

# Play and Therapeutic Action

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*Children in clinical psychoanalysis are able to resolve conflicts and move ahead developmentally. This therapeutic process is facilitated by the psychoanalyst's understanding of the child, reflected in multi-faceted and thoughtful clinical technique. We review aspects of the analyses of four developmentally deviant children who were engaged in child psychoanalysis because of ego disturbances that impaired their ability to learn. These clinical analyses are used to exemplify three intertwined processes related to the therapeutic action of child psychoanalysis: therapeutic alliance, transference, and the role of the child analyst as a real person. These processes were expressed in and were influenced by the emergence of particular types of play in which the children explored complex issues in their lives. Along with other aspects of psychoanalytic technique, including interpretation, the analyses of these four children illustrate the therapeutic meanings of play in child psychoanalysis.*

PLAY IN CHILD PSYCHOANALYSIS CONTAINS WITHIN IT MANY DIFFERENT levels of meaning and experience. However, it is possible to pull together certain general themes in play, or certain modes of playing, and to analyze them in terms of their influence on therapeutic action. In this paper we use the terms *therapeutic action* and *process* to describe and explicate the therapeutic impact of child psychoanalysis.

In particular, we focus on a mode of dramatic play which has

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emerged during the psychoanalyses of four prelatency-age boys (Ritvo, 1993). This play process forces into view the relationship between therapy that emphasizes the unlocking of obstacles to development and that which emphasizes the clarification and resolution of those neurotic disorders associated with symptomatic behavior, inhibitions, depression and anxiety, or their equivalents. Both approaches are necessary to assure a sound psychoanalytic process.

In the four prelatency boys to be presented, theoretical issues concerning choice of technical approach in psychoanalytic treatment suggested a validation of a hypothesis most clearly formulated by Peter Neubauer (1987, 1993). This hypothesis is related to an overarching conviction of Anna Freud's. In numerous presentations and publications she indicated that the major criteria for terminating child psychoanalytic treatment are symptomatic relief and the resumption of progressive development. In Neubauer's formulation, children suffering from an impaired ego (i.e., from developmental deviation largely related to equipmental or endowment factors) require a technical and theoretical approach to psychoanalytic treatment that emphasizes the identification of and rechanneling of deviant developmental characteristics and lags. For the purposes of this report we do not emphasize that part of our psychoanalytic treatment of these children in which resistance, defense, and conflict are clarified, interpreted, and worked through in relieving the child's neurotic suffering.

Each of the children to be presented suffered from serious emotional difficulties with ego impairments, the most common of which was a learning disability that played a significant role in the timing of (formal schooling was about to begin) and motivation for referral for psychoanalytic treatment. Each boy's needs and family's sustained investment in psychoanalytic treatment were related to an awareness of the importance of education. This also involved helping the parents keep the teachers and school administrators informed and supportive of their student's psychoanalytic treatment.

As we present the clinical material, it is useful to keep our presumption in mind that play with a child psychoanalyst can have a development-promoting impact with a minimum of verbalization and interpretation. It is not likely to be therapeutic if such play is not with a psychoanalytic therapist who is empathic, attuned to his patient's moods and fantasies, and available as a player as well as an active psychological-emotional transference presence as the child plays out (with or without an active play role assigned by the child to the analyst) the inner drama, longings, attitudes, motives, and characteristics of his impaired development. In order to focus the relationship of therapeu-

tic action to removing obstacles to progressive development, the case material emphasizes the play interaction more than it does the ongoing interpretation of resistance, defense, and conflict.

#### CLINICAL MATERIAL

The four cases described below have some common features. All were children of academic or professional families of at least moderate means. All the children were diagnosed as having learning disabilities. The fourth child, although quite bright and an early reader, was also described by his teachers as learning disabled because of his extreme behavioral problems, impulsivity, and negativism.

All four children entered analysis between the ages of 4 and 7 and terminated between the ages of 7 and 10. The analytic treatments lasted 2 to 4 years. In the course of each of the analyses, a play world reflecting deviant, impaired development was constructed, explored, modified, and understood as the treatment progressed and was terminated. The nature and valence of the transference changed during the course of the analysis, but initially it was related to distorted relationships evoked by the child's deviant development. Over the course of treatment the transference revealed a potential for more realistic and developmentally appropriate relationships and learning behaviors.

