

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Qualitative research strongly advocates giving a voice to the voiceless. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) claim that researchers cannot give full voice, since researchers never have saturated access to another person's experiences. Researchers deal with unambiguous representations (observation, talk and interaction). In order to do justice to the complexity of participants' accounts, a clear description and a form of contextual interpretation of what happened is essential. People's behaviour cannot be understood if stripped from their experiences in the world. A research participant is known through the representations of the researcher. Hollway & Jefferson urge qualitative researchers to be mindful of their responsibility in ensuring that their representations are contextual.

The analysis, description and interpretation of this study is an attempt to give the reader rich insight and foster understanding of how Janet's agency manifested itself and how a shift in her life-position was brought about. Firstly, Janet's agentic stance at baseline is accounted. Discussion follows on the patterns of Janet's agency and a reflection on the agency enabling process, which facilitated self-discovery. Shifts in agency are evaluated against the data at baseline, the post-intervention stage as well as denoting agency evidenced beyond the treatment room. Understanding gleaned from the findings is synthesized, highlighting the lessons learned for pre-school children and raising new questions for the profession of occupational therapy and other concerned readers.

#### **2. STAGE I: DISCUSSION OF THE BASELINE FINDINGS**

A discrepancy was exposed between the findings pertaining to Janet's basic performance skills and her externalized agency. Her sensory-motor functions, which form the basis for age appropriate task engagement (see Chapter 2: 2.3) were age-appropriate. Janet's

perceptual function (foundation for educational performance skills) was also age-appropriate within the lower average range. Janet's inability of task engagement at home and at pre-school could therefore not be due to lack of potential for age-appropriate engagement. Janet's play did not reflect her latent ability to engage in developmental tasks. She appeared to be blocked from agentic interaction with people and objects.

Her early childhood experiences were impinged on by caregiver contexts. The literature refers to the detrimental effects of prolonged and consistent absence of adequate caregiving, resulting in children to block developmental task engagement and to avoid core human experiences, "most likely in their attempts to protect the integrity of the organization of the ego at that time" (Greenspan, 1989:189). Unfinished business around the death of Janet's brother was not represented at all during the baseline assessment but clearly contributed to her feeling out of contact with herself and her world. This issue arose throughout the intervention-process and will be discussed in the course of this chapter.

## **2.1 OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY VIEW ON JANET'S BASELINE AGENTIC STATUS**

The mental health occupational therapist Eklund (2000) cites Winnicott in connection with caregiver inadequacy. Eklund (2000:10) alluded to response patterns of doing and being in children, instrumented through early attachment experiences, as follows: "The intricate dialectic between contact and differentiation, how the self struggles for an individual existence and allows simultaneously intimate contacts with others, was of great concern to Winnicott. The child begins life in a state of un-integration. The mother provides a holding environment in which the infant is contained". Her comments on good-enough mothering emphasized the following alliance. The mother's organized perceptions of the child are essential in order for the child to develop her own inner state of organization. Persons deprived of this self-organizing experience early in life commonly need intervention at a later stage to redress failings of the environment during early childhood.

## **2.2 GESTALT THERAPY VIEW ON JANET'S BASELINE AGENTIC STATUS**

In formulating Gestalt therapy perspectives on personal development, Yontef (1993:22) underscores the exigency of children in their early development for adequate parenting. Parental relationships need to create "a nurturing, organismic/environmental, ecological balance". He elaborates on the importance of meeting children's needs in order to facilitate them reaching their full potential. Such a parent-child relationship satisfies the child's basic needs but also allows for ego-strengthening struggle, frustration, failure, winning, and to be contained in so doing. Yontef (1997) persists that children further need defined personal boundaries and limits to experience consequences of their choices and behaviour. When parents lack inner resources and are distracted from their parenting task the child develops distorted contact boundaries and responses become stereotyped.

Even though Janet's personal circumstances were stable at this stage, the circumstances of her personal history were emerging as causal in determining her life-position as lacking in agency.

## **2. STAGE II: DISCUSSION OF THE INTERVENTION PROCESSES**

The discussion of Theme 1 (inherent agency patterns) and Theme 2 (patterns of resistance to agency) illustrate Janet's agentic responses before the facilitative process produced shifts in her agency. Analysis of the facilitative process uncovers how the agency shifts were brought about. The discussion is concluded through elaborating on Theme 3, (achieving an agentic life-position). Quotes from the content analysis are used to elucidate the researcher's argument. The dialogic nature of the treatment determined that quotes are presented as joint exchanges within the therapeutic transaction. The quotes are set back for easy identification.

### **2.1 PATTERNS RESTRICTING THE EXPERIENCE OF JANET'S AGENCY**

Temperamental factors determine how agency is manifested. Strelau (1983) emphasized that people have characteristic ways in which they respond to their environment and how

transitions are made from one issue to the next as part of a person's temperamental blueprint. Janet's inherent temperamentally determined trends of agency manifested through her inquisitive stance to novel stimuli.

### **2.1.1 DISCUSSION OF THEME 1: JANET'S INHERENT AGENCY TRENDS**

The codes of this category were gathered around the question "What is that?" In many instances her curiosity was limiting her in allowing experiences to sink in because her focus was so easily shifted to the next emerging figure. De Gangi (2000) referred to the "what is it" reflex, which helps children to orientate themselves and attend to their environment. She elaborated on sensory sensitivity-trends in infants embracing physiological and behavioural responses to stimuli (see in this chapter under 2.1.3).

#### **2.1.1.1 CURIOSITY: ORIENTATION LEADING TO FULLER UNDERSTANDING**

Janet's way of making sense of the situation was driven by her curiosity. She often asked questions, for example:

J: "What is that for that little phone? (Janet points to the video remote control unit)...This? "  
G: "Oh that's not a phone. That's a little clicker for the camera."

Understanding unfamiliar objects in her surroundings affirmed her sense of self. Unfamiliar and funny things in her environment fascinated Janet; when exploring a toy box she exclaimed:

J: "What's this? (Referring to a skeleton) Why is it broken here?" (Points to chest cavity)  
G: "They are full of holes because there is no flesh in there."

Having clarified her understanding of new concepts allowed Janet to offer her own contribution relating to her discovery. Still referring to the skeleton and pointing to the facial cavities:

J: "That is people's nose and that is people's tooth."

Increased contact with the self and with objects and people outside the self were interrelated and facilitated each other leading to internal order and organization.

### 2.1.1.2 CURIOSITY - LOSING FOCUS, DIMINISHING GOAL-DIRECTED AGENCY

Janet's inquisitiveness often resulted in her reacting impulsively to a stimulus or getting distracted, not always waiting for the answers to her questions. At such times her externalized behaviour was random, chaotic, disorganized and avoiding contact, reminiscent of the actions of a child, who has been diagnosed with an attention disorder. The key informant during peer-review accentuated this observation.

Janet's inability to fully orientate to stimuli and to lose focus was illustrated in the following exchange. Janet fired one question after the other at the researcher.

J: "Why is this here?" (Grabbing monkey's earring followed by) "What is this, that orange thing in the mirror?" (Before G. could respond) "What is this?" (pencil-grips) "and what is in there?" (dominoes and as the explanation was to be delivered "Have you got balloons?"

She was unable to wait for and to process answers. De Gangi (2000:254) underscores how children focus attention in everyday activity. "Sustained attention is the ability to direct and focus cognitive activity on specific stimuli". Prolonged lack of sustained attention results in missing out on learning.

