CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.   INTRODUCTION

Developmental perspectives, with the emphasis on psycho-social-, cognitive- and physical development, as well as the development of the ego-functions, will be introduced.

The development of agency as the action orientation of humans is closely linked to the developmental tasks of the child of pre-school age and a discussion of the intrinsic and environmental developmental components of agency will be undertaken.

The philosophical perspectives of Gestalt therapy are outlined, followed by a discussion of theoretical and procedural aspects of Gestalt playtherapy. The phenomenological view on children within contexts that necessitate intervention will be identified.

Throughout the theoretical inquiry a link between the philosophical foundation in occupational therapy and the theoretical frameworks guiding Gestalt playtherapy will be exposed. This chapter will be concluded, synthesizing the relevance of developmental considerations on agency.

2.   DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Most developmental theories are grounded in the assumption that development of human beings is predetermined according to a set maturational sequence. The interplay of human biological capacity and environmental influences, has a significant impact on the way in which this natural process enfolds (Clark, Florey and Clark; 1985: 18). In this overview the focus was confined to developmental characteristics and behaviours of pre-school

children. Since development happens on a continuum, it is important to emphasize that overlapping with previous and future stages does occur. The reader is referred to Table I (&∿pg.23) and Table II (&∿pg.24), to illustrate where the stage of pre-school development is positioned on the developmental continuum across the lifespan of individuals.

Developmentally typical behaviours were outlined with reference to pre-school children's psycho-social development, based on Erikson's theoretical framework. The discussion of pre-school children's cognitive development is rooted in Piaget's perspective. Theoretical perspectives held by Banus (1971), Ayres (1972) and Knox (1997) were consulted to portray physical and sensory-motor development. Diverse perspectives on the development of the ego-functions were identified.

2.1   ERIKSON: A THEORY OF PSYCHO-SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The developmental perspective held by Erikson was described by Clark & Allen (1985:24) as follows: "Erikson viewed development as an auto-therapeutic process, where the successful resolution of a developmental crisis repairs the wound of it's conflict and gives the individual a sense of achievement".

Each developmental stage results in an abstract personality quality. Erikson theorized that the psycho-social crisis of the pre-schooler manifests in the conflict between initiative versus guilt. A positive resolution of this crisis leads to conscious control of the environment and a sense of purpose whereas a negative resolution results in self-blaming incapacitation. Unresolved issues from previous stages will impact on the resolution of the pre-schooler's mastery of the initiative/guilt crisis. Erikson (1982:49) deliberated that over-exercised inhibition was the cause of "…the core pathology in psychoneurotic disturbances".

Pre-schoolers have mastered foundation motor-skills and need to build a repertoire of social skills to deal with the outside world. Many children start attending a pre-school; their social scope is shifted from the family into a broader interface with "new people".

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Central themes include gender identity, adaptation in a group and acquiring a degree of responsibility within their individual contexts. Erikson refers to the stage of initiative versus guilt also as the play-stage. During the play-stage the real life drama is expressed through play. Erikson (1982:48) referred to this as "… the stage which specializes in the awe–filled or humorous expression of the arena in which dramatic events are displayed."

During engagement in play, the conflict between initiative and guilt is battled out. Inhibition is the antipathetic counterpart of initiative, and Erikson (1982:77) emphasized that this conflict was an essential protective mechanism for "...so playful and imaginative a creature". During the play stage, the basis of endearing herself to others is mastered. Children act on their own initiative and feel guilty if their behaviour is not met with approval (Meyer *et al* 1989:157). The ideal resolution of this crisis lies in finding a balance between the exuberance of doing and in over-restraining. The origin of the development of values and a social conscience is embedded in this stage the development.

In this study, one pre-school participant's sense of purpose was explored in terms of her position of agency.

2.2   COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Cognitive development, according to Piaget, depends on the maturation of a person's intellectual capacity, shaped by environmental challenges to which a person must adapt (Matheson and Bohr 1997; 449). Piaget analyzed children's adaptation through interaction with human and non-human objects in time and space. These operations were conceptualized as the developmentally appropriate cognitive methods, employed by the child to organize schemes and experiences and to direct actions.

A biological basis of behaviour was acknowledged, but Piaget was primarily concerned with children's intellectual developmental adaptation in response to environmental experiences. Clark & Allen (1985,26) quoted Piaget: "The theory of knowledge is essentially a theory of adaptation of thoughts to reality, resulting from an inextricable interaction between the subject and objects".

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° Pre-operational thinking stage

Piaget referred to the cognitive developmental stage of the pre-schooler as the pre-operational stage. This period spans the development between the third and the seventh year (Matheson & Bohr 1997: 446). Logic is not wholly established with the result that pre-school children are not able to fully assess cause and effect, according to Piaget. The first two years in the pre-operational stage are characterized by the pre-conceptual development. This phase is linked to the acquisition of language skills. Play provides an arena for learning, and during play verbal operations take place. The pre-conceptual phase is followed by the intuitive thought phase, which is influenced through social and environmental contacts. The child imitates what he has seen and repeats what he has heard. This age group is known for giving away all the family secrets (Clark & Allen 1985:28).

° Interaction with environment

Children learn to interact meaningfully with their environment through the processes of classification, seriation and conservation, which are explored, refined and anchored during play. Conservation is the end product of the pre-operational period, when the child can recognize the continuities of an object or of a genre of objects. Conservation takes place according to a spatial and temporal sequence. Conservation as defined by Piaget, forms the foundation for reading and mathematics (Clark & Allen, 1985).

Children in the pre-operational stage of development perceive the world in an egocentric manner and view themselves as unrealistically causal to many environmental events (Piaget, 1977; Clark & Allan 1985:27). Their egocentric views often lead to the incorrect conclusions and beliefs about the self and are likely to impact negatively upon a child's agency.

2.3   PERSPECTIVES ON PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

An understanding of the patterns of physical development and the variations in these dynamic growth-processes are fundamental to any comprehensive understanding of children. Physical development is intrinsic to the organism and the degree and direction

of change in the child is pre-determined. Banus (1971:12) defines growth "as increase in size or its parts measured in an increase in weight, volume and linear dimensions". Environmental factors to some degree influence intrinsic patterns, as in children whose bodies regenerate after sickness or deprivation. Banus (1971:14) described maturation as "the process of coming to full development". This "coming to full development" refers to the child's maturity at various chronological ages. The maturation of the pre-schooler focuses on the physical development of a child between five to six years.