Finally, all four cases were responsive in a sustained manner to psychoanalytic treatment in modifying and significantly reducing the obstacles to a more normal progressive development, as reflected in their inner lives and in their relationships and behavior at home and in school. The children came to be at greater ease with themselves and others, showed improvement in their academic performances, and found more pleasure and satisfaction in their experiences of both the world of inner reality and the actual world in which they lived. They could be said to have begun or resumed a progressive development with past and present obstacles having been minimized.

The four cases were previously discussed in *The Many Meanings of Play* (Cohen and Cohen, 1993).

#### CASE 1: TOMMY

Tommy, at 6 years, was a confused and anxious child who was not learning. He seemed distant and withdrawn and quite puzzling to his teachers and family. Tommy's older brother was an excellent student. His parents, both academics with advanced degrees, were very attached and close to his older brother, Michael, who was outgoing and success-

ful. But they were perplexed by Tommy and saddened by his lack of academic success. They observed that he was not learning and was not outgoing like Michael, but they could not understand why.

In the beginning of treatment Tommy appeared to be a profoundly sad and troubled child. His play consisted of telling stories with small animal and people figures. Often the themes of the stories were disconnected, repetitive, and without much development. His drawings had a listless and laborious quality. The first spark of excitement was noted when he observed and wanted to count some bottles of soda. He observed this in an unusually curious, even agitated way.

Tommy's parents had no sense of what he was experiencing. To the best of their knowledge, they thought that their son was well cared for and they truly believed that they were doing as much as they could for him. Tommy had been attending day care since he was a small child. They reported that he never showed any separation anxiety in parting. He was not tearful when he parted from his parents; neither was he ever aggressive in his manner. He was quiet, and showed no expression of affect whatsoever when he was left by his parents at day care early in the morning and when he was picked up in the evening. And yet, from what we know about Tommy, this experience was very stressful for him. In particular what was hardest was the disorientation in his sense of time. He could not understand for how long he would be left alone at day care, when his parents would come, and so on. The days would go on and on without an end in sight. He was adrift in an ocean of time, helpless, with no safe harbor within sight.

In the small treatment room (7 feet by 8 feet), Tommy's dramatic play developed around this very metaphor. In the conceptual world which we co-created, Tommy and I were two sailors on a ship at sea. It was a stormy sea with many dangers—hidden rocks, sea monsters, pirates. He was a crewman and I was assigned to be his "Matey," his friend and buddy. In our dramatic play, Tommy spoke to Matey in an (assumed) British accent—and I answered him in turn with the best imitation of a British accent I could muster. At times he designated me the role of captain; at other times he treated me as an equal. Occasionally, Tommy himself became the ship's commanding officer.

In this phase of treatment, he enacted play shipwrecks. The sea was tempestuous; it seemed impossible to control where the ship would go. Of great importance were the maps and charts which Tommy constructed, with the encouragement and aid of Matey. He depicted the sea's geography, the position of dangerous rocks, of monsters and pirates, and the whereabouts of safe harbors and ports of call. These

charts—which were used in the dramatic play, quickly drawn with crayon, pen, or marker on plain white paper—were carefully stored in his private drawer from session to session. They did not seem to be objects prized in and of themselves, but seemed to be useful for the exploration of Tommy's play world. He frequently revised them, or even redrew them from scratch, for the topography of the sea was always changing and one needed to have an accurate representation of it.

In addition to the maps, another important development was the introduction of a single-lensed telescope. The telescope was not represented by a physical object, but was represented in the dramatic play by putting one's two hands together and holding them up to one's eye. In our dramatic play, the child and Matey would stand on the deck of the ship or on top of cliffs (represented by chairs and couches) and try to focus the lens to see what lay about us. This imaginary device, a prop represented by a part of the body, was elevated by me, with the consent and complicity of Tommy, to a level of critical importance in the course of the development of the conceptual world. It was used as a way of assessing our current situation and to understand what lay ahead. With the careful, assiduous employment of this powerful instrument for observation, one could safely navigate the treacherous seas and reach a safe harbor.

The intensity of his anxiety was most fully explored in this phase. Oftentimes, when the sea became stormy and there was a danger of a shipwreck, the telescope would have a sense of urgency associated with it. The waves washed over the side of the ship. The wind howled. "I can't see anything! The telescope won't focus for me!" cried the Matey. "Here, you take it!" Tommy took the telescope, put it up to his eye, and started to focus it. "What can you see? Do you know where we are?" the Matey inquired, barely able to make herself heard above the fury of the storm. Fortunately, Tommy saw where they were and was able to guide the ship to find the food, warmth, and security in a safe harbor.

