

Creative Arts and Play Therapy for Attachment Problems, edited by Cathy A. Malchiodi and David A. Crenshaw, New York, Guildford Press, 2015, 303 pp., £23.80 (paperback), ISBN 9781462523702

I was privileged to have the opportunity to read and review the book *Creative Arts and Play Therapy for Attachment Problems*. The book is comprised of three sections. Each one consists of a collection of essays from different practitioners, mostly from North America, addressing the theme of using creative arts or play therapy for clients with attachment difficulties. They are: “Introduction” to approaches to attachment issues, “Clinical Applications to Approaches to working with Attachment Issues” and “Clinical Applications to working with At-Risk Populations”. This book is certainly most suitable for professionals in and interested in the field.

All in all, there are seventeen chapters from different contributors who work in a variety of arts and play therapy contexts with clients who present with difficulties of attachment and trauma. As a drama and movement therapist working with clients in a setting with other arts therapists, play therapists and counsellors, where trauma and attachment difficulties are a common reason for referral, I greatly enjoyed and appreciated reading of the different nuances that each creative modality can offer within therapy. As illustrated in the different chapters, this is shared by music, play, drama, art and dance therapists.

The idea articulated in Chapter 4, on “Art Therapy, Attachment, and Parent-Child Dyads”, when Cathy Malchiodi reflects on Bruce Perry’s work that “experience becomes biology”, seems to me to encapsulate what the theorists in the book have in common (p. 64). It is from this point of view that play and creative arts therapies are argued as being so important; as they provide tactile, physiological as well as relational and emotive experiences that the client can hold on to and internalise. The general thrust of the theories related to current thinking around trauma, attachment and neuroscience from a therapeutic perspective were at times in danger of being repetitive, if it were not for some interesting references to the psychodynamic approaches of Jung and Winnicott and even some discussion of developmental arrest.

The book opens up the processes and dilemmas of play and creative arts therapies to the reader, providing a rich array of points to consider when working in this way with this particular client group. This includes the writing around the importance of a flexible approach that meets that client’s needs (sometimes including the parents in the work and working for multiple/ longer sessions in a week). It also includes some of the current challenges and debates therapists find themselves having regarding how to work with trauma in clients. For example, the limited effectiveness of only using cognitive approaches when a client may not have yet developed the faculties for cognitive reflection, and the importance of including the senses to soothe the lower parts of the brain and enable recovery. In contrast, the book also considers the question of the effectiveness of keeping material contained in metaphor and not bringing it to full conscious awareness.

The rigorous work with parents and families was a joy to read. It challenged me to reflect on my thoughts and feelings as both a parent and a therapist. The idea of parents who have not had good enough experiences of attachment and care themselves neglecting or mistreating their own children posed a moral dilemma for me. I know a number of people who had very poor attachment experiences themselves who are excellent parents. I was then challenged to contemplate how the decisions parents make about how they treat their children based on their own experiences are vastly more complex than simply not having had good enough parenting themselves. The chapters on working with parents and children together gave a promising message about how attachments can be trans-generationally repaired. It is clear that this type of work, however, requires a lot of time and resources and I wonder if current services on this side of the Atlantic are able to provide enough therapeutic input for families at this time. Some of the work reported in the vignettes took up to eighteen months, maybe more. I sincerely hope that this level of service is available for the client who needs it, as the trend of short-term intervention tends to be favoured by many organisations.

I was moved by the chapters on the creative use of metaphor and on working with cross-cultural adoption, as the writers articulated the rapport between the therapist and clients with such warmth and creativity. Several contributors offered creative tools that have been developed to work on the theme of attachment, such as nest drawing and making butterflies. Some writers offered more structured chapters, with assessment and evaluation tools such as the COS model in Chapter 3, “Attachment Theory as a Road Map for Play Therapists”, by Anne Stewart, William F. Whelan, and Christen Pendleton, which had a useful description of how attachment needs

are communicated in a relationship using the “circle of security” and the idea of how “cues” and “miscues” can directly or indirectly indicate what the child’s needs are.

Since reading this book, I notice that I am more vigilant about the attachment quality of my relationship to my clients and theirs to me. I use the idea of “cues” and “miscues” to remind me when I am in the busy mindset of being a parent to listen and observe carefully my own children’s communication. I have found myself discussing techniques with colleagues from different disciplines, adapting ideas with a degree of confidence to my own work, and I have found myself recommending this book to supervisees. This book has inspired and refreshed me in my working practice and in my everyday life.

Notes on Contributor

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