

Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes (CWTP):- permission for adults to play, alone and with others, while remaining sober and fully-clothed.

As you see I have taken the word 'provocation' rather literally...the reference here of course is to the more usual associations with the term 'adult play'.

However, this title does have a serious undertone for me. And I would also stress here that my belief is that enforced play is not play.

Definitions of play are many and varied – ranging from several versions of a taxonomy of play (such as Stuart Brown's - founder of the National Institute for Play, US), to rhetorics of play (Shakila and Burns). It is generally agreed though that play is a 'slippery' thing to define, and Play Therapists define its existence, paradoxically, more from its absence in a child's life; the child, whose natural state is the play state (they say) presenting as frozen, shut down or suspended.

My current favourite what is Professor Richard Phillips (Sheffield University) says: "For me play is a spirit, as much as a thing that we do. It is a spirit which encourages us to explore, to experiment, to follow our curiosity."

The importance of play for social, physical, mental and emotional childhood growth and development is widely accepted. But what about in our adult lives? Who among us is experiencing a degree of play-deprivation?

And, widening the circle - how, I wonder, does someone who has become paralysed, connect to the playful side of their character, and their life?

Or someone whose childhood was not held, not safe, or where horse-play, or free access to unsupervised outdoor space was limited, discouraged, frowned upon, or carried fear. How does the adult who experienced such a childhood know what the play signals are in any given situation, and with whom, when and where it is acceptable, and safe, to connect to the playful child within?

How, I wonder, does someone who is blind do this? Or a busy executive; a multi-tasking career person and parent? Or someone who is elderly, frail, or bed-bound?

Stories? Films? Books? Conversations? Day-dreaming? Fantasising? Self-narration? Journaling?

– But what about other sorts of play, beyond play which is projected, through symbols such as writing?

How about hand play, and embodied play? Could creative writing provide the medium for such people to become connected emotionally to hand play (ie with a ball, or some clay) or physical rough and tumble, embodied play - through memory and imagination.

Could a creative writing exercise, using a scribe or assistive technology, if needed, offer a means for such an emotional connection to physical play – remembered or imagined?

Other creative therapies are already using an awareness of the value of play, for adults – through music, art, dance and drama. And in play therapy, for children, there is a central recognition of the significance of the absence of play in a child. However, there is little or no Play Therapy provision for adults though. Perhaps CWTP could build on this? Its practice, I believe, already holds a safe-enough structure for creative exploration, expression and reflection...

Links between play and creativity (quotes and paraphrasing from a Sheff Univ. online course – Exploring Play) - “If creativity is the act of making something new and original, having a number of characteristics, such as the capacity to foster divergent thinking and problem-solving, what part does play have, in relation to creativity?”

The work of Shakila and Burns, and Stuart Brown, stress the link between creativity and play *throughout our lives*. And the other creative therapies, it seems to me, are already work with this knowledge and awareness. {When I gave presentation recently on this subject I was greeted by a most twinkly-eyed woman afterwards, significantly older than myself, who was delighted to be encouraged to develop her play, through CWTP, 'at her age!'}

Piaget – considered play as externalised imagination.

Vygotsky – viewed imagination as internalised play. He argued that this process can lead to artistic and scientific creativity in adulthood, if adults continue to be playful.

This raises the distinction between play and playfulness in the creative process. Playfulness has internal characteristics - such as fun, humour, spontaneity, light-heartedness, which are brought into play by an individual – whether that activity is play, or not.

Just as play fosters creativity (although not all acts of creativity are playful), playfulness can enhance creative thinking.

“This” says the Sheff Univ course “has led to the growing recognition of the importance of fostering a sense of playfulness in the workplace.” I would argue though, that, therapeutically, play is of value, inherently, throughout our lives, whether 'harnessed' for specific tasks, or not.

Risks that I am aware of are that active promotion of an emotional reconnection to play, particularly embodied play, *could* uncover trauma in an individual, including sexual trauma. This needs careful consideration of approaches used in any given setting.

Conversely, as a former Forest School practitioner I learnt that one important thing that play helps us with, in childhood, is learning to manage our own risks. Not doing so has repercussions throughout our adult life.

Stuart Brown has conducted extensive clinical research and demonstrated links between serious play deprivation and, at its most extreme, violent and destructive sociopathic behaviour, in the US.

I wonder about some **further implications** - as already mentioned, play therapists work with children whose play states have become frozen, or gone to sleep, recognising the play

state as the natural state of the child. Are there parallels with adults, who after all, Transactional Analysis tells us, carry their internalised child, adult and parent state around with them? “The opposite of work is not play – it is depression” (Brian Sutton Smith)

My 3rd research is a foundation exploration into whether CWTP offers conditions conducive to connecting to the play state, as adults, through creative, expressive and reflective writing. Through my research I hope to explore some of the questions raised above.

If any CWTP practitioners here today are interested in joining me, as co-researchers, in a serious study of play, do please register an interest in my research by email.

And finally, I leave you with some quotes:

“ You can discover more about a person from an hour of play than in a year of conversation” (Plato).

“The truly great advances of this generation will be made by those who can make outrageous connections and only a mind which knows how to play can do that” (Nagle Jackson).

"CWTP – permission for adults to play, alone and with others, while remaining sober and fully-clothed." (Kate Pawsey)