Tommy discovered that he had the capacity to see around him. He learned that one of the ways of overcoming the anxiety of being abandoned and having to be alone was to look around him—not to close his eyes and see the world through a glassy-eyed stare—but to see where he was and act upon that knowledge.

Tommy and his Matey became old sea hands over time. Through their use of charts and especially the employment of the telescope, we eventually memorized the sea lanes. As the world became a more peaceful, friendlier place and the theme of "man against the sea" be-

came less interesting for Tommy, another theme emerged inside the same play world. Until this point, at the back of my mind I held the theoretical assumption that the storms, the shipwrecks, the pirates, and so on were an expression of aggression and (denied) hatred, perhaps toward Tommy's older brother, who was the object of his parents' admiration and love. But the material which emerged at this point of the analysis suggested alternate interpretations.

More and more the dramatic play revolved around the idea of Tommy being marooned on a desert island with his Matey. Here the word "Matey" was used by Tommy primarily not as a way of expressing friendliness and the state of being my "buddy." In the context of the deepening transference at this point of the analysis, I felt it meant something more akin to the word "mate," as in lover. This suggested that the earlier torrential storms were also a representation of the fearful side of the primal scene, while the scenes on the deserted island were a way to express its more affectionate, intimate side. While before, Tommy metaphorically had to fight off his fears and anxieties, here he was able to express unchallenged affection and closeness, without the rivalry of his older brother or father. For as Erikson (1963) states, in his description of the efficacy of play therapy, "The most obvious condition is that the child has the toys and the adult for himself, and that sibling rivalry, parental nagging, or any kind of sudden interruption does not disturb the unfolding of his play intentions, whatever they may be" (p. 222). Tommy now had his Matey (mate-mother-analyst) alone, in the privacy of a secret island.

Yet another way of understanding Tommy's fantasy world, being marooned on a desert island also was associated with the earlier experience of abandonment, isolation, and loneliness. Now, however, even if marooned on a desert island, he no longer experienced the fear of abandonment, for he had his Matey with him. Through his play with the analyst, Tommy had, in a transferential sense, incorporated his mother into his own self; he had his own claim on her which had become internalized in his enhanced self-esteem.

By the time Tommy was 8½, he had shown considerable improvement in school. His glassy-eyed stare had become more focused, and he showed signs of vitality and interest in life. He also was more outgoing and involved and more expressive of his emotions. The emotional stress and anxieties which Tommy experienced lifted; he no longer felt so disturbed or helpless in being alone and not knowing where he was. Today, about 9 years after the termination of his analysis, Tommy has met with academic success in high school and now shows promise as a playwright. Tommy has been able to use his rich and creative imagina-

tion, which we saw in his play world, and relate his own fantasies to a public audience.

CASE 2: ROB

When Rob started treatment, he was 6 years old. His parents were both academics. Their older son was a successful student. Rob was failing for the second year in school. He was aggressive and suffered from encopresis. He defecated in his pants at home and in the most visible, public situations. Children and teachers avoided him and were frightened by him. Rob's parents were extremely concerned. His mother, who suffered from frequent bouts of depression, dated the onset of Rob's difficulties to age 2 years when the parents went on vacation and left the children with a female family friend who at the time was quite emotionally unstable. She was sadistic and aggressive in her attempts to toilet train Rob.

Rob's play in the analysis consisted of playing basketball. He also discussed his experiences of being on the swim team. He assigned me the role of Coach. As far as this play in the analysis was concerned, there really were no other people involved—no other teammates or referees. His play was unimaginative (drill after drill and emphasis on scorekeeping). He tossed the ball into the waste basket; the only variations were from which angle and from what distance. Not infrequently there were aggressive attacks, or Rob would run out of the room, run out of the building, dart across a dangerous room or climb to the roof top.

At times he reported incidents of defecating in the swimming pool and often, preceding a session, he urinated on top of a radiator. This had the effect of making a normally (semi)concealed act more public, for the fumes from his urine would carry through the halls and up and down one or more flights of stairs. I began to understand the association of defecation with swimming, and sitting on top of a radiator was a way to link the act with his mother. The mother, symbolized by the pool's water and radiator's warmth, thus received Rob's feces—even as he made people go away from him and recreated the trauma of being abandoned and left alone.

One of my responsibilities as Coach was to track his vital statistics. The Coach was informed on all aspects of Rob's physical behavior. Central were issues of control over his body and over the bodies of others. Just like the feces which were a love object to his mother, his scoring was presented to me.

