapy program. However, I owe special thanks to Susan Ward for reading and responding to this paper. Finally, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to George, Talia, and Jonathan Weisz for their loving encouragement and support.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper will take the form of a case study which explores the journey taken by myself and a child, Jason, in individual drama therapy. My desire to undertake this study grows out of a life long interest in promoting childrens' creative expression through the arts. As a drama therapist-in-training, I was particularly fascinated by the creative ways in which Jason used dramatic projective play to explore personal issues. I found equally compelling the way in which the metaphors and symbols of play became a language through which we developed a dialogue with each other. In this paper, I will attempt to describe the evolution and nature of this dialogue.

While there were a multiplicity of complex themes that emerged for both the child and myself during the therapy process, it is impossible to address them all in this paper. I have chosen to center my discussion around two of them. The first deals with the way this process helped me grow as a therapist. Inspired by the theories of non-directive play therapy developed by Axline (1969), I had decided to follow Jason's lead in the work. However, I discovered that this was easier said than done. I continually struggled with the ways in which my own biases and assumptions about the role of the therapist conflicted with this stance. For instance, at the beginning of the therapy I was unaccustomed to relating solely through the language of metaphor. I often



felt overwhelmed by my inability to decode this language. Believing that a therapist's job was to understand and interpret in order to better facilitate the sessions, my instinct was to define the meaning of the symbols so that I could feel greater control over the therapeutic process. I struggled with finding a balance between allowing Jason to lead the work and intervening to keep things emotionally and physically safe for us both. As this paper unfolds, I will look at my own process of learning to trust Jason to lead the work where he needed it to go, even when that involved my not understanding the full spectrum of themes which he explored through the metaphor.

The second theme deals with the way in which Jason used drama therapy to explore his identity and see himself as separate from the traumatic experiences of abuse and abandonment which he suffered. My interest in exploring his work in this light was sparked by reading the theories of Johnson (1998) on separation of the Self and Other. His ideas seemed to resonate with my own understanding of Jason's process. The ideas of Gil (1998) and Jones (1996) further informed this perspective. These views will be developed more fully in the following sections of this study.

It is my hope that this case study will contribute to the existing body of literature on drama therapy with abused children. My intention is to further clarify how a therapist

can use drama therapy techniques and methods to build a relationship with a child client. I hope to highlight the ways in which this relationship was a catalyst for personal growth in both Jason and myself.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This research project will take the form of a retrospective case study. When Jason and I began individual drama therapy, I had no plans to pursue this type of research. The idea was conceived two thirds of the way into our process. I found the work to be so rich that I wanted to create a framework through which I could review and understand it more deeply.

In discussing different approaches to writing a case study, Higgins (1993) says that describing the creative arts therapy process is particularly complex. This is because it involves not only the therapist and client, but the creative act which comes out of the therapy. Therapist and client establish a relationship to the art form as well as to each other. The arts medium is like a third presence in the relationship. Higgins states (1993) "This 'tertium datum', is the arts medium itself which often serves as a vehicle for the exchange between patient and therapist and as expression of the growing relation between them" (p. 12). This statement defines my view of one of the key functions of projective play within my therapeutic alliance with

Jason. It provided a medium through which we communicated our thoughts, feelings, and concerns to each other. Through descriptions of our sessions, I will attempt to demonstrate how this was accomplished.

Higgins (1993) compares the case study genre to a story. It is "a romance whose story and characters contain the key to a real life situation" (p.109). Because the descriptions of this case are filtered through my own way of understanding, they will be subject to my biases and assumptions. As such, they do not represent statements of truth. Rather, they describe the story of this therapeutic journey from my point of view. Any interpretations which I make about the child's process must be viewed as my own hunches rather than as statements of fact.

This case study reviews case material from 26 individual drama therapy sessions. The sessions occurred once a week, each session lasting forty-five minutes.

The data collection method was based on my subjective reactions to and understanding of what happened during our sessions. It consisted of my observing and recording, after each session, Jason's affect and manner of engaging in the play, events in his life that may have influenced the above, themes that emerged through the metaphors of play, issues that he chose to discuss verbally, feelings that the play evoked in me, my responses to him, and my feelings about each session. As I did not video or audio-tape our sessions,

these written accounts are the only sources of data which I use in the writing of this study.

Case material was regularly discussed in detail with my on-site and university supervisors. Their feedback further enhanced my understanding of the work. In order to understand the drama therapy process in the light of the child's past life experiences, I read Jason's clinical file before beginning therapy. To further inform my understanding of the drama therapy process, I regularly spoke to other members of the treatment team, informally and in clinical rounds, about changes in his life situation, affect, and behavior. This information helped me understand Jason's therapeutic process in the larger context of his life experiences.

In keeping with strict standards of confidentiality defined by the university, I took the following steps to protect Jason's identity. His real name, the name of the setting where therapy took place, exact details of his family history, and complete descriptions of sessions will not appear in this paper. In addition to obtaining formal consent from his caregivers to do this case study, I also asked Jason for his verbal consent. He said that he thought writing this study was a very good idea and asked that it include the following messages: children need parents to take care of them, children should never be hurt or mistreated, children need to be loved. In my opinion, these

thoughts reveal a profound understanding of children's most basic needs and express Jason's keen awareness of what was missing in his own life experience. They have shaped my appreciation for the intensity of his commitment to the process of drama therapy.

I asked Jason if there were aspects of our work he did not want described in this study. He said that he felt comfortable with my writing about how we played, the themes that came up, the toys we used, and the feelings we experienced during drama therapy. He was not comfortable with my describing his stories in detail. Out of respect for his wishes, I will not give detailed descriptions of the stories Jason told. Instead, I will discuss the general themes that I understood to be expressed through story-making. I explained to Jason that children's real names were not used in order to protect their privacy. I asked him to choose a pseudonym. After careful thought, he asked to be called Jason.

### III. FRAME OF REFERENCE

My approach to individual drama therapy was eclectic in that it drew on a variety of theoretical models and incorporated theories and techniques from both play and drama therapy. My over-all philosophy was shaped by Axline's (1969) theories of play therapy. She believed that play is the child's natural medium of self expression and that

children naturally use play to explore and work through issues in their lives. Axline drew on humanist Carl Rogers' theories of client-centered therapy to create the non-directive play therapy approach. She saw this form of therapy as particularly helpful for children because it allowed the child to bring feelings and concerns out into the open, face them, and learn to control them. As a result, children gained confidence in their ability to think independently. This led to growth in psychological maturity and greater self awareness.

In summarizing her method, Axline discusses eight basic principles which guide the therapist. They include: the therapist developing a warm rapport with the child, accepting the child as is, respecting the child's ability to solve his\her own problems, recognizing and reflecting back the child's feelings, allowing the child to lead the therapeutic process, allowing the therapeutic process to take its course at a pace determined by the child, establishing only limitations which are needed to anchor the therapy in the world of reality (Axline, 1969). She states that "The relationship that is created between the therapist and the child is the deciding factor in the success or failure of the therapy" (p. 74). This view is reiterated by Schaefer (1985), who says that in client-centered therapy the relationship between client and therapist is central to the therapy process. I attempted to incorporate these

principles into my work with Jason.

Choosing a client-centered stance implied that I would follow Jason's lead in deciding how to process the work. As Jason seemed to feel most comfortable speaking through the symbolic language of projective play, we did not regularly engage in verbal processing of our sessions. Rather, we discussed how the characters might be feeling and looked at alternative choices of behaviors for them.

Reading the theories of Cattanach (1994) helped me feel supported in my choice to function within the metaphor. She believes that symbolic play in therapy enables children to explore many facets of their experiences. She says that, during play, the abused child uses toys to create a fictional world which may resemble his own world but is safely distanced from it. The child can explore this world in order to make sense of it. Through the toys, the child can symbolically represent emotions and thoughts. Play becomes a means of communication between therapist and child. The therapist is both a witness to the child's self expression and a facilitator of this expression. Play enables the child to mediate between the inner world of feelings and the outer world of experience.

Talking about traumatic experiences can be frightening and overwhelming for children. It is often easier for children to create a parallel fictional world which reflects aspects of their own experience. The child can then scale

down what they need to explore into manageable segments of projective play. By taking on different roles in the stories the child can explore a complexity of view points, i.e. victim or abuser. Or the child can experiment with changing the story line in order to explore different outcomes. Feedback from the therapist can help the child gain perspective on these experiences and express feelings about them.

My method of defining the play space and using toys to facilitate projective work and storytelling was also influenced by Cattanach's (1994) work. She says that in order for a dialogue to develop between therapist and child, the therapist must first create a climate of safety for the child. Cattanach does this by using a mat to define the boundaries of the therapeutic play space. She brings toys to the session in thematic bags and allows the child to choose the toys they need for each session (Jennings, 1992). I adopted this approach by using a mat to define the play space within my sessions. At the beginning of each session, I asked Jason how he wanted to play and which toys he needed. Allowing him to make these choices reflected the Rogerian perspective that people have within themselves the resources to heal themselves and grow emotionally. I approached therapy with the belief that Jason knew what type of play would best meet his needs.

