

ARTS & PLAY THERAPY IN PRIMARY SETTINGS: A CASE STUDY

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THE NZ CONTEXT: CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health of children is gaining increasing focus and concern

Young children are experiencing "unprecedented levels of loneliness and stress"

Lack of social emotional resources in ECE setting and schools

10-20% of children worldwide estimated to experience mental health disorders

Half all mental health disorders begin by the age of 14

NZ has highest rate of suicide rate of 19 of the worlds most developed and wealthy countries

Not a lot of mental health support is available to children and young people – often reserved for those who can pay privately.





WHAT IS PLAY THERAPY?

- Play Therapy is a psychotherapeutic approach that is primarily used to support children age 3-12 years
- Key theorists: Carl Rogers (Person Centred Approach) and Virginia Axline's 8 Principles of non-directive Play Therapy
- Can be directive or non-directive
- Interest in neuroscience and concepts such as mirror neurons and rewiring of neural pathways through interactions
- "Anything can be anything in the play"
- It doesn't matter what toys are available; it is the therapist that is essential
- Provides an optimal setting for children to explore their thoughts and emotions through play
- Therapist provides unconditional positive regard and undivided attention
- Few rules or limitations are placed on the child
- Child can engage in free expression through play

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

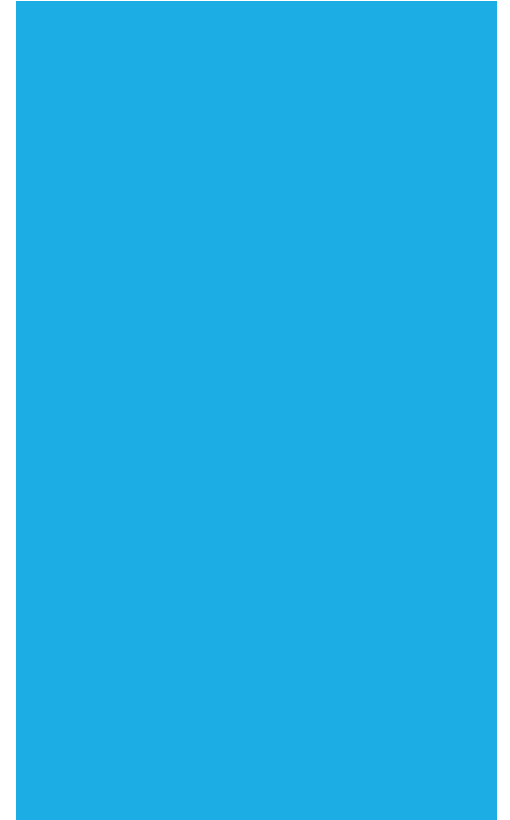
APTE Partnership (Arts and Play Therapy Through Play)

- Charity organisation
- Ministry of Education granted APTE Wellbeing Funding
- Unitec Voucher

Three components

- **Stage 1: Interviews with whanau and school staff**
- Stage 2: PD Creative Circle
- Stage 3: Repeating Interviews with whanau and school staff & reviews with children

Identify the perceptions of parents/whanau and school staff members whose child or students have participated in arts and play therapy provided by APTE





STAGE 1:

Decile 1 school in South Auckland

12 children participated in group or individual sessions for a term?

Group sessions were 80mins – 2 adults present in the session (therapist and teacher/SENCO)

Interviewed:

- 6 school staff members and 1 parent
- Focus group of 3 parents

Example Questions Included:

- How do you think the APTE programme influences children?
- How do you think the APTE programme affects the school staff?
- Overall has your experience been positive, negative or in between?

KEY FINDINGS /THEMES

- Challenges

- The lack of funding, teacher training and support in the primary sector
- Trust between families and staff
- Range of issues: trauma, poverty, housing, attendance

- Positives

- Changes in their children's behaviour for example less aggression
- Children had more awareness of others
- Children developed tools to communicate and express their feelings
- Behaviour shifts not only in school but also in their home
- Better concentration in class and children wanted to attend school

PARTICIPANT VOICES

- "When he started misbehaving in the class and misbehaving in the playground it wasn't the child that I knew. With therapy he's back to himself. He's laughing, he's enjoying school, he's also coming to school more regularly"
- "The shift we have seen in children was more than I could have hoped for. We've just seen some children with such a major shift in a very short time. It addresses, different things, it might be one child's really aggressive and this has calmed them and we've got to see a nicer generous side of them or we've got a real introvert child who's painfully shy, who's anxious about everything is more willing to give things a shot because they're feeling more supported"
- "The result has been happier kids, way happier kids, throughout the whole school"

PARTICIPANT VOICES

- "What I saw was calmer teachers. I remember walking in the classrooms or up to the classrooms at different stages and you can see them a little bit stressed out since the Play Therapy group started, I walk in and it is all a lot calmer"
- "This has helped children to feel heard and that if I say something, somebody will listen to me and that empowers them. I can solve this problem"
- "The children felt like they were accepted, they could share their inner thoughts in a nonthreatening way, through play or through art, they can talk about things that were in their head"



NEXT STEPS FOR THE RESEARCH

1

Complete

- Complete analyses and publish Study 1 (Perspectives of Play Therapy)

2

Complete

- Complete analyses and publish Study 2 (Creative Circle Time PD for teachers)

3

Explore

- Explore possibilities of implementation of Study 3 in 2021



ANY QUESTIONS?