Typical physical trends for pre-school aged children include the following maturational characteristics (Banus: 1971; Knox: 1977; Ayres: 1972):

°   Grossmotor play: Grossmotor patterns, which enable running, skipping, climbing, standing on one leg, somersaulting, skating and lifting the self off the ground, are fully established. Pre-school children change their posture frequently and avoid static positions. A need for movement determines play choices. The activity level is still very energetic. Children of this age like to be off the ground and to hide in high places.

°   Finemotor play and material management: Pre-school children can manipulate tools to make things and can produce recognizable constructions. Pre-school children have developed all the sensory motor processes which are required throughout their lives but further refinement occurs as the child grows older. Physical growth continues until late adolescence and individual genetic characteristics will determine the pace and the scope of the physical development, which is to take place.

Cogniscence needs to be taken that physical competence and age-appropriate growth contribute to a positive self-disposition. Difficulties in the area of physical development, for instance if a child has poor sensory integration or a physical disability, are likely to influence the child's perspective of herself. Likewise when the child has bad feelings about the physical self or about physiological needs and processes, a negative self-disposition is likely to develop.

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2.4   DEVELOPMENT OF EGO-FUNCTION IN CHILDREN

Ego-development in infancy has been summarized by Stanley Greenspan (1989:349) as follows: "The ego develops from its somatic-sensory–affective foundation to embrace object relationships, to expand into a range of drive-effect-thematic domains and to organize into early ego growth." Cole (1994) agreed with Greenspan and stated that when the rising need of an infant is met with inadequate care-giving, the infant is likely to develop resistance to awareness of self and non-self. This resistance to awareness leads according to Winnicott (1967) and Cole (1994), to intolerable anxiety of inadequate care-giving, against which the infant must mobilize her defenses. The defence against the realization of inadequate care-giving results in the reduction of awareness, the denial of internal needs, as well as a distortion of matters that lie outside of the self-boundary, for example the denial of the realities of care-giver incapability.

2.5   ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING EGO-DEVELOPMENT

Experts from diverse perspectives (psychiatric, paediatric, psychological, occupational therapy and Gestalt therapy) emphasized the importance of a supportive environmental context in children's lives, to promote healthy ego-development:

°   A recognized authority of infant developmental trends, Dr. Stanley Greenspan (1989:82), refers to the infant's need for positive contact with caregivers as "providing an optimal environment". The optimal environment balances a sense of empathy towards the child who feels out of control, with the firm consistent setting of limits. In the prolonged and consistent absence of adequate care-giving, "…the child avoids core human experiences, most likely to protect the integrity of the organization of the ego at that time" (Greenspan 1989:189).

°   The importance of the "goodness of fit" is emphasized by Carey and Mc Devitt (1995). Goodness of fit, according to Carey & Mc Devitt (1995:14), is brought about when the properties of the environment, its expectations and demands are in accord with the organism's own capacities, motivations and style of behaviour.

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° The occupational therapy perspective acknowledges that the infant's first task is to take an interest in the world and regulate herself/himself in terms of states of arousal, feeding and sleeping cycles (De Gangi 2000:139). Self-regulatory mechanisms are complex and differ from individual to individual. They are dependent on physiological maturation and care-giver responsiveness. The first experience of regulation stems from feeling soothed by the care-giver. Inability to provide soothing results in fragmented self-regulation.

° The Gestalt therapy perspective emphasizes how a child's development is profoundly affected by the way in which parents respond to the needs of their children and how they allow the expression of their children's needs and wants. Children in their pre-school years absorb negative introjections (Oaklander, 1987:65).

In an environment where infant needs are met adequately, the child experiences excitement in the interpersonal context and this satisfaction is conducive to contact with self and others. In the context of this study it seems appropriate to make the following postulation: In infants, who had positive experiences around the establishment of self-regulatory patterns, the foundation has been laid for the development of an agentic life position. In the absence of opportunities for the development of harmonious self-regulatory practices, agency may manifest itself in overt aggressive defenses or in the underdevelopment of agency altogether.

3.   A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON AGENCY

Agency is known as the "action orientation of humans" (Christiansen and Baum, 1997:591). The importance of individualistic action orientation, also referred to as self-direction, is grounded in the respect for human individuality and a person's right to self-expression, regardless of cultural and religious orientations (Christiansen & Baum, 1997). In this study, agency is viewed from an occupational therapy perspective within the context of the uniqueness of human self-expression. Temperamental characteristics in children and environmental affordance of the development of an agentic life-position were emphasized.

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3.1   AGENCY   WITHIN   THE   PHILOSOPHICAL   FOUNDATIONS   FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Values, which honour the innate human striving towards agency and which constitute the philosophical basis of occupational therapy include:

° Humans maintain organismic balance in the world by being active: "…it is the use that we make of ourselves that gives a stamp to our every active organ" (Meyer, A., 1922:1).

° Human beings need to create, produce, master and improve their environments in order to achieve well-being (Reilly, 1962).

° Individuals who have a sense of control over their environments and who can address obstacles, derive satisfaction from their occupational roles (Sharrott and Cooper-Fraps, 1986).

° Purposeful, fulfilling occupations provide the opportunity to maintain homeostasis, to integrate cognitive, physiological, psychological, neuro-motor and sensory capabilities. This enables peak efficiency. The maintenance and development of satisfying relationships, results in a sense of well-being (Wilcock, 1998).

These views clearly point to the perspectives, which shape current occupational therapy theory. Occupational therapists are facing the challenges to enable their clients in developing agentic life-positions in the context of whichever personal or environmental adversity which influence their client's life. These views furthermore highlight occupational therapists' ultimate motivation to become agents of change in their quest to enable agency in their clients.

3.2   EVOLVING PERSPECTIVES ON AGENCY

A person who has no goal would not be able to orientate himself in the world. This explicit assumption was put forward by Adler (1924:3): "As long as we are not

acquainted with the objective which determines his (a person's) life-line, the system of his recognized reflexes together with all their casual conditions can give us no certainty as to his next series of movements." This view was taken up during the 1990's by Bruner who stated that a human being's agency was not a "static thing" or a substance. It was a configuring of personal events and actions into a historical unity, including what the person has been and the ideation of what he will become.

3.2.1   AGENCY: STRIVING FOR SUPERIORITY

The humanistic "Zeitgeist" influenced Adler's views. Werner Meyer (1989:100) reviews the Adlerian theory, which constitutes one of the base-theories for occupational therapy. Adlerian Individual Psychology pronounces that the central force, which Adler calls the striving for superiority, determines behaviour. Alder proposes that humans are purposeful beings, geared towards overcoming their natural deficiencies and thereby creating their own goals and direction. The human's actions towards balance are described as the innate striving to become "better than one's potential determines". In its ultimate form, this striving toward superiority and betterment, culminates in people towards a striving for "….agreement with all humans and all living beings in the universe" (Meyer, W.F., 1989: 101). The Adlerian view alludes to a balance between organism and environment, which is central to occupational therapy and to Gestalt therapy philosophy. In the discussion of Gestalt therapy theory, the organism/environment context will be discussed in more depth.