I began the process of individual drama therapy with



Jason with no hypothesis or preconceived notions about where the therapy process would lead us. I followed Jason's lead in determining how the play should proceed within the session. I was directive only in the way that I defined the play space and delineated the boundaries of our play. My goal was to create a space in which he felt comfortable expressing feelings and exploring personal issues either verbally or through dramatic play.

The therapy process incorporated a wide spectrum of activities including free play with toys, using toys to enact stories, embodying stories through role play, and engaging in improvisations. I view all these activities as belonging within the category of projective play within drama therapy. This perspective grows out of Jones' (1996) theory that playing is inherent to drama therapy. In listing activities which are used within drama therapy, Jones mentions sensorimotor play, imitation activities, play with objects, play with symbolic toys, projective work with toys, rough and tumble play, make-believe play involving taking on characters, and games (Jones 1996, p. 179).

These types of activities were all touched upon during our therapy process with the major focus being on projective play with toys and role play. Jones (1996) sees projective play within drama therapy as moving along a continuum with play with objects at one end and role play, improvisation, and movement at the other end. The more embodied work serves

to amplify and develop the work with small objects. This was the general pattern which I believe characterized our work.

In order to understand Jason's process from a developmental perspective, I adopted Jennings' (1993) EPR model. This model is based on the theory that children's play follows a developmental progression from embodiment play to projective play to role play. According to Jennings, during embodiment play, children develop a sense of their bodies through sensory experiences such as movement and touch. In drama therapy, a child may demonstrate their need to function at this level by asking to engage in activities which involve movement and touching. This body exploration eventually extends into sensory play using a variety of media, such as plasticine, finger paint, sand, and water. Cattanach (1994) also includes play with slime as belonging within the embodiment stage.

As the children develop a secure sense of their bodies, they begin to show greater interest in the world around them. Their play begins to focus on objects. This is the beginning of the projective play stage. In drama therapy, readiness to engage in this type of play would be demonstrated by the child using toys or other play materials to share an experience or tell a story. Playing in this way implies that the child is ready to invest objects with symbolic significance.

The final stage, role play, is characterized by the

child being able to pretend they are someone else. In drama therapy this involves the child engaging in scene work. Ability to engage in this type of play implies that the child has a firm enough sense of their identity to take on the role of another.

While this paper will not focus on the developmental aspects of Jason's play, I find it interesting to note that his work moved back and forth along this EPR continuum throughout our process. I attempted to follow his lead by providing toys that addressed the needs of each stage.

In attempting to understand the themes of Jason's play and evaluate the effectiveness of this intervention, I drew on the theories of Gil (1998) and Johnson (1998). Gil is a play therapist who works with abused children. She believes that the focus of treatment needs to be on helping children see themselves as separate from the abuse. In discussing the phases of treatment inherent to the therapy process with abused children, Gil (1998 b) refers to the theories of Herman. Herman believes that successful treatment passes through three distinct phases: safety, trauma processing, and reconnection. Safety encompasses both internal and external safety. Herman believes that work cannot proceed until the client's external world is secure and until the client feels trust in the therapist and therapy process. Once safety is established, the client can begin to address the traumatic material either verbally or through

unconscious symbolic processing. Resolution of traumatic material is accomplished when the client assimilates difficult emotions and disengages from the past. At this point the client will be ready to move on to the third stage, which involves the client moving back out into the world and practicing having safe rewarding relationships. Gil states (1998 b) that "Woven throughout the therapy process is a focus on regaining or reclaiming control of one's life, shaping the future, and recognizing that trauma helplessness is now replaced by feelings of personal empowerment" (p. 18).

Johnson (1998) discusses the nature of the therapeutic action of the creative arts therapies within the psychodynamic model. I believe that Johnson's model provides an intervention process which can be applied to Herman's stage of trauma processing. He describes three distinct processes within this model, that of projection, transformation, and internalization. During projection, aspects of the self are expressed in artistic products and processes, such as play. During transformation, the personal material expressed through the creative arts is worked through or mediated. In the internalization phase this transformed personal material is reintegrated back into the client's psychological framework.

Johnson states that children who have suffered traumatizing abuse will internalize the abusive person or

situation. He calls this the abusive Other. The child's Self is taken over by this Other in an attempt to distance the Self from feelings of vulnerability and helplessness caused by the abuse. He says that the therapeutic process for these children must involve the child externalizing this Other in order to rediscover the Self.

Johnson believes that the creative arts therapy session provides an imaginal, metaphoric space in which inside and outside, Self and Other, can be represented. Externalization is accomplished by portraying the Other through the arts media with the support of the therapist. Johnson further states that the transformation from representing the abusive Other to representing the hurt Self is crucial to the healing action of the creative arts therapies. He says: "As the play transforms, clients allow themselves to experience the self-in-danger, and re-experience the Other as Other. Self and Other are therefore restored to their original positions, within the boundaries of the arts\playspace" (p. 95).

Implicit in Johnson's theories is the notion of the creative space as a healing space. I began the therapy process with this same belief. I drew further support for this stance from the ideas of Walker (1998). She says that, in play therapy, children's efforts to heal themselves are mirrored in the stories they tell. Subtle changes taking place within the stories usually indicate subtle changes

taking place within the child.

Throughout this process, I struggled to define my role within the healing dimension of the therapeutic space. I questioned whether it was enough to be a supportive presence or whether I needed to intervene actively in order to promote healing experiences for Jason. The way these questions affected my own experience of this therapy process will be touched on in greater depth in my description of sessions.

#### IV. DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE

Jason is a nine year old psychiatric in-patient. He was referred for treatment because of aggressive behavior and hallucinations. Jason and his siblings have a history of being abused and neglected. The exact details of this abuse were not available to me. One of their biological parents is a drug addict. Unable to care for the children, this parent asked for help from social services. The children are presently each in separate foster homes.

From a very young age, Jason took on the role of caretaker for his siblings and parent. After his admittance to the facility where he is presently a patient, he often expressed concern to staff members about the welfare of his biological family. He told the staff he felt "invisible" and was described by them to be sad and depressed. The staff expressed particular concern about his reports of hearing

voices which told him to do dangerous, self-destructive things. They felt that he had difficulty distinguishing between fantasy and reality.

As part of his treatment plan, Jason was put on medication to help organize his thought processes. In addition to the cognitive-behavioral interventions used at the treatment facility, he participated in several creative arts therapies including individual and group drama therapy. To my knowledge, he did not participate in family therapy.

My initial goal in offering individual drama therapy to Jason was to use play with toys, story-telling, puppetry, art, and role-play to help Jason sort through difficult and chaotic life experiences and express his feelings about these experiences. The overall goals of the treatment team were to help Jason control his hallucinations and violent behaviors so that he could function appropriately in school and at home.

#### V. RATIONALE FOR THE INTERVENTION

Gil (1998 b) believes that it is important to distinguish between children who have been abused and those who have been traumatized by their experiences of abuse. She sees traumatized children as a subset of abused children. Gil defines trauma as an event which overwhelms a child's ability to cope. The child is not able to resolve the traumatic material and is in a state of constantly re-living

the trauma. Some of the behaviors common to traumatized children are recurrent hallucinations, flashbacks, intense psychological distress, dissociation, depersonalization or feeling that they are no longer inside their bodies, irritability, a tendency toward angry outbursts, and feelings of helplessness.

Gil (1998 a) observes that there are certain symptoms which occur with regularity among abused children. These include fear and anxiety, depression, anger or aggression, low self esteem, and difficulty maintaining relationships.

In reviewing Jason's clinical file, I found descriptions of behaviors which corresponded to Gil's description of the child who had been traumatized by their abusive experiences. This impression was further confirmed as I got to know him better during the drama therapy treatment process. Among these behaviors were dissociation, depression, angry outbursts, nightmares, depersonalization, and having unrelated events remind him of traumatic experiences.

Gil (1998 a) believes that the goal of therapy with traumatized children is to help the child disengage from the trauma. She cites Van Der Kolk and McFarlane who state that as long as memories of trauma remain dissociated, they will be expressed as psychiatric symptoms. They say that treatment needs to help the patient regain a sense of safety and put closure on the past. In doing this, the child can



let go of feeling that they are the trauma. Learning to see themselves as separate from the trauma empowers children to get on with their lives.

According to Gil, to facilitate this therapeutic process, the play therapist must provide a safe, accepting environment. He\she must choose toys which relate to the dynamics of the child's experiences and which serve as symbols through which the child can communicate his or her experiences. The therapist's clinical posture needs to be that of a witness and unconditional support who helps the child sort through his traumatic experiences. She believes that facilitating this sorting will help the child regain a sense of mastery and control over his or her life.

Inspired by the ideas of Cattanach and Axline, my initial goal was to offer a space in which Jason could use drama therapy to sort through his difficult life experiences and discover personal resources which would help him move on in his life. I will rely on the theories of Gil, Herman, and Johnson in my attempt to evaluate to what extent these goals were reached.

## VI. THE JOURNEY-DISCUSSION OF SESSIONS

In looking back over this case, I see the therapy process as passing through four phases. During phase one, we defined the limits of the play space and began to get a sense of each other. Jason's work centered around projective

play with toys. Phase two was characterized by a loosening of boundaries and a shift into more embodied explorations of anger and power dynamics. Phase three was characterized by a renewed sense of equilibrium in our relationship. The work centered around projective play with toys and role play. Phase four dealt with termination and saying goodbye.