### 2.1.2 PATTERNS OF ACTIVE RESISTANCE: RESISTANCE AGENCY

Janet's agency of resistance to awareness of internal processes as well as stimuli from the environment through the sensory system had become a habit. Parham (1997) stated that agency habits developed early in life determined agency at later stages.

From Janet's personal history it was known that Janet experienced circumstances in her early childhood, which are described in the literature as adverse. Such early experiences are likely to lead to contact breaking to protect the child's ego from realization of inadequate care-giving (Winnicott, 1964 and Cole 1995). To date Janet's circumstances at home and at school provided appropriate opportunities for her to be agentic and for purposeful age-appropriate functioning. Yet her contact cutting behaviours continued to limit Janet's experience of meaningful contact between herself and her world. These habitual contact-cutting patterns maintained and perpetuated her lack of agency.

### 2.1.2.1 DIVERSION: TO CHANGE THE SUBJECT

A prevalent block in Janet's functional interaction with objects and people was her preoccupation with novel stimuli away from the foreground issue already discussed under curiosity (2.1.1.2). This was compounded by the ego-defence mechanism of actively diverting her attention from matters that were perceived as ego-threatening. This mechanism was demonstrated when Janet was on a fantasy journey with the rabbit-puppet; she was playing that she was flying:

G: "I want you to imagine a landscape and a little river."

J: (giggles- then looks petrified all of a sudden) "It is scary!"

G: "It gets very scary all of a sudden for the little rabbit. The aeroplane goes down back to earth on the floor and the aeroplane has landed." (With that Janet's legs are lowered to touch the ground for a grounding experience).

J: (runs off, cuts contact) "Wait, this is a gun" (she takes the gun off the shelf then giggles)

By cutting contact Janet was acquitted from dealing with her feeling of fear. Phillipson (2001,7) refers to the Gestalt personality function of self, depicting ways of contacting or avoiding contact, ways of being aware or restricting awareness. This function determines the way in which human's "are doing things". Phillipson's view underscores agency. In Janet's case her mode of doing prevented her from self-realizing.

### 2.1.2.2 SOMATIC RESPONSES: TO DIVERT FROM THE MATTER AT HAND

When Janet was resisting contact, she often used a physical complaint to avoid an issue at hand. An itching ear, a scratchy throat and blinking of the eyes troubled her and resulted in contact cutting. Attempts by the researcher to explore these bodily sensations, which distracted her, in order to deepen the awareness thereof, were blocked. Such attempts were met by Janet changing the subject, and thereby reverting to the first contact cutting strategy.

Within the Gestalt therapeutic perspective resistance is defined as fixed "gestalten" with impenetrable boundaries. "No flow of experience or awareness can take place beyond the narrow constraints of such a fixed boundary and growth is hampered" (Laura Perls, 1977). The consequence is habitual, non-productive and preservative behaviour devoid of purposeful agency and self-expression, which was the position of Janet's entrapped agency. Perls referred to the getting stuck in resistance as being "trapped in an impasse" (1951). Oaklander (1987:71) stated in this regard: "Resistance is to be expected, respected and

accepted, for it is the child's way of protecting himself". It is in the overcoming of resistance that self-discoveries are made and agentic choices are enabled.

### **2.1.3 SYNTHESIS OF INHERENT AND HABITUAL CONTACT CUTTING AGENCY RESPONSES**

The findings clearly demonstrated that Janet was not lacking in agency per se. Her natural curiosity was an agency strategy through which she obtained a better understanding of her world. At the same time was her natural curiosity not always regulated towards learning, but sometimes resulted in a lack of selective attention to a foreground matter. De Gangi (2000) elaborated on such trends in infants from a sensory processing perspective. She identified the "what is it" reflex as assisting children in orienting to a novel stimulus in the environment and leading to fuller investigation. Alternatively instead of investigating further or accommodating or attending to the stimulus, a defensive reflex may arise to protect the organism from real or perceived pain and discomfort. In such instances the defensive reflex is operating and limiting the impact of the stimulus on the organism. De Gangi's view included physiological and behavioural responses to stimuli, identifying trends in children to be over-reactive or under-reactive in accordance of their inherent thresholds to sensory experiences. When viewing Janet from the sensory-processing perspective her responses would position her as having low thresholds to stimuli and tending to be easily and overtly alerted to sensory changes. Within this paradigm her sensitivity to somatic sensations can be understood as well. The intervention needed to offer containment to curb the defensive responses but also allow Janet to learn new habits of orientating and selectively attending to "what is it" experiences.

When analyzing Janet's contact cutting habits her agency was mostly directed at blocking contact with her world. Purposeful engagement with developmentally appropriate tasks and of meaningful interaction with people was thereby prevented. Her actions were directed at putting up barriers to self-discovery in order to protect the ego. Oaklander (1978) stated that children with poorly defined ego-boundaries exhibited diminished ability to respond to the world. It was imperative to facilitate in Janet her innate ability to fully experience her world. This was endeavored through enabling her agency.

## 2.2 ENABLING AGENCY

The intervention was aimed at shifting patterns, which restricted agency towards patterns of self-expanding agency. This process was illustrated by means of the model of enabling agency (see Chapter 4: 89).

### 2.2.1 ENABLING AGENCY: THE GESTALT PLAYTHERAPEUTIC PROCESS

In each session the same steps of the Gestalt playtherapeutic process were followed

#### 2.2.1.1 TREATMENT ENTRY

In Gestalt playtherapy, child-centered existential dialogue needs to be generated. Such dialogue can only take place in a sound therapeutic relationship. The relationship between Janet and the researcher deepened throughout the intervention process as illustrated through increased joint attention.

G: "The lion said... You speak for him."  
 J: (In a play –voice) "I want to eat you."  
 G: "I am so scared, I am so scared!"  
 J: (Rolls over kicks her legs and giggles and roars)

Spontaneity increased and Janet developed a playful interchange when she put on the researcher's glasses.

J: "Look at this!" (she is wearing Gudrun's glasses again)  
 G: (smiles) "Do you want to put them on again?"  
 J: "Yes, this is nice glasses!"  
 G: (responds playfully) "Who is this? What is your name?"  
 J: (opens her arms and smiles) "Janet!"  
 G: "Hallo Janet with your nice glasses, have you finished wearing them today?...What is it like to look at things through glasses?"  
 J: (pulls a funny face) "Yes."

Through these playful exchanges Janet was able to expand on her repertoire of relating to the researcher. Agentic behaviour was displayed through taking initiative. Csikszentmihalyi (1998) states that playfulness is a true expression of the self and most strongly resembling flow. Janet's emerging playfulness set a suitable atmosphere for a relationship through which self-discoveries could be facilitated.



### 2.2.1.2 ESTABLISHING SENSORY CONTACT

Increased awareness of the sensory experiences and the resulting increased awareness often led to associations and enhanced awareness of Janet's inner being. Human beings have a universal need to be in touch with their inner selves and simultaneously to register demands from outside the self. Once in sensory contact and open to self-exploration, projections were introduced (Yontef, 1993).

### 2.2.1.3 HANDLING PROJECTIONS

When selecting a suitable projection Janet's natural inquisitiveness was utilized to captivate her. Her difficulties to draw representatively, her limited use of imagination and fantasy during play combined with her distractibility and her tendency to disengage needed to be accommodated in choosing a suitable task. The Gestalt therapeutic techniques that were used to deal with Janet's projections and to facilitate self-discoveries are illustrated as follows.

#### ➤ POLARITIES

Polarities were utilized to illustrate opposing perspectives on the same issue.