Rob himself became aware of his behavior and all of his physical

“statistics” as he made the identification with Coach. He gradually lost interest in playing basketball with Coach and going swimming. Rob’s great concern with his physical prowess became less pressing. Ultimately, the statistics became Rob’s own concern. He took pride in being his own manager.

After three years of analysis, Rob’s encopresis became more and more infrequent. It reached the point where he would never defecate in his pants at school. He did, however, occasionally continue this symptom in my office; I believed that these episodes of encopresis represented a persisting marker of the crystallization of the symptom within the transference. In the analytic situation and through the transference neurosis, Rob was most actively aware of the conflicts in trying to control his behavior. Over time, the symptom disappeared from the analytic office as well. Rob met with more success in school. After the termination of analysis I intermittently heard from Rob’s parents. He developed into a solid, energetic, latency-age youngster, and his movement into puberty was not very eventful; he enjoyed his increasing autonomy; he was accepted into a fine prep school, where he had a circle of friends, including boys and girls, and played on a team.

When Rob was 14 years old, his parents went away for a weekend. He arranged to stay at the home of his friend, but chose to go home to his empty house. This revived his earlier trauma of abandonment when he was 2 years old. He thus promptly invited 30 or 40 of his “close friends” from school to have a wild party in his house. They “trashed” the house, being particularly destructive of Rob’s parents’ bedroom. He was abandoned, and he responded by metaphorically defecating. No one had to tell him anything, but after Rob’s parents returned from their trip, Rob knew that it was time to see the analyst with whom he had overcome his problem of encopresis. After two or three months of sessions with me, he could again defer and channel his anger and was able to resume his normal relations with his parents, his environment, and his own body. Now, two years after this episode of trashing, Rob is a popular teenager interested in becoming a psychologist when he grows up. He remains interested in sports—in a positive, healthy manner, without the obsessive concern for statistics and the control of his body.

### CASE 3: BENJAMIN

From an early age, Benjamin was showing signs of having a severe learning disability. At age 4, a neurologist recommended special education placement, based on what he assessed was an organic impairment in cognitive and motor functions. The exact nature of the disorder was



never clearly diagnosed. The father, a professor of education, wondered if Benjamin was perhaps autistic, as he seemed very impaired and lacked basic social skills as well. Yet at the same time, Benjamin's father identified with his son.

It became clear to me early in Benjamin's analysis that Benjamin's disabilities in learning were caused at least as much by emotional factors as by constitutional determinants. He was a very rigid, anxious boy, constantly feeling and then reliving the experience of stress caused over the most minor failures.

On the whole, Benjamin's dramatic play was uninteresting and unimaginative. He repeatedly played school. In the beginning, Benjamin played the role of the stupid student and cast the therapist as his demanding, critical teacher. His dramatic play was thus very masochistic; he was constantly punished for being unable to spell and compute successfully. Many of the learning difficulties seemed related to how he perceived his "damaged" body. It was only when the punitive analyst/teacher referred to him as Mr. Mixup Man or Mr. Opposite that he allowed himself to become the teacher and made me the damaged student. It was through this change that he allowed the analyst as criticized student to verbalize anger, disappointment, frustration, fear, loneliness, and sadness.

Benjamin now was able to take advantage of playing in a town soccer team with some success. His father, who had never played a sport, watched his child with pride. He, too, joined in the activity and became the coach for his son's team. As a result of their mutual involvement in the sport, Benjamin's father no longer felt trapped by the resonating identification he experienced through the related but differing clumsiness that he and his son shared; neither did Benjamin's own identification with his father focus on this aspect of the father's behavior and attitudes. Benjamin came to internalize the image of his father as coach. This idealized aspect of his parent helped form Benjamin's emerging ego ideal. This, along with the work in the analysis, allowed for the clarification and attenuation of a complex developmental obstacle.

#### CASE 4: JASON

Jason, age 5, a precocious reader and a math whiz, tyrannized the classroom with his aggression, impulsivity, outbursts, and noncompliant behavior. He terrorized the teachers and other children. He was unresponsive to learning in school. Nobody seemed able to figure him out.

Jason's parents, hard-working architects, left him in day care for 10-hour days. When he was 2 his sister was born and his father mysteriously abandoned the family for several months. Jason's mother became depressed. Jason became confused and upset, for his father's disappearance had taught him that it was possible for either or both of his parents to disappear suddenly at any time. He was convinced that his own anger had caused his father to go away to another city.