### *Phase One*

This phase encompassed the first twelve drama therapy sessions. During this time, Jason and I began the work of establishing a trusting relationship and delineating the boundaries of the play space. Using the symbolic language of projective play with toys, Jason shared and explored his experiences. Intertwined in this were poignant expressions of his desire to be helped, supported, and nurtured. As Jason shared these powerful stories, I struggled with defining my role as a therapist.

In describing sessions in this phase, I will focus on the themes that emerged out of projective play, how we began to develop a dialogue through the metaphors of play, and my own questions and concerns about relating through the metaphor.

### *The Beginning*

I felt both apprehension and excitement about beginning drama therapy with Jason. As I was a therapist-in-training,

embarking on this journey was a new experience for me. I had concerns about being a good enough therapist for Jason.

My primary concern at our first session was to create a feeling of trust and safety. I believed that clearly defining the rules and purpose of drama therapy would help Jason know what to expect, thereby helping him feel more secure. Jason listened to this explanation with a thoughtful expression on his face. He asked whether swearing was allowed and I responded that it was okay if it was the characters in his story who swore. I said he could check out the toys. He carefully examined the toys, finally choosing to play with slime.

As I watched him play, I had the impression that he was observing me as well. I sensed that we were both cautious and watchful. Jason chatted about how nice the slime felt on his hands. I said I was glad he was enjoying the feel of it. We chatted about slime until the end of the session.

In session two Jason used the slime, toy soldiers, and toy animals to create a story. The theme of this story had to do with the soldiers capturing an animal to study why it was different from other animals. The slime was to be made into bullets and bombs which the characters would use against each other. Jason asked me to help him set up the toys and enact the story. Inside myself I struggled with my own questions and concerns. How to play with him without becoming directive? What did this story mean? I assumed

that, as his therapist, I should immediately be able to interpret the symbolic significance of the story. Was his story an allusion to abuse? Was it a creative expression of what it felt like to be a psychiatric patient? Was it a statement about his view of himself as different from other children? As these questions percolated inside me, I struggled with trusting that Jason was doing what he needed to do. I said that I would be happy to play with him as long as he told me how he wanted me to play. Jason responded by giving me exact instructions about how to fashion bullets out of slime. Together, we set up the play materials to his specifications. I asked him about the characters and why they behaved as they did. He was forthcoming in sharing this information with me.

While his story contained scenes of war, Jason was restrained in his manner of animating the fighting. He seemed very sad. I tried to maintain my stance as a supportive presence, inwardly questioning whether I should be doing more. We closed by putting away the toys. Jason was meticulous about cleaning up and putting the play materials in order before leaving the room.

During session three, Jason continued this story. He invited me to help him set up the toys. I asked him for instructions about how to do so and he again asked that I help make bullets out of slime. Jason added a new component to his story, that of friends coming to rescue the captive

animal. His story again described scenes of battle between the captors and the imprisoned animal and friends. In this session I observed that, in telling the story, he was more animated and spontaneous than last week.

The story ended with the friends freeing the animal from captivity. I asked Jason how the animal felt about this turn of events. He responded that it was happy that it had friends. While not fully comprehending the full range of issues that Jason was expressing through this story, I believed that a strong theme to emerge was the importance of friendship.

We closed the session by putting the toys away. Jason was again meticulous in the way he did this. I sensed that this was evolving into a comfortable closing ritual for our sessions.

By the end of session three, I began to have a sense of my role vis a vis Jason. I saw myself as a supportive presence. I honored Jason's story by enacting it according to his directions. I gently asked him to clarify what his characters were thinking and why they behaved as they did, attempting to show non-judgmental interest in what he shared. As our initial contract was to sort through issues through play, I thought it would overstep the boundaries of our agreement to push Jason to try to verbally relate his story to his real life. Instead, we stayed in the metaphor. I needed to trust that Jason was expressing through play

what he needed to, even if all the symbolism was not totally clear to me.

During session three, I was pleased to see Jason let go of some of the cautious restraint of past sessions and be more physically expressive and spontaneous during his enactment of the battle scene. I saw this as representing growth in his trust of me and the drama therapy process. I also saw it as a sign of growth in his self-confidence. Interestingly, Jason relaxing more helped me to relax also. I had harbored the concern that being a supportive presence was not enough. But, seeing this positive shift in Jason's level of engagement and relaxation enabled me to renew my own sense of confidence in the therapeutic benefits of following the client's lead.

I had begun to observe that slime figured prominently in Jason's play. My hunch was that slime was evolving into a complex symbol for Jason. He was becoming increasingly attached to this play material. The ways that Jason used the slime in his stories suggested that it was a symbol of danger and engulfment. Conversely, in his interactions with me, the slime became a medium through which we interacted playfully, sharing appropriate touches. In the following sessional descriptions I will further elaborate on the ways that Jason played with slime and on the possible metaphoric significance of this play.

During session five, Jason played with slime in a

variety of different ways. First, he used slime to create masks for the animal figures. Jason was totally engrossed in this activity. It had a private, intense feeling to it. He did not invite me to help. I felt that he needed me to be a supportive presence and not probe into what he was doing.

Following this, Jason engaged me in a game which involved us wrapping each other's hands in slime. This activity had a playful feel to it. The shift from witnessing his private play to an intimate touching game took me by surprise. I needed to shift gears.

After this game, Jason began wrapping a soldier figure in slime. He said the slime was going to kill the soldier. The slime became menacing and dangerous. Jason's affect changed suddenly from playful to agitated. I was enlisted to shoot the slime in order to save the soldier. I was caught off guard by the sudden change in Jason's mood and by the need to constantly shift my role within the session. I felt confused about what Jason needed from me. In the space of forty minutes the slime had shifted from being a mask, to a plaything, to something threatening. My shooting the slime had not stopped it from attacking the soldier. I felt lost within this changing metaphor.

Jason picked up an animal figure and had it free the soldier from the slime. I commented that the animal had saved the day by stopping the slime. Jason nodded his head. I noticed that he looked more relaxed. The session ended

with Jason carefully putting away the toys. He commented that his favorite part of the session was taking the masks off the animals. He asked if we could have drama therapy twice a week instead of once a week.

This session felt very full and somewhat chaotic. In past sessions, the general pattern of playing was for Jason to explore personal issues through the toys, followed by an intimate, relaxing period of hand play with slime, ending with his carefully putting away the toys. Today, he took this process one step further by following our hand play with a further exploration. It was as if the mask-making and hand-play had brought up further issues which he wanted to sort through.

The common thread connecting these three different ways of playing was the use of slime. Jason's attachment to this symbol was further illustrated in session six. As the slime we had been using was getting hard, I brought a new container of slime to the session. Jason was pleased about this. As it turned out, the new slime was very runny and difficult to play with. Jason decided to pour it into a plastic container together with an animal and soldier figure. We watched the toys slowly become engulfed in the slime.

Jason asked if he could come to drama therapy again tomorrow because the old slime would soon be hard and he would not be able to play with it anymore. There was a note



of desperation in his voice. I sensed that he was becoming very dependent on me and on drama therapy. Perhaps he was afraid that he would lose drama therapy as he had lost his parents and siblings. It was as if the slime had become a metaphor for drama therapy. I reassured him that I would always have slime for him to play with for as long as he needed it. Addressing his fear calmed him. With my permission, he tried mixing old and new slime to try to soften and renew the old. Once reassured, Jason felt confident to explore new problem solving strategies. His mood brightened.

I reflected at great length about the symbolism of watching the toys slowly sink into the slime. The metaphor of being engulfed had come up repeatedly. In session eight, Jason returned to this metaphor of sinking in the slime. He put a soldier figure into a container with slime and closed the lid. He turned the container upside down and slowly the slime with the soldier began to drip down.

We both lay on the floor, quietly watching the slime and soldier fall from the top to the bottom of the container. There was a feeling of intimacy between us. I asked Jason what would happen to the soldier. He said that when the soldier was totally submerged he would die. But, he could be brought to life by being cleaned off. As we lay watching the soldier in the slime, Jason said: "He's tired, like me. He's tired of struggling".

I understood the soldier figure slowly being engulfed by slime to be a metaphoric statement of Jason's life experiences. I found it poetic and moving to share this moment with him. The moment was made all the more poignant by his comment about how he identified with the figure feeling tired of struggling. Through the metaphors of his play, Jason was communicating volumes about what a struggle his life was, how engulfed and overwhelmed he felt by danger. Being able to speak through the play materials gave safe distance to his story. I believe that our relationship had become closer and more trusting as a result of his disclosures. I responded by mirroring his body posture, listening empathetically, and commenting on the difficult plight of the soldier caught in the slime. Mostly, we sat close together, sharing and receiving this moment in silence. While the significance of this moment could only be totally understood by Jason, I felt immersed in the slime with him, viscerally experiencing helplessness and engulfment. As a result, I believe I understood a bit better what it felt like to be Jason. I felt tired and shaken up after the session.