G: "Janet, remember our rules for playing together?"

J: (Bounces vigorously on the red ball) "We get.... HAPPY, you and me get happy!"

G: "Yes, that is one of our rules. We always feel nice when we have finished, that is very, very important. We also talk about some difficult stuff. Can you remember we talked about some difficult stuff?"

J: "No."

G: "Yes, we talked about things that were not so easy for you to talk about, when the teacher ... remember the first time. She sent the rabbit to the office."

J: "Jaaaaa...."

G: "And that did not feel nice for you to talk about."

J: "I remember that"

G "And?..."

J: (Points to the opposite door) "I went there..."(pointed to where she had sent the rabbit in the first session).

G: "And then, last time we were talking about the time when your brother died."

J: (stares, nods) "Yes."

G: "Was that easy to talk about?"

The interchange continued, leading to a combined agreement:

J: "It (Playtherapy) makes myself feel better; and it makes me happy; and it makes me excited."

G: "And you know what it also does? It makes you do one thing at a time remember? And you know you were so good at that ... the first times you played all over, and you know what I have noticed? I now know that you can play with the same thing and I was wondering what that felt like for you? Has that been a nice feeling? ... Hmmm?"

J: "Yes... It is also very difficult you know."

Janet experienced a sense of wholeness, springing from the integration of opposite parts as both being true for her, “we are happy when we play together” and “it is also very difficult”. Most children find it easier to absorb the shadow-side of their experiences within a polarity (Oaklander 1986).

### ➤ DEEPENING CONSCIOUSNESS & SHARPENING AWARENESS

After Janet had unintentionally spoken of her baby brother she was cutting contact around this issue. Her resistance to exploring this issue was handled with a technique known as “stay with it”:

G: “But I find it so difficult to understand, that is why I thought you can explain it a little bit to me, you know.”

J: “Now I have something on my cheek, (rubs her cheek) there is salty stuff!”

G: “Yes, but I wanted to finish about your brother, I forgot his name again, Gunsha? ... I find it... Sometimes adults are very slow to understand things you know. I wanted you just a little bit, to help me out a little bit, because what happens, many children have a pretend brother, a toy brother.”

J: “I don’t have.... I have a toy brother.”

G: “That is ok.”

J: “And I have a real brother!”

G: “A real brother?... Is he still small and in nappies?”

J: nods head

G: “The other day you thought he was dead.”

J: “I never knew you know that!!!”

G: “I think you told me you had a little brother and he died.”

J: “I think he never died, he had cancer and then he died, no wait, but Jesus came and fetched him.”

G: “How does it make you feel when you think of him?”

J: “It feels hard and it makes me feel sad.”

G: “Does it make you feel sad that he died?”

J: *mumbles something*

G: “I am so sorry that I did not hear, my ears are not that strong, I want you to please tell me again.”

J: “Hmmmm He died in my heart, and that is where I have my baby brother.”

During this dialogue Janet’s sharpened awareness exposed her confusion and her impotence to form a whole picture from the fragments of her memory. What she discovered through her increased awareness was that it was OK to have those feelings. In a way she reformulated her sense of loss by stating “I have him in my heart”. She thereby acknowledged Gunsha to be part of her identity. The existence of Gunsha was not part of the researcher’s knowledge about Janet. Clinical reasoning around this issue directed strictest adherence to the Gestalt principles of the “here and now”. She remained fully in Janet’s experience without attempting to verify facts (2.3.2.3 in this chapter: creating meaning).

### ➤ OWNING FEELINGS

During the exploration of the awareness of fear during a projection the rabbit puppet was petrified of flying. Janet was diverting from this awareness by wanting to play with another puppet. Cutting contact “protected” Janet from dealing with the issue of fear. Simultaneously she lost self-contact because the feeling of fear was inherently part of her being. Re-establishing the inner contact boundary enabled a shift towards acknowledging her being. This led to purposeful agency as demonstrated by the discussion between the rabbit puppet (Janet) and the beaver puppet (Gudrun) . A breakthrough beyond the barriers of the resistance resulted:

G: “Tell me what you felt?” (She directs the question at the rabbit)  
 J: “I was so scared. That aeroplane gave me such a fright, and then I felt a fright.”  
 G: “Was it scary to be so high?”  
 J (rabbit nods with his head) “Yes.”

Owning a feeling was a new experience for Janet. Habitually she had reacted chaotically devoid of self-organization when a feeling emerged. Acknowledging the feeling of fear strengthened her ego and Janet as a person became real.

### ➤ CONFLUENCE CHOICES AND RESPONSIBILITY

When Janet cut contact with a foreground issue, the technique of confluence was found well suited to heighten her awareness around the issue. Through the researcher’s confluent stance Janet was made conscious of her responsibility to determine how much contact she could handle. One Gestalt experiment, which required Janet to make stars to resemble the people in her life out of scented play-dough, illustrates this point. Janet changed the subject on an impulse. She suggested instead of the planned projection that the poor homeless little girl (who had featured in the previous projection) should make a man out of playdough.

G: “And what will she (the poor homeless girl) do with the man, Janet?”  
 J: “She can cut him up, ha ha.”  
 G: “She can cut him up!”  
 J: “Like this.” (shows with finger slashing action) “Yuck, yuck!”  
 G: “Would that be a bad man?”  
 J: Turns her eyes away.  
 G: Janet would you like to make a man of playdough?”  
 J: “No!!”

Firstly, the researcher went along in confluence following Janet’s lead of pretending to be the little girl from the previous projection. This affirmed Janet’s internal locus of control.

Secondly, Janet's choice to not make a man out of playdough was accepted in confluence. Janet's connectedness to her inner self was deepened and later in the same session she was able to reveal a deep-rooted issue about Grandpa Ronnie.

J: "Well my Grandpa Ronnie, he was a little bit naughty. My dad sent him out."  
 G: "What happened?"  
 J: "I don't know."  
 G: "Where you there when it happened?"  
 J: "No, he go-ed to our house."  
 G: "It was at your house (interested and caring) ...and?"  
 J: "Yes."  
 G: "What kind of naughty things did he do?"  
 J: "He just wanted to shout, and then he hitted her, my mother."  
 G: "And did she cry?"  
 J: "She just hit him ." (shows action)

This violence was explored in more depth:

G: "And did he hurt your body?"  
 J: (nods and taps her own shoulder)  
 G: "On your shoulder, and how did he hurt you?"  
 J: "He hit me."  
 G: "He hit you.... It is hard to talk about this, hey? Your Grandpa Ronnie..."  
 J: Eyes down, coughing.

It was accepted in confluence that at this stage she did not have any or could not face remaining unfinished issues about Grandpa Ronnie (see in this chapter under 2.4.3).

#### ➤ EMPOWERMENT, SELF-NURTURANCE, A SAFE PLACE

During the process of self-discovery children are often faced with hurtful experiences and feelings of inadequacy and it is essential to restore the child's dignity (Thompson & Rudolph, 2000).

Janet indicated a need for oral stimulation while she was playing. This need for sucking and blowing was recognized and was utilized in the Gestalt experiment aimed at developing strategies for self-nurturance. Janet blew and blew:

G: "But you have such a lot of wind for such a small girl!"  
 J: (smiles and looks very pleased)  
 G: Blows into a balloon half full and hands it to Janet  
 J: (Blows it bigger and bigger).  
 G: "You blew this up by yourself with your own wind , wow, wow, wow!"  
 J: (walks up to the mirror looks at herself) "Hey!"