3.2.2   AGENCY: DETERMINED BY NEEDS

A different perspective on the human's striving towards a goal was conceptualized by Maslow, who proposed a hierarchy of human needs that occur in a longitudinal sequence (Clark & Florey 1985:29). Agency, according to Maslow, is determined by the striving towards organismic balance. The physiological needs for food, warmth and rest are geared at survival. The next layer of needs characterizes the quest for safety (physical and psychological security). The need for love and belonging promotes the person's search for affection, emotional support and group affiliation. The need for esteem embraces a person's striving for affirmation and the ability to regard the self as competent and of value to society. The highest level is represented by the need for self-actualization, which

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is attained by only a few people who are able to realize altruistic personal goals. If the lower levels are not met, the individual is incapable (according to Maslow) to direct his energies towards the higher levels.

When applying Maslow's perspective of agency the induction can be made that a hungry person will be agentic in an attempt to regulate this physiological need, in preference to higher abstract agentic pursuits. His agency could therefore be expressed in begging.

3.2.3   OCCUPATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON AGENCY

Looking at the philosophical underpinnings of occupational therapy, Fourie (2002) invites debate around the notion that the process of DOING, BEING & BECOMING (which collectively constitute a person's agency) describes how people create themselves through occupations. She evaluates Wilcock's (1998) proposal that proposes occupation as a synthesis of doing, being and becoming.

DOING is the obvious or tangible part of human occupation. A range of activities is done in the course of a day, week, month and lifetime. Through doing, needs are met, inherent capacities are utilized, interaction with others takes place and meaning and purpose is discovered.

BEING is about who we are, about being authentic and to define what is distinctive about the individual, reflecting belief values and spirituality. This is largely influenced by a person's past and contains the possibilities of the future. Being is inseparable from doing and Fourie proposes that being is dependent on and reflected in doing.

BECOMING is a lifelong process. It is about changing the being into an evolved new state influenced and directed through doing.

The processes of "doing", "being" & "becoming" are in constant interaction, influencing each other. This state is expressed in the human agency.

3.3   THE AGENTIC LIFEPOSITION

An individual's personal power to make choices, is a primary characteristic of agency (Polkinghorne 1995:299). Certain life-changes influence people's position of agency.

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Such changes may cause previously self-directed people to adopt a passive and negative life position. Discoveries of the self within a particular context are instrumental in the restoration of a person's sense of agency. Helfreich and Kielhofner (1993) and Polkinghorne (1996) advocate the use of a personal narrative to explore the process of the self and to determine meaning and volitional directedness.

3.3.1   AGENTIC VERSUS VICTIMIC POSTURE

Certain life events lead some people to a "victimic identity" versus the well-coping person's life position represented by an "agentic identity".   The victimic identity manifests in a self-story, where the protagonist has lost power to instigate change in his/her life; the agentic identity manifests itself in self-stories of active agency (Polkinghorne, 1996:299). Polkinghorne links the agentic life position to the archetypes of spring and summer, capitalizing on the sense of a new start. Expectation, excitement and adventure underpin the agentic position and the protagonist is persistent, focused, motivated and energetic. Problems are viewed as challenges. In the victimic life position the protagonist views herself/himself as out of control and exposed to external forces that throw her/him off her/his balance. The victimic protagonist feels exploited and disempowered.

3.3.2   LIFE STORIES

Life stories portray how a person becomes part of a bigger picture. In order to fulfill a life story the narrator may need to redefine personal goals. Reformulation of personal goals and the ensuing actions, when superficially observed by outsiders, may appear to be incongruent. To illustrate this point, the researcher wants to refer to the study conducted by Helfreich & Kielhofner (1993:311), who gained insight into resident psychiatric patients' views on personal causation and action choices by exploring patients' personal narratives. The analysis of their inquiry indicated that an individual, whose behaviour was perceived as obstructive and non-participatory (by the resident occupational therapists), was in fact acting agentically in accordance with his survival strategy within his life story. This man had to redefine himself within the constraints of being a sufferer of bipolar disorder. His agentic position directed his actions towards "not wasting his time with meaningless hospital-activities", but to take an agentic stance of resistance to such occupations. Another patient, who was perceived by the resident staff as participating and

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actively engaged in the hospital's programme, "the perfect patient" was in her "real" life trapped in the victimic role of "psychiatric patient". This woman could not be agentic outside of the protective milieu of the institution.

Even though agency is conceptualized as action orientation of humans, it must not be confused with the action portrayed in action movies. An action orientation may on the contrary direct the person towards withholding from action. The importance lies in the fact that the person acts within his internal locus of control. Such action is determined, focused and consciously determined from a position of organismic balance.

3.4   AGENCY IN CHILDHOOD

A review of the literature on the theoretical construct of agency for children indicates that no isolated research has been conducted on this phenomenon. However the literature on temperamental and self-regulatory qualities in children is extensive. Action orientation is widely described as a component of self-regulation and temperament by Wylie (1964); Strelau (1983); Oaklander (1987); Greenspan (1989); Cole (1994); Carey & Mc Devitt (1995); Dunn (1999) and De Gangi (2000). A brief review will be undertaken on agency within the broader theoretical frameworks intended to explicate children's behaviour. The author is aware that it is impossible to isolate one aspect of such complex a phenomenon as human uniqueness. The views that are mentioned here, are merely providing a glimpse into one aspect (that of agency) of personal causation and temperamental function, but within the context of this study their specific importance needs to be acknowledged.

3.4.1. TEMPERAMENT AS THE CORE OF THE PERSONALITY

To explain why some children are flexible and adventurous, whereas others are passive and reluctant, requires an understanding of the child's immediate circumstances and personal history. Carey and Mc Devitt (1985:3) identified certain intrinsic and extrinsic determinants that influence a child's behavioural, emotional and functional adaptation.

°   Noxious environments continue to be responsible for children's malfunction.

°   Intrinsic problems in the child explain disorders such as learning disabilities, autism and obesity. Such tendencies will be expressed in a variety of environmental settings.

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° A poor fit between the child's temperamental style and the expectations of the caregivers can generate stress and result in a spiral of further poor adaptations.