Another metaphor which evolved during phase one was that of houses. This first appeared in session two. Before the session, I heard from team members that Jason was angry and depressed because of a disappointment at home. They said that he had been behaving inappropriately. Given that our

sessions stayed in the metaphor and did not include verbal discussions about his life, I worried about how to create a space in which he could address his concerns. Should I tell him that I had heard about his troubles or leave it to him to decide whether to talk about them? I opted for the latter, wanting to leave the decision to Jason. Thinking that a wider choice of play materials could offer him more avenues through which to express his feelings, I added paper and drawing materials to our usual array of toys.

Jason did not want to continue the story he had been working on in sessions one and two. Instead, he chose to draw a picture of the entrance to the dwelling of the animal figures he used in the story. He asked me to help him draw this picture. I again requested that he tell me how to help. He said that I could help color in the picture. We sat side by side, focussing on the act of coloring.

Jason's mood was pensive, his energy level low key. I tried to show my empathy by mirroring his sitting position and matching my physical energy state to his (kinesthetic empathy). Staying in the metaphor, I gently asked him questions about this dwelling. He answered in great detail, describing the entrance to the dwelling as narrow and winding, but containing sources of light so the animals could negotiate the path without being injured. The session finished with Jason and I playing a game with the slime which involved our wrapping it around our hands.

I was surprised at the way this session had unfolded. Based on reports from the team, I had expected Jason to behave in an angry hostile manner. Instead, he was contained and pensive. I sensed that through drawing he was exploring many complex themes. I wondered if the drawing was a projection of his feelings about his own home. Perhaps it expressed the view that homes were treacherous places that needed to be negotiated with care. I also wondered if, in requesting that I help him color, he was exploring how to develop a relationship with an adult. While I was uncomfortable with not knowing the answers to these questions, I sensed a growing warmth and intimacy develop between us as we colored and chatted about the drawing. The metaphor had provided a channel through which he could express his thoughts and feelings and through which I could receive them. I believe this intense sharing had moved our relationship to a new level of trust.

The metaphor of the house reappeared in session six. Jason had asked to play with a toy house. As I had not brought one, I suggested he make a house using a blanket and the furniture in the room. He became animated and said he would make the animal dwelling. We set up the picture we had drawn in a previous session and he draped the blanket over the furniture.

Jason brought in the toys, crawled into the dwelling, and invited me to join him. I asked him to tell me about

this house. He described a home which sounded like descriptions I had heard from team members of his foster home.

At this point, Jason's affect changed from playful to reflective. A mood of intimacy and expectancy was set up between us. He began to talk about a past experience with a sibling, where the sibling was cruel to animals, but he was careful with them. Inside myself, I questioned what this conversation was really about. Was Jason sharing a real life experience? Was the description of cruelty a symbolic reference to an experience of abuse? My mind was racing. I struggled to push aside my desire to interpret. I sensed that what was important was for Jason to have me hear his story and acknowledge his ability to be caring and solicitous of other creatures. I also believed that it was important for me to acknowledge his disclosure of his sibling's cruel behavior.

This was the first session in which Jason verbally shared his experience of family members behaving in cruel ways. His family history suggested that he was witness to, and possibly recipient of, cruel and abusive treatment. Jason's behaviors, which led to his admission to this facility, indicated that he was capable of violent acts himself. I wondered whether this was Jason's way of letting me know that he was not how he seemed in his daily life, but had another side to him that was gentle and caring. In the

light of this conjecture, the theme of masking and unmasking took on new significance.

During session ten, Jason's work again centered around the theme of houses. Prior to the session, team members told me that Jason was very anxious about whether his biological parent would visit him for his birthday. I wondered what impact this concern might have on his work.

Jason asked to play with several toy houses and many people in order to create a city. We found two houses and he proceeded to create two distinct households using the toys. I asked Jason to describe each family. He said that the first home was over-crowded and noisy. In the second home, the family members yelled a lot. Using the toys, Jason enacted a story in which a character from the first family attempted to visit the second family and was rudely rebuffed.

There appeared to be an angry intensity to the way Jason enacted this story. He did not ask me to participate. As I watched the story unfold, I sensed that it contained many layers of meaning for him. I wondered if the two households he created were symbolic representations of the homes he had lived in. Perhaps his story expressed his experience of homes as places which could be threatening or unwelcoming. Perhaps by having his central character be rebuffed, he was exploring his own feelings about not feeling part of any home.

While the relationship between the way Jason played and his outside life was not always clear to me, I believed his work in this session to be profoundly influenced by his immediate concerns about whether he would be reunited with his biological parent. I understood this session to be an example of the way he used projective play to mediate between his inner world of feelings and events in his outer life. I thought it might be important to raise his awareness of the connection between his play and his real life. Staying in the metaphor of the story, I asked him how the character felt after being rebuffed. He did not seem eager to answer my question. I wondered whether his reluctance to elaborate was a sign that this material was too painful for him to dwell on further. I sensed that he understood perfectly the relationship between his story and his life. Realizing that I should tread lightly through this threatening territory, I simply commented that the situation seemed tricky for the character. Jason nodded. I hoped that this subtle interaction was enough to communicate to him that I had heard his story and appreciated his feelings.

In session eleven Jason continued to explore the theme of family relationships. He wanted to play with puppets and asked if I would help him tell a story with them. I requested that he give me instructions as to how he wanted me to participate. He did so in detail.

Using the puppets, Jason enacted two scenes. The first

described a parent reprimanding babies who were fighting. The second described small animals being threatened by larger ones. In the second scene, Jason animated a large puppet who protected the small ones. I commented that his puppet did a good job of helping the smaller ones. He nodded and smiled.

As in past sessions, I sensed that this story contained many levels of significance for Jason. I wondered whether, through the telling, he was exploring his own experiences of dealing with threatening situations in his life. I chose to highlight the moments where his character showed courage and good coping strategies. In so doing, I hoped to communicate to him my confidence in his ability to enlist positive coping strategies in his own life.

Session twelve was our last session before a month long break for the Christmas\New Year holidays. Jason shared that it would feel "sad and weird not to have drama therapy for a month". We discussed strategies for helping him get the support he felt he needed from other staff members. I too felt ambivalent about stopping therapy for an entire month. In addition to working through issues from his past, I believed that Jason was using drama therapy to address concerns in his immediate life, such as: feelings about Christmas and anxieties about whether his biological parent would visit him for his birthday. I worried that, without the support of the therapy sessions, he would feel lost.



Following the advice of my supervisors, I attempted to keep the tone of the session light so as not to bring up painful material which would then be left hanging for the next month. We played games and I adopted a playful manner. Jason picked up on my playfulness. I sensed that playful, joking behavior did not come easily to him.

As this was our last session for a month, I had prepared a surprise for Jason. I had bought him a present in honor of his upcoming birthday. Towards the end of the session, I presented him with this present, a journal. I explained that he could use it to write or draw in during the break. I hoped it would offer him a place to express his thoughts and feelings.

Jason's reaction to this gift were very touching for me. He was very grateful and wanted to keep, not only the card and gift, but the paper it was wrapped in. We said goodbye and I reminded him that I would see him after the holidays. I wanted to reinforce the fact that he could trust me to come back when I said I would. I wondered whether his holiday would indeed be a good one.

In reviewing my own process during these first twelve sessions, I noticed that I was starting to feel more at ease with communicating through the metaphor. As the sessions progressed, I experienced with diminishing frequency the anxious internal voice which needed to interpret the meaning of Jason's play behaviors. Throughout this phase, I had

observed Jason to be extremely clear about the types of toys he needed and the ways he wanted to play with them. These behaviors seemed to confirm Axline's and Cattanach's theories that, in therapy, children know best what types of play will be most helpful for them. Jason's enthusiastic engagement in drama therapy seemed to indicate that he was deriving benefit from the process itself. As a result, I was starting to be able to let go of my need to control the process by interpreting the meaning of his play. I was learning to trust Jason's judgement about leading the process where he needed it to go. I was beginning to better understand that the therapeutic aspect of my presence lay not in my ability to interpret, but in my ability to keep the boundaries of the work safe while adjusting my role to meet Jason's needs. This meant being sensitive to whether he needed me to be his play-mate, witness, supportive presence, or all three within a session. I was discovering that my biggest challenge was to keep from feeling overwhelmed by the poignancy of his expressions.

During this first phase, Jason's work seemed to be a sorting of past and present life experiences. I had the impression that, through projective play, he was telling me what it felt like to be Jason. This was often followed by quieter, more relaxed play. I sensed that telling his story was difficult, painful work and that Jason used this relaxing time to rest emotionally and feel nurtured and

taken care of.

One example of relaxed play were the slime hand games mentioned earlier. They usually involved one of us wrapping slime around our hands and the other peeling it off. They were playful interactions which necessitated that our hands touch. I understood this to be Jason's way of receiving appropriate touches. I believe they were comforting for him.

Other nurturing interactions involved my reading stories to him and helping him find enclosed spaces in which to curl up and relax. In those moments, I felt him let go of his troubles and immerse himself in the experience of being cared for. By the end of this phase, I believe we had established a comfortable routine which allowed us both to feel safe and contained.

As we progressed through these first twelve sessions, Jason used the metaphor to share increasing information about his family life. I understood Jason's desire to share these stories and receive nurture to be an indication of his growing trust in me and in the drama therapy process.