Techniques of actively building up the child's inner strength were utilized when Janet had difficulties to get the playdough out of a container:

J: "I can do it".  
 G: "It's fine."  
 J: "There is still a little bit..."  
 G: "That's OK. We only need a little bit."  
 J (pulls dough out) "I know how to do this."  
 G: "I saw that it is nice to know exactly how to do a thing."  
 J: "It is quite difficult"  
 G: "Especially when it is difficult it is nice to know."  
 J: "Ja... (Sounds as if she is sighing with relief). I even know how to do this one."  
 G: "That is so good. I think you know a lot of things, Janet."

On a practical level Janet's agency was expressed through experiencing herself as competent and able to regulate herself in relationship to environmental challenges. On an abstract level agency was facilitated when integrating the memory of her baby brother. Janet could self-regulate her memories. She found this comforting.

G: "Your brother is the one who is up in heaven with Jesus and you can always think of him when you look at the stars.... (Pause)... Hey?"  
 J: "Jaaaa ..." (sounds relaxed)  
 G: "You want to?"  
 J: "I can if I want to."  
 G: "Yes, you can if you want to. That is important to know. You don't have to, but you can if you want to if nobody else thinks of him you can still think of him every time you see the stars."

The importance of self-nurturance was emphasized. Schoeman (2000) agrees with Oaklander (1987), both accentuating that self-regulatory skills need to be taught during intervention and they should become accessible to the child outside of the treatment context to facilitate generalization of self-regulation. During the last session when rounding the process off the dialogue went like this:

G: "Janet, I wanted you to look at a way you can make yourself feel better, when you are feeling alone or when you had a bad day at school."  
 J: "I never had a bad day. Never ever!"  
 G: "Life is always good for you?"  
 J: "Adam and Carl and Evelyn are my friends."  
 G: (strains to hear, doorbell is ringing) "Say that again please?"  
 J: "Adam is my best friend."  
 G: "Oh, you have a friend at school. That is very lovely!"

Janet had identified how comforting it was to have a friend. On the visit of the post-intervention play assessment, Janet was playing with a group of friends and the researcher understood then what Janet had alluded to. Her day at school was transformed by her being able to engage in play-occupations with friends.

#### 2.2.1.4 SYNTHESIS FOR GESTALT PLAYTHERAPEUTIC PROCESS

The therapeutic work with Janet centered primarily on opening the contact boundaries and enhancing her awareness continuum. This was congruous with the objective of Gestalt therapy. “In Gestalt therapy the only goal is awareness. Growth and autonomy are achieved through an increase in conscience” (Yontef 1993:16). Awareness of sensations and feelings but also automatic mannerisms and habits are brought into awareness. The product of awareness is to discover the self, to get to know the environment, taking responsibility for choices, self-acceptance and the ability to be in contact. In the case of Janet these processes were approached through engagement in Gestalt playtherapy. Janet became conscious of sensory experiences, she discovered who she was, she related to objects and people (the researcher) in the playroom and she learned to take responsibility for her choices. These processes took place within the secure and containing therapeutic relationship, maximized through the highly structured handling strategies.

#### 2.2.2 SELF-ENABLING STRUCTURE

In the early stages of intervention it was evident that the effectiveness of the Gestalt playtherapeutic techniques was restricted through Janet’s agency-limiting patterns of getting easily distracted and her resistance to contact. According to the baseline findings, Janet had been less distractible during the formal quantitative testing (on the DTVP-2 and the DAP). It was deducted that the highly structured environment (as was necessitated during standardized testing) aided Janet’s task-engagement. Janet had seemingly benefited from a firm, defined structure to enable purposeful action. Clinical reasoning led to the decision to provide a similar explicit structure to maximize the Gestalt therapeutic process. Dunn (1999) proposed that one way in which distractibility could be curbed was by providing a structure in the environment, which fostered selective attention. To foster selective attention by actively focusing the child was compatible with the Gestalt view of directing the client towards self-regulation.

In Gestalt playtherapy the role of the therapist is directive. It is the therapist’s responsibility to ensure to that contact is enabled beyond the child’s resistance of the organismic self.

Yontef (1993) states that when therapists go along with the client's resistance, clients cannot re-own their lost or never developed potential of being. Therapists therefore need to work within the child's context and offer a structure in which ego-boundaries are strengthened beyond resistance habits.

The content analysis explicated four strategies, which provided boundaries for Janet. The scope of this research did not include an in-depth exploration of the non-verbal queues that were given in conjunction with the linguistically administered structure. The importance of nonverbal enablers of agency such as tone of voice, gestures and facial expression, however needs to be acknowledged.

#### 2.2.2.1 INSTRUCTION

Verbal directions sanctioned Janet to make contact with objects in the playroom:

G: "I want your fingers to come and explore, I want your fingers to pretend they are going on a lovely journey, and then you tell me what you can feel, just your fingers and your hand, put them in there (hole in seed container) and feel it. Close you eyes, if you want to... and then you feel and feel and feel."

J: (excited) "I can feel! I can feel a tiger."

Sensory contact promoted self-contact. When exploring her feelings, Janet needed clarification:

G: "Is it not very nice when you close your eyes?"

J: (shakes head.)

G: "What happens when you close your eyes?"

J: "My eyes get sore when I close them."

G: "When you close them they get sore, so it's nicer when you keep them open. And how do you feel when you close them? ... A little bit scared?"

J: "But when I open my eyes it does not make me scared."

G: "Ok you feel better when you keep them open?"

J: "Yes."

G: "Then you must keep them open."

J: "I can!" (Referring to being able to close her eyes. Thereafter she was able to participate with closed eyes)

Having acknowledged the feeling, which had been elicited during the awareness exercise, Janet was able to expand on her range of tolerance for sensory experiences. Dunn (1999) emphasized the importance of confining unfamiliar experiences in accordance with the tolerance thresholds of a child who avoids contact, but at the same time to expand on the child's resilience to impel growth experience.

### 2.2.2.2 OFFERING CHOICES

Choices allowed Janet to maintain her dignity when she was unable or unprepared to explore experiences beyond her tolerance threshold. For Janet feeling consciously was unfamiliar and threatening. Committing herself to a choice affirmed her internal locus of control in situations of existential anxiety. During therapeutic dialogue between the rabbit puppet and the monkey puppet feelings of anxiety were explored. Janet's undermining of contact manifested as follows:

J: "Why do you have a swimming pool?"

G: "Janet you are asking me about the swimming pool. When did you think of the pool?"

J: "Yes."

G: "Do you want to talk about the swimming pool or do you first want to talk to the monkey?"

J: (Whispers) "The monkey."

The choice to talk about the swimming pool (unrelated to her feelings) or discussing feelings and experiencing self-contact, challenged Janet's self-determination. Committing to a choice also affirmed Janet's sense of autonomy in practical matters.

G: I want you to open up these (containers) and decide which one is the best.

Choosing her preference defined herself and Janet felt strengthened in her agency. Schoeman (2000) emphasized the importance of making certain that children were in sensory contact before sanctioning choices to guarantee that the therapeutic work reflected the child's frame of meaning.

### 2.2.2.3 REFOCUSING

The reinforcing structure helped Janet to reconnect with events when she had cut contact:

G: "Yes, but I want you to look at me first. Remember what we had said in the beginning. I want you to try very hard not to rush to the next thing. We decide together. When you feel you have finished, you first talk to me (uses gestures to support the you- and me- moment). You say Gudrun I want to finish off, and then we see if we can finish it off or if we need to carry on a little longer."