The importance of understanding children's temperament was emphasized by Carey and McDevitt (1995:116), who highlighted that "temperament affects the speed and thoroughness of a child's exploitation of what the maturation of the nervous system has made available".

Cognizance needs to be taken of the fact that ongoing environmental adversity results in restricted opportunities for potential development. Lack of affordance in turn can lead to under-attainment of children's inherent capabilities. The importance of the emotional support and occupational opportunities that a child needs to develop competence, determination and a positive belief system, must be acknowledged.

Children's action orientation encompasses a range of capabilities and behaviours. Carey & McDevitt (1995:117) proposed the following considerations, when ascertaining agency levels:

° A child's relationship with people and her social competence or under-socialization.

° Performance capabilities depend on the existence or absence of inherent difficulties and coping strategies to overcome or be overwhelmed by these intrinsic adversities.

° A positive self-esteem and self-regulation versus a problematic self-esteem and poor self-regulation.

° General contentment and a sense of well-being or the absence thereof.

° The experience of an adaptive coping style, versus defence mechanisms determined by temperament (such as direct engagement versus avoidance).

3.4.2   EXTROVERSION VERSUS INTROVERSION

The assumption that the extrovert resembles a strong personality was proposed by Strelau (1983) who cited Eysenck (1966). Strelau (1983:144) made the following statement: "In behavioural terms, extroversion and strength of excitation are dimensions of goal-directed

behaviour, expressed on the one hand through social activity and on the other through work." In Strelau's research the focus was on the correlation of strength and extrovertism. His research findings on introverted individuals by comparison appeared to be inconclusive. The researcher's personal stance is one of caution about casting children into structures, which could label an individual. It seems however justified to acknowledge Strelau's and Eysenck's views (1983) and to understand these perspectives within the historical context of classification psychology.

Temperament manifests itself firstly in energetic levels of behaviour and secondly in temporal characteristics, referring to the speed of reaction and ability to shift from one matter to another (Strelau 1983:175). Kant referred to the energy levels expressed through temperament as "Lebenskraft" (life force). Oaklander (1987:66) has also referred to children's life force when she was explaining children's behavioural expressions:

> "It is the child's very life force the organism's endless quest for equilibrium - that causes him to withdraw, project, fantasize, deny and avoid, strike out, fragment, scream, steal, be afraid, remain confluent, wet the bed, be encopretic, pull out hair scratch himself, become ill" (Oaklander, 1997:65).

The perspective, portrayed by Oaklander, reminds us that children are in many ways different to adults. Adults struggle to get along in their lives, as do children. In addition children have to simultaneously cope with developmental challenges, which constitute ever-changing goalposts. The fact that children are designed to mature, grow and change, influences agency in ways where the direction taken, may appear to be sideways or backwards and may in fact portray conflicting positions at different stages during their maturation.

3.4.3 INFLUENCES ON AGENCY

An individual's internal need for stimulation (also known as neurological arousal) to function at his/her personal optimal level is determined by neuro-physiological mechanisms (Carey and McDevitt, 1992; Dunn, 1999 and De Gangi, 2000). The child's seeking or avoiding of sensory experiences satisfies this inherent need for arousal and determines the state of alertness as well. Strelau (1983:261) maintains that given a

particular family (and a unique psychosocial context), children can be punished or rewarded for choosing certain situations and avoiding others. Carey & McDevitt (1995:14) agree that family settings are less welcoming to children who display low adaptability and negative mood. Oaklander (1987) confirms Strelau's, Carey and McDevitt's view by emphasizing that young children depend for their every need on their care-givers. Children often "reformulate" care-giver inadequacy by changing their (the children's) needs to suit the care-givers, resulting in children losing contact with themselves.

> "When the rising needs in the infant are received with less than satisfactory meeting of those needs, the infant will develop resistance to awareness of self and other in direct relation to the degree and quality of disturbance in care-taking. The infant must mobilize her defence against the intolerable anxiety of inadequate care-giving" (Cole, 1994; XVII).

This caption by Cole (1994) illustrates Oaklander's Strelau and Carey & McDevitt's opinion on the impact of inadequate care-giver patterns.

4.   A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SELF DISCOVERIES

Self-discoveries require an interested and attuned attitude towards the self and pivot on the observation of the self in action (Perls, F. 1951:1). In psychological discussion the word self has been used in different ways. Wylie (1974) highlighted two original trends explaining the meaning of self.   On the one hand, the self was referred to as an object of the person's own knowledge and evaluation. The other view portrayed the self as an agent or process (as in Maslow's view on the striving towards self-actualization). Wylie summarized her discussion on these perspectives of the self in the following words (1974:1) "...and so we find that almost all the theories of personality which have been put forward in the last three decades assign importance to the phenomenal and non-phenomenal self-concept with cognitive and motivational attributes".

The process by which self-discoveries are enabled in this study is rooted in the practice of gestalt therapy. An attempt will be made to provide a brief and yet thorough introduction of the constitutive components of Gestalt therapy philosophy and how the self is viewed within the gestalt theoretical framework.

4.1   GESTALT THERAPY

Gestalt therapy is a humanistic therapy technique, which facilitates awareness of emotions and behaviours in the present context (Doermann, 1999:1). Clients' experiences are not interpreted, but through therapeutic dialogue, enhancing a deeper consciousness of awareness, the client is gaining insight into the self. As the client becomes aware of an emerging need and deals with it, this need recedes and a new issue emerges into the awareness continuum. This process of the flow of needs, the becoming aware thereof, the dealing with such needs and the receding to enable the flow of a new need is known as organismic self-regulation. Corey (1990:319) refers to the challenge of facilitating organismic self-regulation as moving the client from environmental support to self-support. Corey quotes Perls (1990:319) '… to make the patient not dependent on others but to make the patient discover from the very first moment that he can do many things, much more than he thinks he can do".

4.1.1   HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR GESTALT THERAPY

When Perls was conceptualizing Gestalt therapy as a treatment strategy and life philosophy, he was influenced by his own background in psychoanalysis, Gestalt psychology and the humanist "Zeitgeist", which prevailed in post-war western society. The underlying assumption in Gestalt therapy capitalizes on an individual's natural capacity to gain insight into whole patterns as they occur. It implies that actual awareness can be trusted more than dogma and theoretical frames (Yontef, 1993:8). A good Gestalt refers to a perceptual field organized with clarity against the ground of a person's living context.

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Gestalt therapy was established by Fritz Perls around 1950 as a new psycho-therapeutic movement, in defiant response to the inflexible attitude of the psycho-analytical fraternity. Psycho-analysts shunned Perls's thoughts about oral resistance and his therapeutic methods.