### *Phase Two*

This phase occurred between sessions thirteen to eighteen. It was characterized by a loosening of boundaries and a descent into dark angry territory. I will attempt to understand this change in tone by suggesting ways that events in Jason's outside life may have affected his work in

drama therapy. Descriptions of sessions will focus on the manner in which Jason used drama therapy to explore violence and anger. I will look at my own struggle to safely contain the work for both Jason and myself.

As we were starting a new semester, I thought it would be interesting to bring new play materials as a symbol of our new start. Consequently, I brought finger paints to session thirteen, thinking they might allow Jason to express messy feelings in a safe distanced manner. I also brought familiar toys like slime and puppets. I was looking forward to resuming our sessions together.

Jason was interested in trying out the paints. He explored mixing colors for a long time. He asked that we take turns drawing on the paper. Jason drew small pictures of concrete things, like suns and happy faces. Not wanting to compete with his style of drawing, I chose to explore abstract ways of smooshing the paint on the paper. This activity had a self-conscious feel to it, as if we were each trying to get a sense of the other through painting. Jason questioned me closely about what I was drawing and why. I asked him to explain his drawings, attempting to receive his explanations in an accepting neutral way.

After a few minutes of painting, Jason said he was finished and asked to play with slime. He surprised me by mischievously throwing it at me. I decided to follow this playful lead and we developed a game which involved throwing

slime. Jason began to throw the slime hard. I commented on this. He apologized and we changed the game to a more benign game of catch.

I was interested to see Jason initiating a playful spontaneous interaction. Seeing this spontaneity as a healthy manifestation of playfulness, I went with it. When Jason began throwing the slime hard at me, I realized that I had made an error in judgement. Our play had moved into unsafe territory. The boundaries had been pulled out too far. I was left feeling confused about the reasons for this burst of aggression towards me.

Jason began session fourteen by asking to show me songs that he had recently learned to play on the piano. I listened attentively, expressing appreciation. He invited me to play a duet that we both knew. We did so with enjoyment. His affect was energetic and intense. I sensed that it was important for Jason to show me his newly acquired skill of piano playing and I listened to his playing with rapt attention.

Inspired by Jason's openness to learning new forms of creative expression, I offered to teach him a drama mirroring game which involved our taking turns being leader and follower.

I was surprised by Jason's reaction to playing this game. As leader I had modelled simple movements for him to follow. However, when it was his turn to lead, he did extremely

complicated movements which I had difficulty following. I felt that he was trying to win a competition rather than play a game. While leading he began to engage me in a sword fight using rolled up paper as swords. I was unclear about whether he was still playing the mirror game or doing a role play. When I asked him to clarify what he was doing, he said he was no longer playing the mirror game. He was a super hero fighting me.

I sensed that the tone of our interaction had changed from playful to menacing. I felt physically threatened by Jason's statement that he was fighting me. Attempting to put us back into a metaphor where we could distance the action and put clear boundaries around it, I said that this sounded like a story. I suggested that we each take on roles and create a scene. The rest of the session was spent describing the characters, discussing what would happen in each scene, and enacting the scenes as we described them.

Jason's story described interactions between two sword fighters. It contained themes of power dynamics, fighting, and conflict. His affect during the enactment of the scenes was angry and intense. I worried that role play was too unboundaried a frame through which to explore such explosive issues. To further contain his emotions, I insisted that we stop the action and write down the story. Jason resisted this suggestion. I was adamant. He went to the piano and played some songs. Then we gave the story a title and wrote

down the chapter headings.

After this session I felt exhausted and confused. In the sessions before Christmas I perceived the work to be progressing in a contained, safe manner. Suddenly, Jason had shifted from projective work with toys to role play. Rather than expressing his emotions through objects, he was now embodying the emotions physically. It seemed like he was focussing the expression of his anger at me. I worried about continuing to follow his lead when it seemed to be leading us in dangerous directions.

I had many questions. What caused Jason to direct so much anger towards me? Perhaps the power dynamics of leading and following in the mirror game brought up experiences in his life where he was a victim of abusive power dynamics. Perhaps he saw the tasks themselves as too daunting and he was angry at me for engaging him in an activity which felt threatening to him. I wondered if I had come to represent for Jason an abusive Other in his life.

Before session fifteen I learned that, two days previously, Jason and his siblings had an emotional meeting with their biological parent. Since that time, his behavior had been volatile and angry. I decided that this session needed to be scaled down to keep it safe for us both. I brought a wide array of small toys and drawing materials through which Jason could contain his feelings.

Jason played with action figures, organizing them into

my group and his group. He called my group the "good guys" and his group the "bad guys". His story involved battles between our group members.

Jason played out this story with great intensity. At times he invited me to animate it with him, and at other time he animated it by himself. The story included many gory moments, characters being killed and coming back to life, family members coming in and out of the action. After finishing to enact this story, Jason asked to rest in his special cozy place.

Witnessing his story, I felt submerged in a dark, angry space. I understood his story to be a complex exploration of anger, violence, abandonment, love\hate, and death and re-birth. I was relieved that he agreed to express these emotions through projective work with toys rather than role play. The toys and mat provided a sense of containment. Nonetheless, I felt that Jason was leading us into very stormy territory.

Speaking to other team members gave me insights into factors in Jason's outside life which may have been influencing his work in drama therapy at this time. I learned that his life had become very unsettled. His status had been changed to day-patient and he was now sleeping at his foster home rather than at the treatment facility. He was being integrated back into community school and was worried about being able to get along with other children at



school and in his neighborhood. Jason was anxious about whether he would see his biological parent again and was concerned about one of his siblings who was in a state of distress. He had begun to have nightmares about frightening experiences in his past life.

As there seemed to be so much chaos and uncertainty in Jason's life, I reasoned that it would be best to keep the drama therapy space as contained as possible. With this in mind, I brought an array of small toys to session sixteen through which he could projectively express what he needed. Jason looked over the toys and said he really wanted to play with toy sports equipment. He wanted to simulate playing hockey, baseball, and tennis with me. On the one hand, I was concerned about getting back into this type of action role play because in past sessions it had become unsafe. However, Jason's request was so specific that I felt it represented a specific need that he had. I decided to honor this request. To ensure that the play was safely contained, I insisted that we establish the rules of play before we began.

As we played, Jason shared that children in his neighborhood were reluctant to play with him because he sometimes got angry and disrupted the play. I wondered if he was searching, through our role play, for strategies to feel successful at playing with other children. Perhaps this desire for playing sports in drama therapy was a metaphor for getting along with peers. In response to this hunch, I

stressed fair play and sticking to the rules. I wanted to have our interaction model the values that I believed were important for getting along with other children. I praised his skills, pointing out the areas in which they were particularly strong. My goal was to raise his level of confidence in his ability to negotiate playing with peers through playing sports.

A sub-theme which I guessed was also being explored through these sports interactions was anger. Every so often, Jason tried to hit the ball too hard in my direction. I was somewhat alarmed by this and was concerned about getting hurt. At those times, I wondered if the anger was directed at me or whether I represented someone in Jason's life with whom he was angry. To insure our emotional and physical safety, I stopped the play and reminded him about the rules. He apologized and adjusted his behavior to be more appropriate. I sensed that this interaction and the play materials themselves were bringing up unsettling feelings in Jason that were a product of both past and present life experiences. I was frustrated by not really understanding the significance of the sports metaphor for Jason. I felt myself to be groping blindly for interventions that would address his needs and contain his emotions.

In session seventeen Jason asked to have small figures, a toy house, and toy bats. He wanted to start by role-playing a scene from his story of two sessions ago where the

characters were sword fighting with each other. I asked him to define how they were fighting and why. He said they were sword-fighting for fun to practice their skills. My instinct told me not to do this because it would put us in an emotionally volatile place. However, I was curious to see if Jason's relationship to this story had changed. I agreed to do a short enactment before settling down with the small toys.

We role-played this sword fight using the bats as swords. As we played, Jason's affect became increasingly angry and agitated. He said that in the next scene his character was going to hit me with a bat. My hunch was that Jason was re-playing an abusive scenario from his past life. He seemed to be casting himself in the role of abuser and me in the role of victim. We were in dangerous territory. I immediately stopped the play and said we had a no hurting rule. I suggested that his character could hit some pillows in the room with the bat, but certainly not me. I felt upset that I had not followed my instinct and had allowed us to enter into an unsafe interaction. Fortunately, re-directing Jason in this way was enough to diffuse his desire to focus his expression of anger at me. Instead, he focussed his attention on action figures and engaged me in playing out a story with these toys.

I asked Jason to explain who his characters were. He said they were angry guys who beat up other people. When I

asked why they were angry he said they just were. Jason asked me to animate characters who were trained in martial arts and fought only when necessary and with skill and control. The story described the way in which the martial arts experts helped the angry guys control their violent behavior by teaching them martial arts skills. At the end of the story, Jason's characters had developed into martial arts experts who fought only in self defense. Jason's hero concluded the story with these words: "We learn to develop our inner strengths". I commented that learning the rules and skills of martial arts seemed to help the hero master his need to fight all the time. He had learned to use his finely developed fighting skills only in self defense. Jason nodded.