Cueing and gestures were also used:

G: (points to the centre of the mat and indicates that Janet needs to come into the defined space through gestures. Janet moves back onto the mat.)

Boundaries were introduced into areas where Janet had habitually cut herself off the awareness continuum. Yontef (1993:10) referred to the aptness of frustrating the client's attempts of contact breaking by compelling therapists to balance warmth and firmness, and to bring structure and limits into areas with poor boundaries.



#### 2.2.2.4 DEMONSTRATION

Agency was enabled through demonstration and by broadening Janet's performance abilities. Janet could not dress her doll and lost interest in the game.

G: "Is that something you don't know how to do?"

J: (ignores Gudrun and continues packing away)

G: "Janet, is it difficult to put the doll's clothes on?"

J: "Yes."

G: "That is OK, that is something we can do together. See, you can just slip this (sleeve) in here."

J: (tries and gets it right)

G: (passes the doll's panties to Janet and aligns them for the doll's feet).

J: (tries and manages)

G: "There you go."

Having succeeded and having mastered a new skill strengthened Janet's view of herself as a competent agent. At times instruction, clarification and offering choices were combined to facilitate her agency:

G: "It (the lid of the toy box) will collapse, ja, and then you will hurt your feet and it will be very sore if you fall through there. But you can jump onto this lovely nice cushion, I don't know if you'll like it but have a feel."

When providing a self-enabling structure, the therapist's stance needed to allow contact to happen at Janet's pace. Firmness needed to be balanced with the permission to be. It was important that Janet understood that the choice to make contact or to cut herself off lay within her and that the researcher was respecting her innate decision. It was the researcher's responsibility to set up opportunities for self-regulation. Phillipson (2001,7) confirmed that it was the client's decision to respond to opportunities of choice or to give self-determination up and resort to blocked or reactive behaviour.

#### 2.2.2.5 SYNTHESIS: ENABLING AGENCY

Janet needed explicit boundaries to create a stable field for exploration of issues. Techniques needed to be restricted to only one figure to curb her distractibility. Gestalt therapy philosophy propagates flexibility regarding the implementation of techniques. Yontef states: (1993: 6) "in Gestalt therapy there are no shoulds". The Gestalt therapy motto emphasized: "What is, is ". In Janet's situation "What is, is" suggested that instead self-discovering through abstract projections, Janet was discovering who she was within the 'here and now' (which was made safe through the boundaries) of each treatment moment. The firm therapist-driven structure maximized the Gestalt playtherapeutic strategies in

promoting self-contact and meaningful engagement in the world. Such boundaries created opportunities for self-discovery and enabled a new agentic repertoire.

This structure provided the boundaries to make breakthrough possible past the barriers of her habitual resistance patterns. Greenspan (1989) referred to this firmness of structure combined with child-centered opportunities as an “optimal environment” for the experience of agency, where a sense of empathy with the child was balanced with firm limits.

## **2.3 SELF-EXPANSION**

The categories of developing competence in her world and creating meaning were uncovered in the theme of self-expansion.

### **2.3.1 DEVELOPING/ EXPERIENCING COMPETANCE**

Towards the last two treatment sessions Janet was experiencing herself as effective in dealing with demands.

#### **2.3.1.1 DEALING WITH PRACTICAL CHALLENGES**

Janet’s capability to deal with practical and familiar situations was revealed in her emerging ability to solve problems. During a tasting experiment a container of cinnamon and sugar fell over, Janet stated:

J: “This is not a mistake. This is an accident.” (When offered a toy-broom she called aloud) “I never knew you had a broom here!”

Sweeping up, added to the excitement of being in the playroom. Janet wanted to pour the swept up cinnamon and sugar back into the container (agentic behaviour). When asked what else one could do with it she exclaimed: “For your dogs”. She experienced the satisfaction associated with having found a solution and feeling competent.

#### **2.3.1.2 CONNECTING EVENTS**

Janet displayed enjoyment in her evolving sense of competence through linking experiences over a time span. This was expressed in the following statement:

J: "I was loving to play with two things." (in the beginning of the fourth session when she was referring to the previous session.)

She started to anticipate events and plan proactively. Strategies were explored on how she could stand up to her little sister. Janet visualized herself in the situation as follows:

J: "Uhm... I just play hide and seek, and she counts 1,2,3, and I hide and she can't find me."  
 G: "UHUM, and would you like that and she could not find you at all?"  
 J: "Yes, I'd like that!"  
 G: "And that would be fun, hey?"  
 J: "To tease her."

This dialogue was followed by Janet exclaiming:

J: "It makes me feel better. Much better!"

Janet stated intentions, she was able to ideate and plan actions she was to engage in:

J: "Then I want to do this." (Walks to the toy cupboard with the miniature characters) "There is the sandpit." (points to the seed tray)  
 G: "Yes, this is another sandbox, I'll show the one we will use when you are ready."  
 J: "OK, where is the sandbox?"  
 G: "It is at the bottom of the toy cupboard."  
 J: "OK, I have already checked, there it is."  
 G: "Good for you, Janet!"  
 J: (Gets up and shows where it is hidden in the bottom drawer of the toy cupboard).

As Janet's play became more integrated, she reflected on events from the previous sessions.

"I remember that!" and also when getting ready for the final session she proclaimed:

G: "So, we are going to start with this, we leave the other ones here." (Taking containers of play dough out)  
 J: (unpacks the playdough) "Remember the blue one was my favourite."

When she reached this level of agency she gained insight into to spatial concepts. She could also ascertain an order of events and she felt connected with a chronological progression of her life. She made sense of events. Bandura (2001:5) stated in this regard: "Intentionality and agency raise the fundamental question of how people bring about thoughts and activities over which they command personal control that activate subpersonal neurophysiological events for realizing particular intentions and aspirations. " This process happens within a person's phenomenological temporal context. The temporal extension of agency enables connecting what has been with what is, with what is to be. This process is innately connected to the process of BEING, DOING & BECOMING to be discussed in more depth later in this chapter (☞ 4.2)

## 2.3.2 CREATING MEANING OF THE ISSUES THAT EMERGED

Creating meaning illustrates how Janet developed organismic balance around contextual life experiences. This category uncovered experiences that are integrally linked to her identity. Although some issues remained unresolved she was able to become consciously aware of them. Gestalt playtherapeutic experiments helped her to negotiate these vacillating identity properties. Focal towards her seeking of meaning were physical manifestations of self, family issues, the matter of Grandpa Ronnie and the unresolved issue of a brother (Gunsha), who had died.

### 2.3.2.1 PHYSICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF HEALTH

It appeared that in Janet's family context, somatic externalization of aspects of the self was acceptable and it was a safe way for Janet to be noticed. This was already evidenced in her habitual contact cutting agency (see 2.1.2 in this chapter).

#### ➤ SOMATIC RESPONSES

Janet's preoccupation with somatic phenomena was not only relevant as a strategy for contact cutting. She projected sickness in relation to nurturing. This was illustrated during projective play:

J: "This is medicine."  
G: "What does she need the medicine for?"  
J: "This is the medicine for her throat."

Later during the same session she used the bottle and stated:

J: "Let's pretend this is for her now." (Sticks the bottle under the doll's nose.) "Because her nose is sore."

The connection between being sick and needing extra care was illustrated by her preventing the sick doll from bathing because it was to make her better.

#### ➤ HOSPITALIZATION

Janet alluded to her tonsillectomy when the eucalyptus aroma of the blue playdough triggered her memory of her hospitalization:

J: "When I was sick, you know, I used to go to the doctor and stayed there for a whole week."  
G: "You stayed for a whole week with the doctor?"  
J: "Yes!"