Gestalt therapy is grounded in the philosophies of field theory, phenomenology and existentialism (Estrup 2000). Field theory refers to a contextual philosophy where an event is viewed as a field within a larger field including intrinsic biological and intrapsychic factors, as well as extrinsic conditions, such as social, cultural, historical, climatic, physical and familial factors. A person in his life space constitutes a field. Each life-role is representing a different field within the larger field. In Gestalt therapy the focus is on the client's phenomenological field. Phillipson (1998:3) explains that phenomenology asserts what is perceived within the contextual framework of the client. Existentialism emphasizes "being" in contrast to "not being". Yontef (1993:16) states that: "Gestalt therapy is especially appropriate for those who know intellectually about themselves and yet don't grow".

As a treatment method, Gestalt therapy has proven to be most effective for persons who are overly socialized, restrained, inhibited and who have limited experience of enjoyment of life.

Similarly, occupational therapy philosophy underwrites a phenomenological view of a person within a context, which encompasses genetic determinants as well as all the external, intra- and interpersonal factors, which impact on a person's life.

4.2   KEY CONCEPTS OF GESTALT THERAPY

Gestalt therapy is a practical treatment, which utilizes every aspect of the client's experience as part of the journey of self-discovery. Core-principles have been identified and described by Perls, Hefferline & Goodman (1951); Oaklander (1987); Corey (1990); Yontef (1993); Cole (1994); Woldt (1997); Phillipson (1998) and Estrup (2000). These principles will be briefly described to procure insight into the process of Gestalt therapy.

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4.2.1   CONTACT FUNCTION

The first step in self-discovery is to become aware of the self. Oaklander (1987) describes people's desire to have contact with their inner needs, registering demands from outside the self and acting thereupon. The mechanism, by which contact between the inner needs and the demands from outside is regulated, is called contact function (Woldt 1997). Experiences are regulated across the contact boundary. Perls *et al*. (1951:227) define the external contact boundary as the point at which the organism meets the environment and the internal contact boundary where the organism becomes aware of her internal needs.

The process of Gestalt therapy facilitates the client's awareness of sensual experiences and of polarities within the self as well as becoming aware of the demands made on the organism from outside the self and of feelings that are evoked. This may manifest in the client's desire to change and simultaneously to choose to avoid change. The manifestation of opposing needs around the same issue is referred to as a polarity. Unresolved polarities lock up emotional energy and are dichotomized. Unacknowledged polarities impair the contact function and resolved polarities will result in a heightening of creative living (Cole, 1994).

If the contact function is impaired, according to Perls (1951), the person gets trapped in what he refers to as a neurotic layer. Perls developed a theoretical construct of the five neurotic layers to illustrate how fragmentation and resistance to contact prevented the experience of growth.

°   The phoney layer - A person's actions are marked by trivial, banal, stereotyped behaviours. People pretend to be something, which they are not.

°   The phobic layer - People become aware of their insincere games, which mark the phoney layer. They also become aware of the fear underlying the phoney layer, which motivates the games played in the first place. This is ego-threatening and leads to stronger contact cutting.

°   The impasse' layer - The awareness of the fear underlying the phoney behaviour strategies cannot be maintained any longer. The person experiences a shutdown of

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awareness and a total inability to move forward and is stuck in a growth-inhibiting strategy.

° The implosive layer - People who move past the impasse consider alternative behaviour.

° The explosive layer - People actively explore alternative behaviours. Energy is released (which was formerly trapped in the impasse) available for forward growth.

4.2.2 ORGANISM / ENVIRONMENTAL FIELD

In Gestalt therapy terminology a person is referred to as the organism and all that is not self is referred to as environment. The contact-boundary, where the experience occurs, does not separate the person from the environment. Rather it limits and protects the organism from being enveloped by the environment (Perls *et al.* 1951:229).

4.2.3 FIGURE GROUND CONCEPTS

Through contact within the organism/environment field, a figure is formed. This could be an awareness of a physiological need or the emergence of an interest or preoccupation (Woldt, 1997). This figure is seen against the background of the organism/environment field (Perls *et al.* 1951:231).

4.2.4 AWARENESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

Information from the sensory systems leads to awareness, leading to figure formation. When this figure is dealt with, the individual's internal (organismic) balance is restored.

Blockages in the inner and outer contact-functions result in diminished ability of orgasmic self-regulation. Increased awareness may result in emotional pain, but concurrently goal-directed choices are enabled. Through the ensuing agentic action, energy is freed up, enhancing contact with the self, which is enlivening (Corey, 1990: 319). Full awareness is the process of being in vigilant contact with the foreground issue with full sensory-motor,

cognitive, emotional and energetic presence.   It implies taking responsibility for sensations perceived, for feelings felt, for thoughts that were conceptualized and for directing action in accordance with conscious choices (Yontef, 1993: 12).   Enhanced awareness promotes an internal locus of control and thereby it enhances well-being.

4.2.5   THE HERE AND NOW

Clients are encouraged to explore immediate needs and unfinished issues, by means of an experiment. Unfinished issues from the past may emerge into the awareness continuum and into the foreground. They are always dealt with in terms of their present relevance, the "now".   Likewise can projected future issues create a discomfort in the "now", which will be dealt with strictly within the present context. Perls *et al.* (1951:33) describe the here and now perspective as follows: "Living fully in the present includes taking note of present reminders of past lessons and thus making more adequate present responses; and it includes taking note of present harbingers of things to come and adjusting present behaviour appropriately".

4.2.6   UNFINISHED BUSINESS

When individuals are unable to deal with a particular figure against their personal background, their inner and outer contact-functions are incapacitated. Client's current situations are heavily influenced by the unfinished business. Perls (1951) referred to this phenomenon of impaired contact function as entrapment within the neurotic layers. Perls conceptualized five neurotic layers to illustrate how fragmentation prevents growth.

4.3   THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS

In Gestalt therapy, treatment centers on organismic awareness work within the client's phenomenological field. The emphasis is on the facilitation of a direct experience and the therapist's strategies of frustrating the client in any attempt to break out of the awareness continuum. Self-discovery leading to Gestalt-formation is enabled through participation in an experiment. Phenomenological focusing skills and therapeutic dialogue are utilized to

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regulate homeostasis around foreground issues. Each session is an existential encounter and functions as a unity. The therapist and client take a calculated risk, exploring unknown territories (Yontef, 1993).

Gestalt counselors during the seventies were aggressive therapists. Experiments were dramatic. Certain splinter groups of Gestaltists emphasized techniques over phenomenological dialogue (Thompson and Rudolph, 2000).

