

Book review

Play and art in child psychotherapy

By Ellen G. Levine

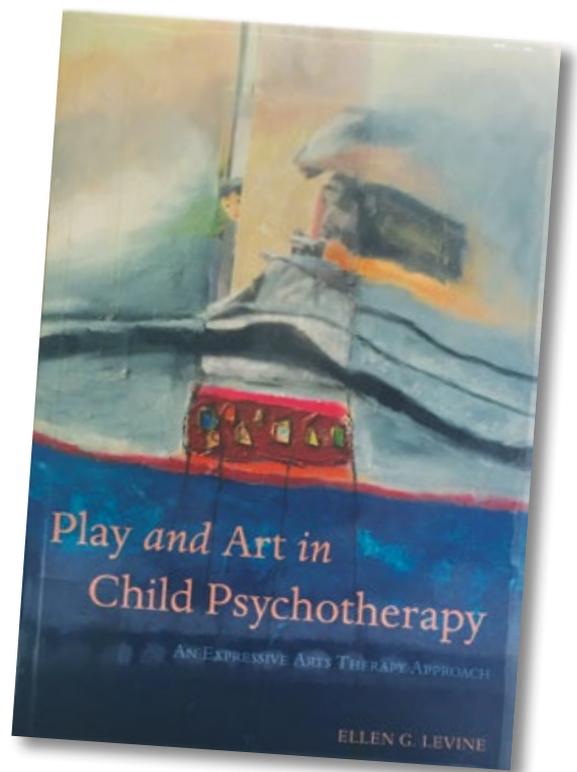
Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2015
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Reviewed by Kristy Thorburn
Ipswich Art Therapy, Australia

The pathway through a career in the expressive therapies is rarely a straightforward one, nor is it one that is achieved from a single university program or training course. Levine's experience has been no different, and she begins this contribution to the expressive therapy literature with a journey through her own diverse training and career development, predominantly in North America and Europe. This is an interesting account that gives insight into the non-linear ways that we develop our approaches.

The book then moves from Levine's professional autobiography into establishing an incredibly useful component, "the architecture of a session". Here, even seasoned professionals will enjoy reading about the unique way Levine frames her sessions. Of particular interest is her conceptualisation of the treatment phase of sessions as a time of decentring into the alternative reality of the therapy process. Never before have I heard this process explained so eloquently. Levine also moves through the processes of aesthetic analysis and the assessment phase that she refers to as 'filling-in'. Of all the chapters in this book, Chapter Two is one that I would have particularly liked on my university reading list.

The case studies immerse the reader in Levine's style of play-based work with children and their families. There is acknowledgement of the systemic approach necessary to engage effectively with families, and, just as importantly, Levine encourages us to embrace play, to engage families in play, and to make a true commitment to developing an understanding of the nature of play-based expression in a multitude of settings. Valuable reflective comments are provided on the



case studies presented. These are the kind of deep learning conversations that many of us wish we had the opportunity to regularly hear from more experienced clinicians.

Levine also provides us with a discussion of a supportive arts-based inquiry methodology that she uses to gain insight into her therapeutic work. While this is rather laborious to read through, it is nonetheless perceptive and wholeheartedly honest, and provides a thorough methodology for the reader to repurpose in their own practice. I am glad to see this in the main text of the published book, as discussion of these processes is rare, and so often seems to be hidden away in drafts, appendices and notes, where the reader does not have the opportunity to garner learning.

This book will be very valuable for therapists who are preparing to use play in the therapy room, as well as those who are currently doing so. The skilful intersection of play-based interventions with visual art therapy is a great strength of this work, and something that students and professionals alike will find beneficial.

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