G: "And your Mom and Dad had to go away and you had to stay alone with the doctor?"  
 J: "No, only my mom were with me."  
 G: "Was that when your tonsils had to come out?"  
 J: "Yes."  
 G: "And was that sore?"  
 J: "But it was not so sore, I never cried!"

Having been hospitalized resulted in added attention and Janet was singled out as being important. This had been an ego-affirming experience for Janet.

### 2.3.2.2 FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Pre-school children view the family as an extension of the self. Transparent family boundaries and clearly delineated individual identities enhance the experience of the self as an autonomous organism.

#### ➤ MY PARENTS

Parental functions were played out through nurturance themes in her projective play. Furthermore one specific issue in relation to her parents exposed dyadic relationships.

G: "Close your eyes. Anything that comes to mind when you think about your sister?"  
 J: "I think of my father and my sister."  
 G: "Do you think about them together?"  
 J: (nods) "And I think of my mother and me."

Experiencing herself in a form of fusion with her mother and her sister in the same unit as her father was expressed again when she made the family star-scape. Attempts to explore the dyadic relationships in more depth were met with resistance, which could not be worked through during the period of research.

#### ➤ MY SISTER

The baseline data indicated that sibling rivalry was a problem. Janet's sister featured repeatedly as a source of conflict and strong feelings were expressed:

G: "I was thinking if it is possible that you sometimes know what it feels like when somebody gets very cross?"  
 J: "Yes, they (parents) get very cross, because my mother no because my sister hits me then she hates me then she laughs at me."  
 G: "Does she make you feel as if you are not very special?"  
 J: "No and then I cry if she does that (looks up) ...and what is that thing?" (Cutting contact)

The dialogue around her sister was taken up again in the next session:

G: "And sometimes do you fight and sometimes do you have a good time?"  
 J: "I don't fight with her she only fights with me."

G: "OK, I was thinking if that happens all the time or quite a lot, what can you do to make yourself feel better?"

J: "I will kill! I will take the wooden spoon and smack my sister with it."

In the last treatment session when the issue of the sister re-emerged, Janet's feelings were framed differently:

G: "We need to talk about things that we don't want to talk about that we get it off our minds. Does your little sister sometimes make you sad?"

J: "No, she makes me very, very happy."

Less sibling conflict at home and at school had been reported, and occasionally Janet had been able to take leadership in the sibling relationship.

### ➤ OTHER RELATIVES

Janet's schemata about her extended family were blurred. During the tasting experiment she indicated that the taste of the green jelly reminded her of:

J: "When I visit my sister?"

G: "Your sister?"

J: "Oh, I forgot, my cousin."

The ensuing discussion clarified that she did have a cousin whom the family visited at times, but these differences in relationships only starting to become delineated in her mind. The smell of lemon reminded Janet of her granny. She was not sure where her granny was. During therapeutic dialogue Janet announced that she had stayed with her granny and that she was missing her sometimes.

J: "It makes me think of my granny."

G: "Your granny, what about her?"

J: "Last time she go-ed onto an aeroplane and visited my cousins."

This exchange proved that Janet had memories about her early childhood contrary to her parent's assumption that Janet thought she had always lived with Pat and Joe without any recall of her early infant-hood. Janet tried to clutch onto a very early memory she had of her granny, but there were many gaps in her recollection.

J: "I was a baby when I was, when I used to stay with my granny, when my parent's got married."

This remembering of an earlier stage of her life when she had lived with her granny connected Janet to her own personal history. Knowing more and understanding better the chronological order of life-events formed a powerful part of creating personal meaning. Through the increased awareness of her grandmother, Janet was also able to become aware and to express her feelings about missing her granny.

### 2.3.2.3 GUNSHA

During the second session Janet mentioned that she had a brother, who had died. This had not been discussed during the parent interview at the stage of baseline data collection.

J: "Last time when I had a baby brother, he died."

G: "How old were you then?"

J: "22 or 23. I am fast growing. I want to play with the Barbie dolls."

At this stage it was impossible to re-enter dialogue around her brother. His name, Gunsha, sounded like an immaturely pronounced name. Gunsha was brought into the awareness spectrum in all subsequent treatment sessions and an attempt was made to establish meaningful facts around his identity.

J: "And I have a baby brother."

G: "Is he also a cousin?"

J: "No, he is my baby brother."

G: "And where does he stay?"

J: "With me."

G: "What is his name?"

J: "Gunsha."

When trying to establish a chronological context around Gunsha, Janet was unsure:

G: "Your little sister, was she born already?"

J: "She is three years old."

G: "Is she a twin? Was the little boy a twin of hers? were the two of them babies together? Or were they babies at different times?"

J: "My sister is three years old."

Janet herself was trying to make sense of her memories:

J: "I was a baby first, then I grew up, then my baby sister came out of my mommy's tummy."

G: "Hmmm.. That is quite right. And did your baby brother come first out of your mommy's tummy or your sister?"

J: "First my brother."

She continued:

J: "He died a long time ago."

G: "Have you asked your mommy about him?"

J: "Ja, but you don't need to tell my mommy that I have told you. "(Janet makes full-on eye contact)

The fact that Janet emphasized that she wanted this matter to be handled confidentially showed that she trusted the therapeutic relationship. Agency and an internal locus of control were clearly exhibited. Another attempt to make sense of Gunsha was evident in the following exchange:

G: "I am trying to work out you see, I am sometimes taking such a long time to understand. This brother and you were you babies at the same time?"

J: "I was a baby when I used to stay with my granny."

Janet was linking life events in a chronologically meaningful order. A final projection around Gunsha was conducted to help Janet to integrate her memories, which were predominating her foreground.

G: "Your brother is the one who is up in heaven with Jesus and you can always think of him when you look at the stars.... (Pause)... Hey?"

J: "Jaaaa ..." (sounds relaxed)

G: "If you want to."

J: "I can if I want to."

Agency was evident in her ability to choose and her confidence directing her participation. Her strengthened ego allowed her to respond in a self-affirming unique way and to self-regulate her emotions. Janet was given the assurance that her feelings about her brother were good and that she was entitled to think of him. Ownership of her feelings regarding Gunsha invigorated her and she could direct her unblocked agency towards the exciting world of the "here and now", which she was now experiencing. In dealing with this particular issue the researcher was guided by the Gestalt therapy theory to only work with "what is is". This implied that no investigations were undertaken outside the treatment situation in uncovering facts about Gunsha. Gestalt therapy works on issues in the "here and now" of the therapy hour. Working on integrating issues through graded exploration of the client's experience "so that the exploration of self is an experience of interpersonal support, self support and safety" (Cole 1994). Gestalten that are increasingly intimate are explored leading to shared humanity. It was considered important the Janet reached some sense of consolidation about her feelings regarding Gunsha, since the intervention was of such short duration. She needed to have closure about this one issue. This was achieved in the researcher's estimation.

#### 2.3.2.4 GRANDPA RONNIE

When Janet was making playdough stars to represent her family members her step-grandfather appeared on her foreground:

J: "Well...my grandpa Ronnie ...but then...he was a little bit naughty. My dad sent him out."

From the perspective presented by Janet, Joe had forbidden Grandpa Ronnie their home after an incident "of naughtiness" and of violence directed at Pat. When dealing with Janet's experiences around Grandpa Ronnie it was considered essential to empower Janet to deal at a future stage in more depth with this memory if she needed to.