Gestalt therapy has traditionally been conducted in groups or workshop-like sessions. Recent trends in Gestalt therapy theory emphasize self-acceptance of the client and a caring demeanor of the therapist. The therapist's trust in the client's phenomenology and a shift towards psychodynamic exploration within the therapeutic dialogue is emphasized. An increased focus on cognitive anchoring of the awareness work characterizes the treatment focus with less significance on cathartic expression (Yontef 1993:9).

4.3.1 THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP AND THERAPEUTIC DIALOGUE

Authenticity, warmth, acceptance and responsibility characterize therapeutic dialogue (Yontef, 1993:4). The active, healing, contactful presence of the therapist enables the client to consciously explore areas, which cause pain and shame. The relationship is horizontal and non-exploitatory. Estrup (2000) acclaimed that the client is the expert on the client and the therapist enables the client to gain access to this tacit self-knowledge. The quality of the contact determines whether what the theologian Martin Buber calls the "I - though relationship" has taken place. In the "I-though relationship" clients feel safe to face all parts of themselves. The goal of Gestalt therapy is that a client's awareness of the "what and the how" is made explicit and how changes within the self can be facilitated.

4.3.2 RESISTANCE

Clients with decreased awareness of their needs and strengths, who are resisting their organismic self, are in pain. They often want the therapist to do for them what they believe they cannot do themselves. Laura Perls (1977) described resistance as "getting stuck in a habitual pattern". The Gestalt experiment is designed to move past such an obstruction. She emphasized that blocking of behaviour shows some of the client's life

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force in an attempt to achieve homeostasis. Fritz Perls *(1951)* identified the following resistance styles:

° Retroflection – means that a person's intended behaviour is sharply interrupted and turned back, directed at the self. An individual substitutes the self instead of the environment as the target of behaviour (Perls *et al.* 1951:146*).* This often manifests in psychosomatic complaints.

° Introjection - constitutes a way of acting, feeling, thinking, which has been internalized by an individual without assimilating and genuinely owning such ideas and forms of behaviour Perls *et al.* (1951:189). Racism and gender stereotyping are examples of introjected ideas.

° Projection – refers to a trait, attitude or behaviour, which belongs to an individual, but is cast onto somebody else in the environment. A person may be overtly critical of others and feel everybody is critical of him (Perls et al. 1951:211).

Behaviour stemming from introjected material focuses on the should's and not on the wants, resulting in the client's existential self-alienation (Yontef, 1993:13). Cole, (1994) stated that the process of energizing resistance dealt with the undoing of introjected, projected and retroflected material.

4.4   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The absence of definite standards for training criteria of Gestalt therapists was reported to be problematic by Yontef (1993). Doermann (1999) stated that certain critics had labeled the Gestalt approach, to be anti-intellectual and that in the hands of ineffective therapists the results could become mechanical exercises and result in client manipulation. Yontef (1993:38) emphasized the ultimate importance of the therapist's authenticity. "Such a position is not acquired overnight. It is to be learned and relearned more deeply not only throughout one's career but throughout one's entire life."

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4.5   SUITABILITY OF GESTALT THERAPY FOR CHILDREN

Awareness work through sensory contact making is attractive to most young clients. Children are generally inquiring creatures who explore their worlds through their senses. The dialogic component of Gestalt therapy is not suitable for pre-school children, since the child's cognitive function does not back up the deductive operations that are required.

5.   GESTALT PLAY THERAPY

A child-centered Gestalt therapy approach has been conceptualized by Violet Oaklander (1978).   Gestalt playtherapy incorporates the Gestalt therapy philosophy with developmentally appropriate playtherapy techniques. In developing the procedural guidelines for treatment consideration of child-centered therapies were incorporated.

5.1   HISTORICAL OVERVIEW ON PLAYTHERAPY

The first documented psychotherapeutic interventions for children focused on anxieties relating to separation, alimentation, fear of rejection and fear of failure.   Freedman, Kaplan and Sadock (1980) introduced Anna Freud's work, which was aimed at restoring in children a sense of self.   Anna Freud (the daughter of Sigmund Freud), a teacher by profession, studied psychoanalysis with children.   She discovered that in child-analysis, contrary to adult psychoanalysis, transference was not possible. Playtherapy evolved as a result of her assumption, that children's play portrayed the player's understanding of his own particular life situation.

The theory pioneered by Anna Freud was taken further by Melanie Klein (1882-1960), who determined the tendency in children to dichotomize objects into good and bad. Underlying desires and tensions were expressed during play.   Klein postulated that dichotomous feelings resulted in anxiety, caused by the developing child's angry and aggressive feelings towards the loved object.   Fears that such "unacceptable" feelings could destroy the "loved object" developed (Jennings 1993:7).   Klein grounded playtherapy as a technique, through which interpretation about the child's unconscious experiences could be made.

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The remarkable case histories reported by Virginia Axline (1950) put the client-centered approach in playtherapy firmly on the map and popularized playtherapy as a technique. Axline's approach pivots on reflecting back to the child what has been said. Axline (1969) emphasized the individuality of all children and the importance of total unconditional acceptance of children, regardless of their behaviours.

> "During a playtherapy experience, that sort of relationship established between the therapist and the child makes it possible for the child to reveal his real self to the therapist, and, having it accepted – and by that very acceptance, having grown a little bit in self confidence – he is able to extend the frontiers of his personality expression"   (Axline, 1969:28).

An in-depth discussion of Gestalt playtherapy, which was conceptualized during the 1970's, within its philosophical frame and procedural application will follow.

5.2   OAKLANDER'S APPROACH TO PLAYTHERAPY

In Gestalt therapy the quality of the therapeutic relationship and therapeutic dialogue are viewed as more important than techniques. By contrast does Oaklander regard technique as imperative: "I find technique to be an important aspect in working with children" (Oaklander, 1987:71). She qualifies this position by drawing attention to the fact that children generally do not autonomously decide to seek therapy. Their concerned, unhappy parents bring them often against their (the children's) wishes. Children generally have little power and knowledge about the workings of the social milieu. The behaviours that bring them into therapy, be they acting out behaviours, somatic symptoms or withdrawal, are often an expression of incapacity to cope with environmental demands. A variety of creative, expressive techniques such as graphic art, projective play, story telling and puppetry serve as an invitation to children to participate. In addition, these forms of expression give the child, who struggles to identify feelings, and does not understand how these feelings influence his inner balance, a pathway to self-discovery and self-expression.

The first step in treatment is firmly aimed to "…make a transfer from a position of non-responsibility to one of self determination" (Oaklander 1987: 70). This therapeutic stance

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provides the means for an internal locus of control in child-clients, which exemplifies an agentic life-position.

