

Rhythms of Relating in Children's Therapies: Connecting Creatively with Vulnerable Children. Stuart Daniel and Colwyn Trevarthen (Eds). London, Philadelphia PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017. 374 pp. Illustrated

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This collection of writings from across the globe provides a variety of multidisciplinary focussed chapters that each take a different pathway to highlight how rhythm, connection, play and creativity can assist trauma healing. Each chapter draws upon a solid research base to illustrate effective ways to use rhythm and creativity to underpin therapeutic work with children. Numerous case illustrations covering attachment issues, developmental trauma, anxiety, challenging behaviour and learning difficulties are a key feature of a book that is woven together by a central rhythm that encompasses play and the creative arts of music and dance.

Rhythms of Relating is presented in a clear format and divided into two related parts. Part one offers two chapters that are focussed on the musical essence in human connection; part two consists of nineteen chapters underpinned by rhythms of relationship inherent in a wide variety of children's therapy.

In part one, the initial chapter "Love, Rhythm and Chronobiology" by Osborne (2017) is well placed upfront as it sets the scene for the themed concept of "rhythm" and discusses the rhythms inherent in life and nature.

From here the discourse leads on to time and sensing, weaving a rather complex but fascinating dialogue that discusses the rhythms of darkness and sunlight and the overall connection with the human sleep/wake cycle and circadian rhythms. Osborne examines what he refers to as the human "window of rhythm", describing it as the ability to discern rhythm including perceiving a pulse and identifying individual beats as well as our ability to perceive the overall musicality of the rhythm. He extends this "window of rhythm" concept further to bring in the therapeutically-relevant area of nonverbal interactions and human connection without reliance on language.

Many therapeutic texts draw attention to how humans can co-regulate another person but, in highlighting the human ability to co-regulate another's arousal, Osborne takes the next step by offering the reader further information about rhythm that is underpinned by solid research covering such concepts as vibrations, waves and their neurobiological impact. He highlights how rhythm is significant for healing, stress reduction and regulating affect, and, in doing so, offers important information for a range of practitioners including therapists, dancers, musicians and researchers.

Chapter two, "Health and happiness grow in play", written by Trevarthen (2017), looks at the benefits of movement and play within a context of relationship. Trevarthen highlights his interest in playful interaction with infants as a foundation for human learning and development and draws upon his extensive research into early learning and cognition dating back to 1968. In doing this, emphasis is placed on the learning that occurs in a child prior to language development. Trevarthen discusses the impact of movement, play and its connection with the young person's communication and learning processes. Key to this development is "intersubjectivity theory" (p. 28), which is closely aligned with attachment theory; as Hughes (2011) aptly describes it in his workbook on attachment-focused family therapy, intersubjectivity is crucial to the development of the young individual within the family context (p. 2) and allows for play to be shared within this context bodily and consciously.

Once again the theme of rhythm emerges in this chapter as Trevarthen brings attention to his research on infants and how their eyes and head move in "precise synchrony" (p. 30) tracking an object in the same consistent rhythm used by adults in activities such as scanning an object.

Actions of the body are described and reveal contemporary understandings about sound and rhythm. A fascinating study of a young blind baby who was recorded conducting her mother's singing illustrates the use of bodily action in the form of hand gestures to mark phrases and melody shifts in her mother's voice, showing synchronicity and attunement through sound with gestures akin to that of a conductor even though she had never seen a conductor.

These key concepts of rhythm and movement described by Trevarthen (2017) offer the practitioner opportunities to discover new ways of facilitating learning and new ways of relating through play, rhythm and movement.

In reading part two I could not help but be reminded of the work of Vygotsky (1986), who offered us that developmentally and educationally-focussed vernacular, the "zone of proximal development". This is the place in which a child's less structured and more spontaneous concepts meet the systematic logic of adult reasoning, offering a kind of compensation for the less competent child with the scientific logic of the adult (p. xxxv). This collection of writings highlights the co-operation possible with a key adult such as a therapist to positively promote the child's growth and mental health and wellbeing.

Chapter eight, “Play and the dynamics of treating pediatric medical trauma: Insights from polyvagal theory”, is excellent and would be amongst my favourite chapters in the book. In the chapter, Porges and Daniel (2017) offer a detailed understanding of polyvagal theory through a series of readily understandable case examples. The examples use the concept of play and its impact on children to illustrate aspects of the theory of polyvagal; in doing this, it enables a complex theory to be accessible in a memorable and comprehensive way.

Chapter ten, “Harnessing the dragon: Using an image of unbridled life force in play therapy” offered by McCarthy (2017), weaves a fast paced story drawing on the use of play therapy techniques and the symbolism inherent in the use of the dragon to support children’s healing and change. It is a fascinating and easy read that conveys the benefit of play therapy and the need for a wise and attuned therapist for supporting change and healing, all underpinned by the important use and positioning of the dragon in play.

Finally, I will highlight chapter seventeen, “Establishing relationships with children with autism spectrum disorders through dance movement psychotherapy: A case study using artistic enquiry” by Athanasiadou and Karkou (2017). Unlike the majority of the book, this chapter places emphasis on the use of artistic enquiry as a research lens to inform on the benefits of dance movement psychotherapy (DMP). Artistic enquiry is a postmodern form of qualitative enquiry that is explored in depth as a research method in Leavy (2009) and in Hervey (2012).

The author draws upon DMP concepts such as attunement, mirroring and embodied play to describe the important relationship of movement and the body in the therapeutic process. The research used video recordings of sessions, the therapist’s somatic responses to session-based interactions, and written reflection by the therapist based upon observations, feelings and ideas. Data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). Unlike some of the other chapters in the book, in this study, the author was both the researcher and the therapist, and actively drew upon her own emotions and personal experience to inform the outcomes. Consistent with this approach, the chapter is peppered with vignettes of the therapist’s somatic responses and reflections. This chapter not only highlights the use of dance and movement as a useful therapeutic medium but also brings to life the use of artistic enquiry as a research method.

Overall, the book is refreshingly diverse and I believe of tremendous value to researchers and therapists alike. This book is worthy of attention and highly recommended.

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