I believe that the hero's statement metaphorically expressed an important insight that Jason himself had achieved during the session. He had begun to see alternatives to dealing with difficult situations by violence and acting out. With guidance from the martial arts practitioners, the hero had been able to develop new strengths and coping mechanisms. Positive change was possible. I took this as a hopeful sign that Jason was ready to take on the task of finding his own inner strengths in order to promote growth in his abilities to cope more adaptively.

My perception of Jason's work as expressing readiness

to learn better coping strategies contradicted other team member's perceptions of him. They reported increasing frequencies of angry outbursts on his part and were expressing concern about his ability to behave in a socially acceptable manner in his outside life. As they were preparing him to go back to community school, they were concerned that he learn more socially acceptable ways of expressing anger. Consequently, anger management became a strong focus of their treatment. I believe that this increased Jason's awareness of the ways that anger affected his behavior and profoundly influenced the way we worked in drama therapy.

In session eighteen, Jason chose to enact a story using small hero figures and soldiers. The story described a war between two armies. I was to animate the "bad guys" while he animated the "good guys". I wondered if this story was a metaphor for a conflict taking place inside Jason himself. In order to increase his awareness about the nature of this struggle, I asked him to clarify who the armies were and what they were fighting about. Jason said that the bad guys attacked the good guys because they were angry and didn't know why. The good guys were able to defend themselves because they were well trained and had control over their fighting skills. This sounded like a continuation of the themes from our last session.

Jason took great care in setting up his figures and

gave me detailed instructions about setting up mine. The battle took place in many stages, with figures dying and being brought to life by doctors. Eventually, all the bad guys were killed.

I asked Jason what he thought about this ending. He said that he felt good about it because the good guys had won and killed the bad guys. He said this story was "not to be continued. It is finished".

To close the session, we put the toys away in their containers. There was a sense of completion about this session, as if a concern had been resolved. My hunch was that, through enacting this story, Jason had gained insight into badness and goodness and the role they had played in his life. At one point during the story-telling, he commented that one of the bad guys who had been killed had a "cold heart". I wondered if he was talking about people in his own life who he had treated him or his family members badly. If so, then this comment indicated to me that he understood that the mistreatment resulted from the perpetrator having a cold heart rather than from a badness within the victims. I wondered if the story might also have been an exploration of the "badness and goodness" that Jason thought was inside himself. Perhaps his story expressed his efforts to vanquish the forces of badness in himself.

### *Phase Three*

This third phase occurred between sessions nineteen and twenty two. It was characterized by a renewed sense of equilibrium in our relationship. I no longer felt that my energies needed to be concentrated on containment because Jason's play behavior showed that he was capable of containing himself. I returned to being a supportive presence, and concentrated my efforts on facilitating Jason's exploration of his personal strengths. In describing the themes which emerged during this phase, I will focus on metaphors which reflected Jason's desire to explore strategies for making friends and getting along in the world.

In session nineteen, Jason asked to play with plasticine and super hero figures. He wanted to use the plasticine to make a path for the super heroes "so they wouldn't get lost". He invited me to join him in this task and showed me his special method for creating this path. Following the completion of this task, Jason used the plasticine to make masks for the super heroes. He shared that he used to do this in his "real parents' home" and that it made him feel "safe". Again he invited me to join in the task. We sat in relaxed silence, both working on our masks. I followed his lead, using his mask-making method with my figures. To finish, Jason asked that our figures walk up the path.

At the end of the session, Jason asked if we could keep the figures in the masks until next time because he was not finished with them and it would take a long time to re-make the masks. Despite my not understanding the full significance of this activity for Jason, I believed him when he said he needed to finish it. I agreed to put these figures aside for him for one more week. The session ended with Jason carefully putting the toys in their containers.

There was a calm feeling to this session. We seemed to have moved out of the turbulence into a more centered place. I was relieved at not having to negotiate Jason's need to project angry feelings on to me.

I was intrigued by the re-appearance of two themes from previous sessions, that of making a safe path and making masks. My hunch was that going back to these themes enabled Jason to explore his past in the light of the present. I perceived my role to have returned to that of supportive presence, honoring and supporting his quest to sort through the chaos in his life and inside himself. It felt as if we had weathered a storm and had both emerged more resilient and peaceful.

In session twenty, Jason and I continued where we left off. He was happy that I remembered to bring the masked figures and plasticine. He invited me to join him in embellishing the figures' masks. Once completed, Jason said our figures would have a battle and that his would win. He



said mine were the "bad guys" and his were the "good guys". After a long series of battles, my guys were all killed. Jason said we should finish by seeing who could remove the plasticine from their figures the fastest. He won, and explained his expertise by saying that he had been practicing since he was little. To close the session, Jason carefully packed away all the toys in their containers and folded up the mat.

Jason's affect throughout this session seemed more upbeat and self-confident. I wondered if his story represented a metaphoric killing off of the badness in his life and inside himself. Entrusting me to embody the badness suggested that he trusted in my ability to survive the battle and contain it for him. It also enabled Jason to distance himself from the image of himself as bad. He was now free to identify with the good guys. This gave him the space to explore the goodness within himself.

At our next session, Jason said he wanted to act out a story about a giant. I was concerned about getting back into role play rather than staying in the safe contained space created with small toys. Our past experience was that role play became unsafe and overwhelming for both of us. However, as Jason seemed to have a vision of what he wanted to do, I decided to explore this idea with him verbally before discounting it. I asked Jason to tell me about the giant. He said he was an angry giant who had no friends. I asked what

he wanted to act out in the scene. Jason replied that the scene would show how the giant behaved when he was angry. I said that I was concerned about this scene getting out of hand. In order to keep the scene safe for us both, I needed us to plan the action before doing the scene. We would have a special signal for beginning and ending the scene and we would stick to our plan. Jason agreed to these rules.

The scene was planned and enacted according to these guidelines. I was the stage manager. Jason played the giant. The small people were villagers that he stomped on. I found it interesting that Jason had enough self control to modulate between playing the giant and coming out of role to give me stage directions.

When this scene was finished, I was reluctant to leave Jason with the feeling of this destructive character still in his body. I asked him if there was a second part to this story. I reasoned that, if Jason said the story was finished, I would suggest doing a scene in which the giant tried to think of alternatives to his angry behavior. Jason replied that there would be a scene two. It would be about the villagers helping the giant realize the importance of making friends, and helping him learn to make friends. I was pleased that Jason's interests seemed to coincide with my own instincts about the direction the story should take. We set up the scene using the same guidelines as in scene one.

I believed that, through this role-play, Jason was

exploring strategies for controlling his own angry outbursts and for learning to make friends himself. With this in mind, I encouraged him to determine what strategies the villagers would use to help the giant. We enacted the scene according to his plan. He played the giant and asked me to animate the small figures as magical people who helped the giant. I sensed that, in casting me in this role, Jason was asking for help. I wanted to help him realize that he had many wonderful personal qualities, and was not the angry, unlikable character he had described in scene one.

Speaking as a magical person, I told the giant that, in addition to feeling angry, he also had many other feelings and personal qualities like humor, sensitivity, creativity, and goodness. The magical person told the giant that the villagers wanted to be his friend and would welcome getting to know these wonderful sides of his personality that he had hidden for so long.

Jason listened carefully to these words. Although we spoke through the metaphor of our characters, I believe that we had honored and addressed each other's concerns. To finish, I felt it essential that we formally de-role. My guess was that the character of the giant was very close to Jason's image of himself. I wanted to create a distinction between the world of fantasy and the real world so that Jason could make a solid distinction between the two. I modelled brushing and shaking off my characters and

affirming that I was now Zeeva. Jason animatedly shook off the character of the giant and proclaimed himself to be Jason.

Because I perceived Jason to be drawn to activities which enabled him to embody roles, I was pleased that we had succeeded in negotiating a way to do this that felt safe for us both. Through this role play, I believe Jason expressed his desire for acceptance and belonging. He explored strategies for safely containing his angry feelings. Through my interventions, I hoped to help him gain insights into his personal strengths. By de-roling, I hoped to help him affirm his own identity and differentiate between fantasy and reality.

Jason and I spent session twenty two dressing up in costumes. I felt at loose ends during this session. I wanted to maintain my stance of following Jason's lead. I assumed that this session would be about playfulness. However, even as we tried on costumes I sensed a sadness in Jason. Our playfulness felt somewhat forced.

It was not until the end of the session that I had a better idea of what might be going on for Jason during this activity. Jason left our room in costume wanting to show his costume to the other children and staff members. I was not comfortable with him taking our session out of the room and told him so. He ignored these comments. He was proud of his costume and wanted others to see it. My hunch was that he

wanted to impress the other children with his costume in order to engage their interest in him. He was proud of his creativity and wanted to have it recognized. I wondered if he was attempting to reach out to his peers by putting into practice the suggestions of the magical person in the previous session. With this in mind, I let go of my critical stance and discussed with Jason the possibility of keeping the costume until free play, when both staff and children would be available to see it and possibly join him in dress-up play. He agreed that this would be a good idea. After our session, I informed the staff of this plan so that they could support Jason's efforts. They picked up on this idea and organized a dress up activity in which Jason and other children participated.

#### *Phase Four*

According to the guidelines set by the university, my stage as a drama therapist was to finish at the end of the academic year. As Jason claimed to be enjoying drama therapy and finding it helpful, I tried to arrange to continue the therapy for several months. At this time, I discovered that this would not be possible. Since Jason had been told by a team member that he would continue having drama therapy with me after his discharge, I felt it imperative that we discuss this new development and begin the process of termination.