5.2.1   RELATIONSHIP AND THERAPEUTIC DIALOGUE

The therapist conveys her respect and she views the child as an entitled human being. Oaklander describes this atmosphere in which children's self-discoveries are facilitated as follows: "The process of work is a gentle flowing one – an organic event. What goes on inside you, the therapist, and what goes on inside the child in any one session is a gentle merging" (Oaklander, 1978:53).

5.2.2   RESISTANCE

When working with children "… resistance is to be expected, respected and accepted, for it is the child's way of protecting himself", according to Oaklander (1987:71). It is in the becoming aware of resistance, when self-discoveries are made and agentic choices are enabled.

5.2.3   TECHNIQUE

Techniques give the child an arena through which self-discoveries can happen. Awareness is enhanced during the experience of a projective task. Stevens (1971) propagated an evolving spiral of sensing, acknowledging and questioning, leading to the next level of sensing to be acknowledged, explored and assimilated, leading to the next level and so forth. This spiral is continuous and leads to the deepest level of self-understanding possible at a particular time. This is jointly determined by the child's level of maturity, ego-strength and organismic balance. As the understanding of the self and the environment becomes clear, the child-client is able to explore choices and possible responses in dealing with the situation.

The techniques used by Oaklander for therapeutic experimentation will be mentioned here without elaborating on specific procedural application. Miniature creatures are used for

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projective sand play. Oaklander developed a monster technique to evoke the shadow side in the child's life, she uses a procedure for dream exploration, and she has adapted the empty chair technique for children. Creative art techniques, drama, movement, the use of puppets, projective play, writing and journal work, are utilized. The phenomenological context of the client and the therapist and the treatment place and availability of equipment and material determine which activities will be used.

5.2.4   INSIGHT

The techniques used by Oaklander involve self-expression through projective media. Interpretation is never part of a Gestalt therapy process. Successful therapy with children lies in enabling the child's own wisdom, deeply rooted within. Oaklander refers to this process as: "…gently opening the doors to self-awareness and ownership. Through such open and contactful sharing the client strengthens her own self and gains self support" (Oaklander, 1987:72).

Participation in Gestalt playtherapy teaches children that they have choices about their life. This method also facilitates an understanding of what these choices are. The unique personal context for each individual is respected. As insight emerges, children become aware of the polarities they carry within themselves. It is here that the child and therapist together disarm the conflict between the polar opposites and unite the two forces as part of the whole. The initiative/guilt polarity, which is inherently part of the pre-school child's developmental crisis, can be investigated and be brought to positive Gestalt integration.

5.2.5   SELF ACCEPTANCE AND SELF – NURTURANCE

Children generally have a well-developed judgmental, critical self.   The critical self is based on introjections of how one should be. Self-acceptance of all one's parts, even what Oaklander (1987:74) calls the "…most hateful parts", is vitally important. Oaklander believes: "An outside agent can never change a child's negative belief about himself. "The development of the child's own loving nurturing part of himself must meet with the

'bad' self to accept, understand, comfort and love it" (Oaklander, 1987:74). Self-acceptance is brought about through self-nurturance. Shaming and blaming need to be replaced with an acceptance of mistakes and conscious choice of self-affirmation.

The focus on the client's phenomenology and internal locus of control underwrites the researcher's views of facilitating an agentic life-position. The way in which the developmental crisis (☞Erikson 2.2 in this chapter) of initiative versus guilt can be approached will enhance personal growth and well-being in children. The researcher wants to draw attention to the compatibility of this contextual view with occupational therapy philosophy.

5.3 SCHOEMAN'S MODEL OF PLAYTHERAPY

Children are naturally sensual, inquisitive and spontaneous. In her work with children Schoeman (1996) found that the Gestalt playtherapeutic approach was ideally suited to capitalize on these qualities. Schoeman developed Oaklander's model further to address treatment needs of South African children and to provide a structure for training of Gestalt playtherapists. As Schoeman's model was developed around Oaklander's working model, there are areas of overlap. The general structure of the Schoeman model (2000) formed the guideline for the intervention strategies used in this study.

5.3.1 ENTERING TREATMENT

The importance of the therapeutic relationship in successful therapy cannot be under-estimated according to Schoeman (1997). Practical guidelines to this end emphasize the importance of clarifying relationships with the child and with the parents during the first session and to observe the "I-though" principle (☞4.3.1 in this chapter). The child needs to get to know the therapist as a genuine, authentic person and not as conniving with the parents.

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5.3.2   ESTABLISHING SENSORY CONTACT

Children, who are emotionally preoccupied and in a poorly regulated state of sensory awareness, are not in full contact with themselves or their surroundings.   The first treatment objective is therefore to enhance sensory contact. Schoeman (1997) discussed the use of novel sensory experiences through the five senses, music and intuitive experiences.   The stimulation of these senses enhances the registration of sensory awareness, which in turn mobilizes energy; the child is propelled into action.

This aspect of Schoeman's work held much promise for the researcher whose background in occupational therapy strongly emphasizes the importance of sensory processing and regulation of the sensory environment. It is important to point out the different perspectives in which sensory contact is understood. In occupational therapy reasoning, the perspective on sensory regulation is rooted in the neuro-physiological theory and in the framework of sensory integration, whereas psychological considerations underpin the gestalt view. Clinicians from divergent perspectives formulated identical treatment aims, namely to create a sensory environment in which the child is functioning at what De Gangi (2000) calls: "optimal level of arousal".   The researcher's interest was stimulated to explore how the two perspectives when used conjunctively, enhance clinical insight and efficiency in treatment.

5.3.3   ASSESSEMNT OF THE CHILD'S PROCESS

When referring to an individual's personality functioning, Schoeman prefers to use the term "process" (1997:29). The word process implies continual reconfiguration, in this case of ego-function. Within the context of a constant reshaping of the self-structure, each person has an inherent base-pattern of personality function. This is the typological blueprint around which the personality theorists evolve personality trends. Schoeman (2000) proposes that the children's underlying base-pattern or process should be assessed through a projection. During this projection a metaphoric scenario is offered, suited to the child's developmental context. In this scenario a pleasant expectation is suggested as positive anticipation as well as a frustration in the form of an unforeseen obstruction.

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Around this projection the therapist and the child together figure out which personality characteristics typify the client.