G: (takes Janet's hand and speaks gently) "I want you to look into my eyes."



J: (looks up –joint attention is established)  
 G: “When you want to talk about your grandfather...”  
 J: (fidgets and reaches to take another ball of playdough)  
 G: “Let me see you eyes. Look into my eyes and only hold one thing.” (Gently closes Janet’s hand around the playdough which was warm from handling and which had elicited the memory of Grandpa Ronnie.) “This one is nice and warm, hold one.”  
 J: “I want to hold the blue dough.”  
 G: “That is a different thing. I want you to use the red clay...” (which is the playdough around which the associations around the grandpa evolved.) “We use the blue one later...” (gently lifts Janet’s chin while prompting eye contact.)  
 J: Pushes her jersey back, but maintains eyecontact.  
 G: “When a child has a bad memory, it is like a box we put the lid on the box and put a rope around, and like you were saying, put it away. We then don’t need to worry about it, because you can forget about it.” (uses gestures to support the story, Janet is focused)  
 J: “Looks down and presses her playdough.”  
 G: “But sometimes you think about the box in your mind.”  
 J: “Then I will tell you.”  
 G: “Then you need to unpack it and you can ask your mommy to quickly bring you here. OK, because it is nice to talk to a big person about worries that are deeply on your mind...pause...OK...” (tone is caring and gentle) “Maybe you want to talk about that memory now?”  
 J: (hits the playdough against the table) “...No.”  
 G: “You don’t want to talk about it now?”  
 J: (shakes head).  
 G: “That is ok... You don’t need to talk about things when they are not there, remember.”

The ability to have been able to choose to talk about her grandfather increased Janet’s agency and her “power” to take responsibility for her own feelings and decisions, to self-regulate. Clinical reasoning around this particular issue cautioned the researcher to not feel complacent about what Janet had disclosed and what else might have happened. From the baseline assessment it was known that Pat had experienced her stepfather as violent and she had to live in a children’s home because of him. Joe had been concerned after a visit by Grandpa Ronnie. Since Joe had forbidden Grandpa Ronnie entry into their home, no contact was possible at this stage. It was discussed how Janet could address any re-emerging issues and feelings regarding her memory of Grandpa Ronnie to prevent possible entrapment in a victim life position in the future.

### 2.3.2.5 SYNTHESIS OF SELF EXPANSION

Gestalt theory, according to Perls, concludes that integration of unresolved issues releases the energy, which has formerly been trapped in “maintaining an impasse”. This energy invigorates the ego (Thompson and Rudolph: 2000). The impasse in Janet’s life manifested in a disengagement of herself as a person to the events in her life. Her being and doing were heavily influenced by the unfinished business she was carrying with her.

During intervention the link between Janet the person and her world was sought. Developing Janet's sense of coherence about her life-events created meaning. A chronologically meaningful chain connected moments into a story creating Janet's life story. Polkinghorne (1988,150) succinctly referred to the creation of a life-story: "We make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story." Janet had created a part of her own story by connecting with people and events. This affirmed her being, enhanced her doing and guided her becoming (see 4.2 and 4.3 in this chapter). It was illustrated how well suited the Gestalt playtherapy techniques were in guiding Janet towards being, doing and becoming.

### **3 DISCUSSION OF STAGE III: POST INTERVENTION FINDINGS**

This discussion of ascertaining and evaluating post-intervention agentic functioning beyond the treatment room deals with the fourth objective for the study.

#### **3.1 POST- INTERVENTION FEEDBACK FROM JANET'S TEACHER**

Sue<sup>1</sup> confirmed that agency shifts had taken place. Janet was now sitting in the middle of the group where she had formerly always drifted around on the periphery. During the lunch break friends surrounded her. She engaged in tasks like drawing and construction, which had formerly not happened. Janet spontaneously showed her work to her teacher. Joint attention between Janet and Sue and Janet and her peers indicated that she was able to engage meaningful contact with people in her environment, leading to age-appropriate social agentic behaviour.

#### **3.2 A POST INTERVENTION PLAY ASSESSMENT: PRE-SCHOOL PLAY SCALE**

The shift in Janet's behaviour had been so dramatic that the researcher undertook a further observation in the following week to verify that the change in Janet's agency was sustained (both observations were videotaped for data evidence).

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<sup>1</sup> Sue- Janet's teacher

Janet had become part of the life at pre-school. According to Polkinghorne (1996) an agentic life-position is characterized by expectation, excitement and adventure. All these qualities were evident in Janet's play during the two Pre-school Play Scale observations.

Transfer of behaviours, evident during playtherapy, had taken place. Joint attention, which occurred during the intervention, was also observed at school. Janet was able to perform the age-appropriate fine-motor tasks of material management and sustained attention in the task of drawing a mermaid. Prior to treatment her agency patterns were expressed through drifting off and playing in the bathroom when other children were drawing.

Playing cooperatively with a group of friends enriched Janet's grossmotor-play. Transfer from the playtherapy situation was evidenced in her pretending to be a lion and her confidence in being a valued person. Her play was focused, rules evolved and the game was expanding. Where she had appeared lonely and lost in the baseline assessment she was now belonging to the group. Her engagement in the group manifested in her participation in all activities (eating, indoor-play outdoor-play). Agency was expressed through initiating play but also by cooperating with other children. Verbal expression supported her engagement. The games that Janet participated in were quite concrete but the level of enjoyment and life-force associated with her play was a true expression of her being. Her ability to be playful, to share, to laugh and to express her energy in goal-directed ways further highlighted her evolved agentic life position.

Playfulness is defined as agency characterized by flexibility, experiencing joy and spontaneity, according to Parham & Fazio (1997). Eklund (2000:13) points to the relationship between being and doing. A child who is deprived of the internally balanced state of being can not grow and become, and can not play. In order for a child to discover her identity, the state of "going-on-doing" is essential. Eklund proposes that this process in children can only take place when the child's needs are met and another person's non-demanding presence creates a state of quiescence for playfulness to develop. This happens ideally in the early stages of infant-parent relationship. In the absence of such an experience, the play-therapeutic context can replicate this atmosphere for growing. Winnicott (1964) views well-being as the relative integrity and spontaneity of the self, best

and most importantly expressed through play. The shift in Janet's play therefore was a true expression of her new agentic being.

### **3.3 FEEDBACK FROM JANET'S PARENTS**

At home Janet's play behaviour also changed. Janet was taking the lead in the sibling relationship for the first time in her life. She completed tasks, she was more organized and focused and sequenced her tasks methodically. She also played imaginatively (dressing up). All these behaviours were manifestations of agency.

Without spelling it out, Janet's parents showed reluctance to join a member-checking interview. Reflection on their reluctance verified that whatever their motivations were, it was not part of the bounded system (defined for this case study) to explore the parent's choices. It was therefore decided to formulate a post-intervention agency status without a member-checking interview with Pat and Joe.

During a telephonic conversation with Joe (the last attempt to arrange a member-checking interview) the researcher suggested that the parents might like to have a discussion at a later stage. This could be arranged when the research report had been completed. The parents might want to review how the process had been for them as a family. The researcher felt that she had fully accommodated their parental rights. Both parents expressed that they felt the process of intervention had been worthwhile and a transformation had been brought about in Janet, which they were delighted about.

### **3.5 MEMBER-CHECKING WITH JANET**

Member-checking with Janet took place during the closure session. Janet expressed sadness that the special playtime had come to an end. She identified that she had learned a lot of new things (self-discoveries had taken place). She expressed her trust in the therapeutic process, by requesting that the treatment videos should not be shown to her parents and confirming that she was informed and happy to have her story told.