In the play world which Jason constructed, he was in business with his therapist. My analytic office became a business office. The physical properties which were used were quite extensive—stationary, documents, models for development and marketing. Sometimes Jason and I were co-workers; at other times Jason assumed the role of boss and I was his subordinate. He would tell his employee what to do, fantasize about all his "great ideas" for a "new product," and so on. At certain moments I became a high-ranking executive, while Jason was an employee of the company. As an executive, I was expected to point out all the important "issues" and could discuss Jason's past "business failures." The fantasy world did not have a playful quality to it—its tone was very serious. Jason became angry if I was slow to respond: "Come on! What are you doing there?"

There were many businesses that emerged. The actual nature of the product changed over time. During the course of the analysis, a number of different products were discussed, modeled, and toyed with. There was one product in particular, however, which seemed to have serious economic possibilities. This was a phone-watch. With this watch, a businessman could get in touch with any of the most important people in his business at any time. "It will become absolutely necessary for every executive to own one," Jason, the businessman, said. "With a phone-watch, you can know where the most important people are all the time." For Jason, that most important person to whom he occasionally referred, by way of example, was his mother. Although he seemed determined and aggressive, Jason was actually very sensitive. Most of all he worried about the possibility of his parents disappearing, how his own actions might cause this, and what he should do in order to prevent this from happening. In order to cope with this anxiety, he put some protective space between himself and his parents, the people closest to him and most linked to his anxiety concerning abandonment. Rather than passively accepting his parents' disappearances, Jason became defensively aggressive and angry. The rage he felt at his parents for his father's disappearance and his mother's depression and then her hospitalization was eventually generalized to include nearly everyone.

Jason appeared very adultlike both in and outside of the play world he constructed. This early maturity had a defensive function. In many ways Jason remained very infantile. He enjoyed cuddling with his stuffed animals and needed a night-light at bedtime. His apparent maturity was thus part of Jason's defensive shielding—the ways in which he distanced himself from the insecurities of being a child and dependent on adults.

The internalization of the phone-watch and the process of identification which took place in the analytic process allowed Jason to cope with the insecurities aroused by his experience of being separated from his parents. This separation was both physical, as when his father left when he was 2 years old or when he was dropped off at day care, and emotional, as in the distance he experienced between himself and his mother when she was depressed. With the identification and internalization of his "product" and the play world which he created, Jason became less aggressive and troublesome; the school no longer threatened to expel him.

In many sessions the phone-watch which Jason was developing was clearly the most interesting and relevant product for Jason; it was not the last "idea for a product." Just before termination, when Jason was 8 years old, he discussed the possibilities of a paper airplane mail-order business. "We could sell do-it-yourself kits, parts, paint. If a part broke, you could send away for it and it would arrive in two days."

This time the issues of separation and specifically termination in the analysis were developed in the paper airplane mail-order business. He showed some anxiety at the prospect of termination and the resultant separation from me, just as he felt anxious around vacations. He wished to hold onto me, to keep me from disappearing. Jason offered all kinds of incentives to his business partner for not dissolving our partnership. He mentioned how, if we promoted certain airline companies in our model business, he and his "business partner" would definitely get free tickets on real airplanes—we could go any place we wanted together. The business showed an associative connection between Jason's memory of his mother's hospitalization and his fantasies concerning me after the analysis terminated. As he remembered taking an airplane when he visited his mother when she was hospitalized, having free airplane tickets meant that he could visit me any time he wanted, even after the analysis terminated.

At the time of termination Jason was no longer as aggressive; the collaboration was not as one-sided. In the end, Jason reluctantly agreed to make me a "consultant," whom he could call upon in times of need. He agreed that he could manage the day-to-day affairs of the business

on his own. Both Jason and I were thus able to dissolve the business partnership, as he replaced it with the gratifications that became available in his more progressive, less deviant development.

#### DISCUSSION

Our consideration of therapeutic process in child psychoanalysis, a complex theoretical and clinical area, is confined in this paper to three issues that are brought into view by the psychoanalytic study and treatment of four boys as they were moving from the oedipal to the latency period in their developmental trajectories.

The first issue is the nature of the therapeutic alliance; the second is the nature of the transference; and the third issue is the role of the child analyst as a real person, as a significant, influential adult in the growing-up experience of his analysands. These three issues are closely and inseparably tied together; their fit provides a clinical view of how to understand and be guided in the technical management of the psychoanalytic treatment of developmentally deviant children and the theoretical questions these issues raise when looked at together.