5.3.4   PROJECTION

Through the projection foreground issues are expressed, explored, clarified and discussed. Schoeman agrees with Yontef that the quality of the therapeutic relationship is the most important treatment ingredient. At the same time Schoeman agrees with Oaklander, who emphasized how important it is to make the therapy scenario novel and attractive for clients. Schoeman (2000) identified the following media to be used during Gestalt playtherapy:

° Dramatized play - role-play, the use of puppets, movement, dance and body techniques.
° Creative play - creative play includes clay modeling, sand play with miniature characters and various drawing techniques.
° Biblio Play - based in the use of the written word and in story work, including the writing of a life-story, journals, poetry, letters and metaphorical stories.

Since pre-school children are not able to write yet, their life-stories have to be told through methods other than reading and writing. A life story could be explored by using miniatures in the sand tray or by means of a drawing or through projective play.

5.3.5   OWNING THE PROJECTION

Feelings must be recognized as part of the self. Frequently in a projection, real feelings, which emerge from unfinished issues, need to be integrated. At this point the child often offers resistance.   The exploration of polarities is recommended to neutralize the resistance and to make a choice. Many children are frightened by their feelings and Gestalt formation needs to take place around such fears and underlying anxieties as well (Oaklander 1987). What is felt during the projection must be tested against the reality context, and strategies of containing or dealing with this feeling need to be explored.

5.3.6   WORK ON CHOICES

Exploration of polarities leads to the identification of alternatives. As the child is aware of different positions, she needs to be made aware of her agency in making a choice. Consequences of choices may be explored further through another projection or discussed, depending on what the client's needs are. As the child takes ownership of what was externalized through a projection, her own competence is affirmed (Schoeman 2000). It is this component of ownership, of making a choice and taking a stance, which has to do with agency and is thereby of particular relevance for this study.

5.3.7   CONFLUENCE, POLARITIES AND CLARIFICATION

When polarities are explored it is essential to simultaneously explore the possibility of going along. Going with the flow is a fluid process, which could happen at any point in the therapeutic procedure. Going in confluence could in fact constitute an active choice in the child's life situation. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) emphasizes that people who are in the face of real life hardship are able to "...transform a hopeless situation into a new flow activity that can be controlled, will be able to enjoy themselves." in spite of an adverse circumstance.   The flow activity Csikszentmihalyi (1990) refers to, implies going consciously along with the inevitable without loss of self. It is in this context where the viewpoints that Polkinghorne (1995) and Helfreich *et al. (*1994) portrayed, on the reformulation of a personal life-story, fit in. Individuals with a positive agentic lifeposition are able to go along with adversities and yet remain in a state of organismic balance.

5.3.8   EMPOWERMENT AND WORKING TOWARDS A SAFE SPACE

Empowerment invigorates the ego and stems from the self-affirmation brought about through agentic choices and self-determination. The released energy is ego strengthening. Self-nurturance forms an important part of Schoeman's treatment model. Schoeman (2000) suggests that within the context of the therapeutic dialogue an activity must be identified which leaves the child recharged. This activity should be accessible to the child

outside of the treatment context to facilitate generalization of self-regulation outside of the clinical setting. Self-nurturance tasks could be a form of playing, shooting at a target, stroking the family dog, or retreating to a "safe place" in the child's lifespace.

6. SYNTHESIS OF THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The exploration of the theoretical frameworks exposed key themes suitable to direct the qualitative inquiry into transformative self-discoveries for pre-school children. The following relevant contexts emerged from the literature review.

6.1 THE ORGANISM / ENVIRONMENT FIELD

The properties of the environment in its relationship as the non-self to the self with its demands and expectations need to be in synchrony with the child's capabilities, motivations and adaptation style, for children to reach their potential. Children's inherent need for organismic balance directs actions towards homeostasis of their inner needs with environmental demands. When a child's attempts to self-regulate and to reach homeostasis between internal and external needs are constantly restrained such an imbalance will be reflected in the child's adaptive behaviour.

6.2 AGENCY

An internal locus of control is embedded in an agentic life-position. Determination, goal-direction, and a position of organismic balance characterize the stance of preparedness for self-aware action, which is expressed within an agentic self-position. A sense of expectation, excitement and "life force" underpin the agentic life-plot. Within such an agentic posture, adversities can be viewed as challenges. In a situation where parental and contextual circumstances disallow certain behavioural responses and inhibit the development and exploration thereof in a child who is temperamentally inclined to be withholding, such children will not have the opportunity to develop an agentic life-position (Carey & Mc Devitt: 1995).

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6.3   MATURATION

The general trend of the maturational process takes place at a pre-determined sequence, regardless of a child's environmental context. Intrinsic determinants will find expression regardless of the extrinsic contexts of the child's life. Environmental influences are however instrumental in maximizing children's developmental potential within the given intrinsic and developmental circumstances. Children need to be accepted in their existential context and they need occupational opportunities for skill-acquisition and self-expression.

6.4   PLAY IS THE OCCUPATION OF CHILDHOOD

Through play developmental challenges are mastered. Psycho-social rules for behaviour are explored through engagement in play and children assimilate personal-, family- and cultural values. Life roles are habituated through engagement in play as the primary meaning-giving occupation of childhood. Children's cognitive functions such as temporal-, spatial-, and language-concepts, intuitive thought and the understanding of object constancy develop through the engagement in play.

The biological basis for pre-school children's development determines children's need to explore and conquer their environment through sensory-motor play. Knox (1997:35) epitomized children's need to play as "…an integral part of young children's lives. All children engage in some form of play and it is through play that they develop an understanding of the world and competence in interacting with it". Development and refinement of physical performance skills is accelerated through engagement in play.

6.5   GESTALT PLAYTHERAPY AS CHOICE FOR TREATMENT

The importance of play in pre-school children's lives validates that the inclusion of play in the treatment, as realistic contextual reasoning.   The Gestalt therapy perspective, which underwrites the kind of relationship in which children can develop an internal locus of control, provides a suitable philosophical context within which treatment is to take place.

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7.   CONCLUSION

It is appropriate to capitalize on the pre-school child's inherent need to play when selecting intervention strategies.   Since the development of purpose and the inherent readiness to be agentic are maturationally given, the researcher postulated that Gestalt playtherapy was a suitable medium for a pre-school child to make self-discoveries and acquire an agentic life-position.

In Chapter 3 the methodology for this study is introduced. The reader is enlightened on how the process of inquiry was structured to deal with the objectives of this study.

The methods for purposive participant selection to identify the most suitable data-rich single preschool participant are outlined, followed by an introduction of the participant.

The methods to denote the participant's position of agency pre- and post-intervention are proposed. An outline of the procedure of intervention and strategies of data capture and data analysis to be utilized during the period of intervention is presented.

Steps to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study to highlight credibility and applicability to wider preschool populations are identified.