Before session twenty three, I took Jason aside and

explained the situation to him. I chose to discuss this outside of the session because I was concerned that explaining the reasons for this change in plans would take up much of our session time. I wanted to allow Jason the full session for dealing with this information.

I said we would see each other for four more sessions. Jason seemed shocked and upset. He said he would feel sad not to have drama therapy anymore. I admitted that I shared these feelings. After this discussion we went off to our drama therapy room. I wondered what impact this talk would have on the work.

I had brought to the session Batman figures and paraphernalia which the treatment facility had recently acquired. Jason was excited about the new toys and spent most of the session exploring them. I kept him company, chatting with him about the different toys. There was a watchful, careful tone to our interactions.

At the end of the session, he played the theme song from the film "Titanic" on the piano and sang the words. They had to do with losing someone you love but keeping their memory in your heart. I felt tears spring to my eyes. I guessed that Jason was singing about the many losses in his life, including the loss of drama therapy. I was glad that he found such a contained way to communicate his sense of loss. I praised his playing and singing, feeling that it also expressed my own sense of loss about needing to say

goodbye to Jason. I realized how attached we had become to each other.

In the following session, Jason divided the Batman and super hero figures between us. He set up a sheet of white paper on the floor saying it was a wrestling ring. He referred to my guys as the "bad guys" and his as the "good guys". Jason said our guys would wrestle each other two by two. This interaction continued until all my men had been defeated by his.

Jason had brought his art therapy portfolio to our session. We set aside this time to look at his pictures together. Reviewing his art therapy work opened the way to reflecting on his process in drama therapy as well. I pointed out themes that were common to his work in both art and drama therapy. Jason described how one of his paintings expressed the way he was feeling the day he painted it. I commented that he had worked hard to sort through and express his feelings. I said I thought he was very creative in the ways he used art and drama to do this. This discussion enabled us to move our understanding of our therapy process from the metaphoric to the conscious level.

In this session, Jason and I began the process of dealing with unfinished business so that we could say goodbye to each other. I believe that his unfinished business had to do with separating the "bad" from the "good" in his life. In his story, his figures defeated mine. The

good forces had overpowered the bad. While I don't really know all that this symbolically represented for Jason, I like to think that it celebrated the growth in his awareness of his positive qualities. Perhaps it was also his way of letting go of drama therapy.

My unfinished business had to do articulating his many attributes in order to leave him with a more positive sense of self. I wanted him to know that I believed in him and thought he was a great kid.

I began session twenty five by reminding Jason that this was our next to last session. Jason shared that he felt sad, but could handle his feelings. I responded that I, too, felt sad and would think of him often. I suggested that next week be a celebration of all that we had shared in drama therapy and asked what he thought of this idea. He liked it. We agreed that I would bring in a treat. Jason asked me to bring egg nog, explaining that it reminded him of Christmas.

Following this discussion, Jason was ready to begin playing. He divided the super hero figures between us and chose a bum puppet, which he referred to as a "drunk". The play consisted of Jason's figures killing mine. He then asked that the figures kill the bum puppet. I asked why he needed to be killed and Jason said he "deserved it". After all the bad guys were killed, Jason went to the piano and played a sweet melody that he had made up. His mood was peaceful and composed.



During the story-telling, Jason's mood appeared intense, with an edge of anger. Once the story was told, his whole body relaxed. There was a sense of relief. He played the piano in a calm, soulful manner. It was as if a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. My hunch was that in both last week's and this week's sessions, Jason was dealing with the unfinished business of metaphorically killing off the bad, abusive figures in his life. This hunch was strengthened by observing the change in Jason's affect after he finished enacting his story. I finished this session feeling frustrated about needing to terminate at this point.

Session twenty six was our last session. I chose not to give Jason the option of playing with the small figures in case the play brought up material that would remain unresolved. Our joint agreement had been to have this last session be a celebration honoring the process we shared and the relationship that we had developed.

In keeping with this plan, I set up a table with egg nog, cookies, and a goodbye letter to Jason. I did not put out toys. When Jason entered the room, he looked surprised and pleased. He asked me to read him the letter I wrote. In the letter I said how much I had enjoyed sharing the drama therapy process with him. I talked about his many personal qualities which I had gotten to know as a result of our work together. I wished him well. Jason listened as I read, a sad wistful expression on his face.

Jason asked if we could have the treats. We shared them, talking about the recipe that I had used to make the egg nog. Jason was gracious, serving me as well as himself and saying how much he was enjoying the food. There was a festive atmosphere.

When we finished eating, I asked Jason how he wanted to spend the session. I suggested that we could make something that he could take home with him. He liked that idea and suggested a sand art project that we could do jointly.

Jason and I created the picture together, with me following his instructions. Our conversation focussed on the picture making. This activity somehow contained my own strong emotions about needing to say goodbye to Jason. I wondered if he felt the same. Jason shared that he had learned sand art before moving to Montreal. He said that he moved here so his parent could get better. He said: "Now I'm better".

We finished our session by discussing the images we saw in the picture we had made. We had a last drink of egg nog. We closed by wrapping the remaining cookies for Jason to take home and saying goodbye.

I believe that this last session highlighted the collaborative nature of our relationship and gave us an opportunity to share a nurturing moment through the sharing of food. I was very moved by Jason sharing that he was now "better". Not wanting to disrupt the moment, I did not press

him to describe further what he meant by this. I accepted this statement at face value, confident that Jason knew what "better" meant to himself.

## VII. DISCUSSION

Jones (1996) says that "Work involving symbol and metaphor in Dramatherapy can help clients to engage with highly problematic material. They both serve to permit expression and to give a form for exploration of the presenting problem" (p. 242). Jones explains that symbolic work occurs when a client invests an object, image, action, or creative expression with personal meaning. This meaning may transform over time. An illustration of this in Jason's work is the way that the symbolic significance of slime continually changed and evolved. Jones states that metaphor involves dealing with one thing by means of another. For Jason, the giant story was an example of a metaphor through which he explored his own identity and worked on developing strategies for behaving more adaptively in his real life.

Throughout our therapy process, I was increasingly aware of the complex nature of the symbols and metaphors which Jason created. Each symbol and metaphor suggested many possible themes. As Jason's therapist, I believed it necessary to make choices about which themes to focus on in order to better facilitate the work. I have chosen to highlight the following themes which I believe were central

to Jason's process in drama therapy: feeling engulfed by danger, the victim\abuser dynamic, goodness and badness, getting along with peers, controlling anger, and discovering personal strengths.

In my opinion, this progression of themes represented Jason's process of working through his issues. He began by sharing his life story with me. His accounts were filled with descriptions of feeling engulfed by danger and chaos, feeling alone and not wanted. As the trust between us grew, he launched into more in-depth explorations of the role that abuse\badness played in his life, sometimes from the perspective of victim and other times from the perspective of abuser. Once this material had been communicated to me and explored by Jason, he became interested in searching for adaptive strategies for getting along better in the world.

This progression of themes suggests that once Jason had revealed and explored his difficult experiences, he was ready to begin the work of re-building his life. It also suggests a relationship to the stages of trauma processing described by Gil and Johnson. I would like, now, to look at the extent to which Jason's work reflected a working through of traumatic experiences based on the theories of Gil, Herman, and Johnson presented above.

In phase one, I believe that Jason and I laid the groundwork for Herman's stage of safety. Jason's behaviors indicated that he was showing increasing trust in me and in

drama therapy. I felt increasingly comfortable following his lead. We settled into a routine which made space for him to explore personal material and receive nurturing attention from me.

During phase two, Jason's work suggested a shift into Herman's stage of trauma processing. I wondered whether Jason's anxieties about seeing his biological parent coupled with the unexpected visit of the parent had brought traumatic material from his past closer to the surface. Perhaps this immediacy awoke a need in him to explore this material through the less distanced medium of role play. I believe that Jason's process during phase two involved a re-playing and exploration of traumatic experiences of abuse which corresponded to Johnson's model of trauma resolution. Through projective play with toys and role play he was externalizing the abusive Other. I understood Jason's dividing of his toys into good and bad guys to represent his efforts to separate Self from Other in order to put the blame where it belonged. Killing the "drunk" in session twenty five was a powerful example of this.

Sometimes, he created role play situations which felt dangerous to me. I believe that putting me in danger served a multiplicity of functions for Jason. It allowed him to communicate what it felt like to live in his world. It enabled him to see the Self in danger and explore the role of perpetrator, and it pushed me to bring in the boundaries

of our play in order to restore safety. My actions conveyed the message that behaving abusively is unacceptable, and imparted my view that what happened to him was wrong and was not his fault.

By the end of phase two, there was a shift in the tone of Jason's work. The martial arts story of session seventeen suggested a movement toward Johnson's process of transformation in that the characters had achieved insight into strategies for controlling violent behaviors and were beginning to put those strategies into practice. The sports role play of session sixteen, the giant role play of session twenty, and the costume interaction of session twenty two indicated a movement toward Herman's phase of reconnection in that they expressed a desire to explore strategies for controlling angry behavior and getting along with peers.