In the treatment of the four boys the analyst, when invited, was quite active in the play, feeling the seriousness of the drama as important in its own right. The analyst formed a close alliance with each of these boys in the adventures they created. She noted how the strength and intensity of the therapeutic alliance was forged in the play with minimal interpretation of unconscious feelings and conflicts. The play was the thing! Paradoxically, in the context of treating developmentally deviant children, the analyst as a new or real person gained in importance in fueling the therapeutic process, while the analyst as a transference object, never insignificant, became less central in providing therapeutic leverage. As Peter Neubauer said recently, "We strive these days to do more than just undo the repressed. For example, we also work to overcome [developmental] deviations and arrests" (Abrams, 1991).

For example, Jason's difficulty in termination could be understood in terms of the play world he created and its relation to the rest of his life. The play world was not marginalized as "child's play." Jason was serious; what he was doing was in many ways real to him. In the play world of business which Jason created, he was honing his skills as a businessman, rehearsing for his future occupation, and engaged in activities which were important to him and real in and of themselves. With a serious determination which only a young child can have, he once actually requested "development funds" from his parents to support the "research" and "test-marketing" of the phone-watch. This

request apparently caused a minor crisis in the family. His parents had no idea how they should respond. They did not know if Jason was “only playing” or whether his request for money was serious and real. They felt that they could not make the decision for themselves and went to the analyst for consultation. Jason’s play world was not far removed from the real world in which he lived. This is similar to the children described by Solnit (1987) and Vygotsky (1978) who were, in Vygotsky’s words, “playing at reality.”

In the midst of such play, the child does not sharply distinguish the play world from reality. This is not a sign of pathology, but of the intense investment in the elaboration of imagination and fantasy. Engagement in the play drama, as in the theater, is “real” for the time being. Play worlds such as Jason’s seem to be very close to the border of reality. Others, such as Tommy’s, are much more distal, while the majority, such as Rob’s and Benjamin’s, seem to be approximately intermediate in distance between the child’s inner reality and the world in which he lives. This does not mean, of course, that the child cannot place boundaries around the play world. In fact, the children described sometimes did this quite clearly, in tone of voice, through setting the scene, or even by such phrases as “let’s pretend.”

However, when they were fully at play—in their developmental effort to reshape their worlds—they could suspend disbelief and fully allow, at least for moments, the expression of their capacities for imagination which enabled them to see themselves and their world more openly and with more opportunities to be active in practicing their “experimental” reshaping of it than in their past nonplay world. The suspension of reality testing, exercise of imagination, and playing out of hypotheses of alternating views appeared to be vital in facilitating the psychoanalytic process with these children. With the support of the child psychoanalyst, the emergence of capacities to experiment in play and to elaborate and explore the inner fantasy world becomes a development-promoting exercise for these children in confronting the distortions and inhibitions that characterize their particular developmental difficulties.

In his more general observations about play, Freud (1908) referred to an intermediate area of experience, the dialectic between reality and fantasy, that has increased significance for this discussion. He said, “Might we not say that every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or, rather, re-arranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him” (p. 143f.). In this view Freud suggested the development-promoting aspect of play for children.

As an imaginative activity which borders reality, playing with a child psychoanalyst has a therapeutic value that in the neurotic child must be translated, interpreted, and worked through to have more than transient therapeutic value. In the developmentally deviant or ego-impaired child, as in the four boys reported in this paper, the play is essential, whereas translation, interpretation, and working through are replaced in importance by how the play and the participation by the child psychoanalyst open up the obstacles to a more normative progressive development. In this context, the analyst as real or new object gains in importance as compared to the analyst as a transference object. It is not a matter of either/or but how the predominance of the former (analyst as new or real object) has a shaping influence on technique as a pathway to therapeutic leverage and action.

In each of these cases, the critical issue was how the child explored and used the analytic opportunities for playing with, or in the presence of, the adult psychoanalyst. As the analyst was observing and playing she was enabling each child to explore alternative ways of viewing himself and his world. The push for this is derived from the libidinal and aggressive drives and the maturational energies that constitute the forces that move development ahead. Within the metaphor of these play world activities, the child identifies with the analyst in tolerating change and in forgoing the familiar stickiness of the deviant developmental views and expectations associated with learning disabilities and distorted self-esteem representations. In turn, this analytic work, including the interpretation and working through of neurotic conflicts and defenses, enabled these children to use their differentiations in object relationships to promote capacities for object constancy, friendship, and identifications that can be elaborated and liberating.

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