The fact that Janet could express that she felt sad, that she could also identify what she had learned during playtherapy was a statement of her agentic life-position. The ability to self-reflect on complex human experiences was captured by Bandura (2001:10) with the words: "The capability to reflect upon oneself and the adequacy of one's thoughts and actions is another distinctly core human feature of agency". The researcher wants to add to Bandura's caption the fact that access to and expression of feelings deepen the dimensions portrayed by him and enrich the human's expression of agency.

### **3.6 PEER-REVIEW BY THE KEY-INFORMANT**

The key-informant verified that the agency, which was noticed by the researcher, had indeed manifested and that Janet had displayed a significant shift in her lifeposition. The key-informant commented in particular on how amazed she had been that Janet who was functioning initially only on a concrete level, had responded so rapidly accessing abstract concepts within herself. Emphasis was on the reduction of the motor restlessness and the improvement of attention and impulse control since the initial sessions. The shift towards purposeful task engagement at the end of the intervention period was described as "remarkable". Janet's ability towards organismic self-regulation with regard to self-nurturing and dealing with difficult memories and an increase in playfulness (all abstract outcomes) had been promoted.

With regard to the pre-treatment and post-treatment play observations the key-informant commented as follows. "I could hardly believe this is the same child and in such a short time". Focus and joint attention had been brought about. Shifts in the quality of engagement were evident. The key-informant highlighted that a transfer of play themes from the playroom into the schoolroom had taken place. Joint attention with the therapist had been generalized into shared attention with her friends and with her teacher.

## **4 SYNTHESIS: JANET'S JOURNEY TOWARDS AN AGENTIC LIFE-POSITION**

Through the self-discoveries an agentic life position was enabled. Janet experienced what Csikszentmihalyi (1998) refers to as flow. Janet encountered herself as a capable agent in

her life with the potential for enjoyment and playfulness and purposeful task engagement. By being purposeful she had fulfilled the developmental task of pre-school age, resolving the initiative versus guilt crisis, characterized by the determination to achieve mastery (Erikson Chapter 2 2.1).

#### **4.1 AGENCY: FROM A GESTALT PLAYTHERAPUTIC PERSPECTIVE**

From a Gestalt perspective Yontef's view (1933:3) frames the process that has taken place as follows. Yontef emphasizes that people are continually discovering and re-discovering themselves. Janet had discovered herself during this process and was now responding to the developmental challenges, due to her enhanced agency. Janet's conscious being resulted from the shift in her life-position where she was liberated from the impasse (of passivity and avoidance or alternatively chaotic, random and non-productive activity). Janet's interaction with objects and people was transformed. This had a powerful effect on her doing. Purposeful agency enabled her to engage in developmentally appropriate life tasks. She also experienced the power of being able to choose between alternative options and taking responsibility for her choices and actions.

“Patients in Gestalt therapy are in charge of their lives. The therapist facilitates attention to opening restricted awareness and constricted contact boundaries; firmness and limits are brought into poorly defined areas. Gestalt work is like an act of grace. The organism does grow with awareness and contact. One thing lead to another”(Yontef 1993:25).

This had led to Janet's becoming.

#### **4.2 AGENCY: AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PERSPECTIVE**

Research on psycho-social theories of social withdrawal (in this study referred to as contact cutting) uncovered that self-alienation can be averted by gaining personal meaning. Such meaning leading to hope, allowing choice and the experience of agency (Cristiansen, 1999:555). Meaning is derived from an individual's understanding of life-context but also from the belief to have done the “right thing”. Bruner (1990:109) asserts that what constitutes the “right thing” is subject to alteration within a given chronological context.

According to Bruner, two universal phenomena operate in creating meaning. The first being human reflexivity, referring to the human capacity to turn around on the past in light of the present, and likewise to alter the present in the light of the past. Secondly, Bruner identified the human intellectual capacity to envision alternatives and to conceive other ways of being of acting and of striving. Janet, at the age of five years was not developmentally ready to fully perform such advanced cognitive operations (reflexivity and ability to envision alternatives). The process of Gestalt playtherapy helped her to reformulate the experiences and memories that had entrapped her in a state of blocked agency in a developmentally suitable way. This reformulation can be understood as what Bruner (1990:110) called “turn around the past to link it up with the present”. Her life-events were making more sense in a chronologically meaningful continuum. Difficult and deep-rooted life-events were identified. By reclaiming these experiences within the unique range of her understanding, Janet’s agency was empowered. Christiansen (1999,552) refers to this occurrence as: “tying agency to identity”. The dynamic interdependence between the facilitation of self- discovery and setting agency free was exposed.

In enabling Janet to connect with her own being, doing and becoming, the process that took place fulfilled the occupational therapy aim of promoting her sense of well-being (↪ Chapter 2: 3.2.3). Janet’s self-discovery led to existential contact with people and the objects around her. She connected significant events of her life to formulate an identity of who she is within a temporally meaningful manner. Agency was unleashed and filled her with life force. Through being and doing she is becoming and fulfilling her destiny.

#### **4.2.1 GOODNESS OF FIT: GESTALT & OCCUAPTIONAL THERAPY**

The researcher wishes to make an attempt at formulating Janet’s shift in her life-position in the occupational (being, doing, becoming) perspective. This has to her knowledge not been done before but in her perception thereby the appropriateness of utilizing Gestalt playtherapy within the occupational therapy theoretical framework can best be illustrated. (↪ Illustrations 2: Janet trapped in the impasse’ versus Janet’s enabled agency by opening the contact boundaries)

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**Illustration II: Janet trapped in an impasse versus Janet's released agency post-intervention:**



#### **4.2.2 DISCUSSION OF ILLUSTRATION II: JANET'S ENTRAPPED AND RELEASED AGENCY**

The analysis leading to the illustration is based on Wilcock's model (1998) of doing, being and becoming (Chapter 2:3.2.3) and Perl's (1951) view of entrapping a person's contact-function in the neurotic layer of the impasse' (Chapter 2:4.2.1). Janet's "being" was restricted within impenetrable contact- boundaries maintaining her in an impasse and disallowing agency. Janet maintained this system through her "doing" which manifested in disconnecting herself from people and objects as well as responding unselectively and randomly to stimuli in the field, making it impossible to attend selectively. "Being" and "doing" were expressed in unspecific undefined ways, accounting for an inability to engage in developmentally appropriate tasks. By being stuck so rigidly in an impasse there was no notion of "becoming".

Gestalt playtherapy intervention combined with the self-enabling structure opened the contact boundaries and Janet could escape from the impasse. As Janet became more contactful she became more selective in orientating to stimuli. Her agency led to life satisfaction, which encouraged her to maintain and expand further on her agency. Contactfulness of her inner being and her outside world led to Janet experiencing her "being". This triggered her ability to orientate, to attend and to respond to sensory experiences, feelings and environmental challenges and resulted in "doing". Being and doing allowed Janet to explore and refine developmental skills and to define and re-define herself in the constant spiral of "becoming".

It is hoped that this study will in a small way have helped to shed light on the complex processes which were influencing the single preschool participant's life-position and that the findings will deepen insight on the phenomenon of agency. Chapter 6 comprises of a reflection on the outcomes on this inquiry in relationship to the initial research proposal. The researcher will express her impressions around these findings and the discussion thereof may ultimately make a contribution and provide recommendations for planning and problem-approaches with regard to the promotion of well-being in pre-school children.