I understood the progression of symbols and metaphors to indicate that Jason was tackling the issue of trauma resolution through his work. Unfortunately, two factors limited the extent to which we were able to follow through with all of Herman and Johnson's phases. The first limiting factor was the lack of safety in Jason's external world. The second was our need to terminate therapy.

Gil (1998 b) states that a child's ability to make full use of the therapy process will be disrupted if the child is not in a safe living situation. While Jason felt safe at the treatment facility, he did not feel sufficiently

nurtured or supported at home. Added to this were constant upheavals in his life, such as the brief reappearance of his biological parent and strong concerns about his sibling's welfare, that kept his world on edge and unstable. Fortunately, he was able to use the medium of drama therapy to express his concerns and share them with me. However, this ongoing intrusion of unsafe events continually reinforced for Jason the notion that the world was not a safe place. To his credit, he fought against this, continually searching through the metaphor for safety and for strategies to successfully move back out into the world. While our work touched on explorations of self empowerment and reconnection, I believe these phases were not fully worked through. Having to terminate limited the time we had to fully explore these issues. Instead, we needed to abruptly redirect our focus to saying goodbye.

On the positive side, I believe that drama therapy provided a medium through which Jason could explore his identity and discover personal strengths. I was then able to share my view of his strengths with the treatment team. While Jason's clinical records tended to highlight his acting out behaviors, tendency toward angry outbursts, and hallucinations, his behavior in drama therapy continually revealed his insight, creativity, sensitivity to others, and tremendous resilience. While his outward behaviors indicated an inability to cope, his play behaviors revealed a strong

desire to sort through his terrible experiences so that he could get on with his life. Jason often talked about what he wanted to be when he grew up. He had a vision of himself as a successful adult. This, to me, was a beautiful testament to this child's desire to overcome the effects of his early traumatic experiences and reconnect in a healthy way to life.

Drama therapy also helped Jason to clarify the boundaries between his fantasy world and real life. Jennings (1999) says that "The child or adult who cannot eventually differentiate between ordinary life and imagined life is likely to suffer serious emotional damage" (p. 72). One manifestation of this damage is that the child gets stuck in the world of fantasy and has difficulty sorting out what is real and what is play. In Jason's case, I believe that his chaotic childhood made him unable to see the boundary between reality and fantasy. In daily life, I believe this inability manifested itself in Jason's tendency to hallucinate. During therapy, I felt this confusion to be particularly evident during phase two, when his role playing continually transformed from a playful interaction to a re-creation of an abusive situation.

In drama therapy, I attempted to create an environment which was governed by clear rules and boundaries. I wanted to give Jason the experience of moving back and forth between the play world and his real world. I used techniques



such as de-roling and putting away the toys at the end of each session to emphasize the boundary between these two worlds. As a result, I believe that he made significant gains in his ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality. I understood his enthusiasm in proclaiming "Now I'm Jason", after de-roling from his giant character, to be an indication of this growth.

A third positive outcome of this therapy process was the relationship that developed between Jason and myself. I was initially concerned that communicating through the metaphor would limit the degree to which we were able to develop a close therapeutic relationship. My experience proved this not to be the case. The safety of metaphor enabled Jason and I to delve into territory which would otherwise have felt too threatening. Jason's increasing desire to share this material coupled with my increasing comfort with receiving it helped our relationship become more trusting and solid.

In evaluating my own development, I believe that this experience helped me grow as a therapist in a variety of ways. I feel that the degree to which I was able to be present for Jason was directly proportional to the growth in my ability to let go of the need to interpret the exact meaning of his work. Casement (1985) says that it is important for a therapist to remain open to the unknown, to tolerate not knowing so that understanding emerges from the

therapy process itself.

Closely related to the therapist's capacity for dwelling in the unknown, is the ability to ride the waves of the client's process without becoming overwhelmed. I found this a tremendous challenge in working with Jason. I often felt filled with sadness witnessing his stories. I secretly saw myself as the one to save him and transform his life. It took many hours of discussions with supervisors for me to realize that I could not erase the past from Jason's or any other client's life. At best, I could support Jason in his quest to sort through his experiences and help him find the inner resources to move on.

Negotiating this therapy process with Jason gave me greater insight into the nature of drama therapy itself. While in Axline's play therapy model the therapist is an observer of the client's play, in drama therapy the therapist is a participant. I found that I continually needed to be flexible and open to playing in the full gamut of ways within the EPR spectrum. This ranged from slime hand games to enacting stories with toys to embodying characters. I needed to think on my feet. Interventions were made through the play.

Communicating through the metaphor within the drama frame often necessitated my intervening through the vehicle of my role. For instance, as a magical character in the giant role play, I conveyed to Jason the importance of

exploring other aspects of his identity aside from his anger. Other times, I found myself in the role of theater director, setting down the boundaries of the interaction in order to safely contain it. An example of this was my insistence on defining exactly how we would do each scene in the sword fight role play.

A crucially important lesson that I learned was that setting down clear rules was key to providing a productive therapeutic experience for Jason. Both projective play with toys and role play required that I delineate the parameters of the interaction. In projective work with toys this involved staying on the mat and not engaging in hurtful actions. In role play, this involved creating a safe theatrical container for Jason's explorations.

Through working with Jason, I learned to assess the relative safety of different ways of playing. For instance, working projectively with small toys on a mat felt safer than role play in that it provided the most containment and distance to the work. Mirroring games had implicit power dynamics which were threatening for him. I learned that following the lead meant understanding the general thematic material that Jason wanted to explore and insisting that we do so in ways that were safe for us both. I learned to be flexible and to re-direct the play when necessary. Jason relied on me to contain the work. In order to do this, I needed to stay in tune with my own instincts while making

choices about which themes were the important ones and how we might explore them safely.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Although I view this drama therapy process to have been incomplete in the way it promoted the working through of trauma, I still believe that it provided a range of positive experiences for Jason. First, it gave him the opportunity to establish a positive relationship with an adult which modelled respectful ways of interacting. Second, it enabled Jason to gain some perspective on his early traumatic experiences by helping him realize that he was not to blame for them. Once he had achieved this insight, he was able to move beyond his image of himself as a victim and inherently bad. This led to the third important outcome of therapy, which was Jason being able to see positive qualities in himself.

From my perspective, I perceived drama therapy to offer a window into aspects of Jason's character that were not always evident in his daily life. I was happy to be able to share my observations with other professionals because it helped them gain a more complete understanding of Jason. By the same token, getting their input served to further inform the drama therapy process. Collaborating with the treatment team has helped me understand the way in which different treatment modalities can support each other. In fact, Gil

(1998 b) says that, in her experience, traumatized children benefit from long term treatment which combines several treatment modalities, such as cognitive-behavioral and play therapy. She believes that cognitive-behavioral treatments may be most effective in helping children deal with nightmares, phobias, and violent behaviors, while play therapy methods may be best for helping children build a relationship with the therapist and work through traumatic material. My experience with Jason has led me to agree with Gil. I believe his interests would have been better served had he been able to continue with both drama therapy and cognitive-behavioral interventions.

Finally, I learned that when communicating through metaphor, the therapist can not always understand the layers of meaning implicit in the work. Therefore, the therapist must make choices about how to understand the symbolism. These choices have a direct impact on the flow of the work and the nature of the relationship with the client. I believe that Jason's and my own journey was a product of what he chose to share and how I understood it.

Since this therapy process stayed within the metaphor, I did not have the opportunity to explore the dimension of verbal processing. Had Jason and I been able to continue the therapy, I question whether communicating through symbol and metaphor would have sufficiently addressed the demands of Herman's stage of reconnection. This phase of therapy seems

to warrant the creation of a bridge between symbolic expression and cognitive understanding. I believe that verbal processing of the work could facilitate cognitive understanding for the client. In my future work, I look forward to exploring the ways in which symbolic play and verbal processing can be interwoven to support each other in the drama therapy process with children.

In conclusion, I think that individual drama therapy provided a medium through which Jason could safely work through traumatic material, develop a fuller awareness of self, and practice negotiating a healthy relationship with an adult. I find it to be an effective treatment modality for children who have difficulty distinguishing between fantasy and reality.

As a therapist, I learned about the importance of dwelling in the unknown and riding the waves of the client's process. I also learned that working in individual drama therapy with a child involves being therapist, stage director, actor, playmate, and facilitator. It also requires knowledge of how to keep the work safe.

I was continually struck by Jason's courage, creativity, and persistence in grappling with difficult issues. His resilience has been a source of great inspiration for me. It is my hope that our process has left Jason equally enriched.

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**APPENDIX**

**Consent Form**

**CONSENT FORM**

Drama Therapy  
Masters in Creative Arts Therapies Programme  
Concordia University

I, \_\_\_\_\_, undersigned, give my permission for G. Zeeva Benathen Weisz to write a case study describing the process of said child in individual drama therapy. This case study will be undertaken as a Masters thesis to complete the requirements of the Creative Arts Therapies Programme at Concordia University.

I understand that both the child's identity and the setting where drama therapy took place will be kept strictly confidential. No information will be given in this study which could lead to the identification of this child. The goal of this study is to explore the value of drama therapy as a treatment modality for use with children.

I have read and understood the contents of this form and accompanying information letter, and I give my consent as described above.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_