



Drama for Life – Wits School of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Our inner child speaks to the stories of ourselves that we carry around either knowingly or unknowingly. These stories may come in many forms and this research aimed to awaken these early experiences through the method of play. Neuro-dramatic play is a frame of play in Drama Therapy that was used to frame the activity choices. The method of guided play was used as a container to carry out the neuro-dramatic play techniques. These methods also set a frame for understanding how the inner child can be awakened. A way to activate these memories is through using our bodies as a vessel that allows the flow of experience to take place. This is why play is an important element of this research as it assists us in traveling to and navigating that space in time, using our bodies. The colonized African child growing up under post-colonial times may have the experience and memory of being deprived of play due to colonial factors that include Apartheid, land displacement, and but not limited to slave labour. These colonial factors were introduced to hinder the black mind from remembering and consciously being aware of who they are. The system continues to serve those who are oppressors as play factors have not been clearly defined in the African context. This study investigates how the use of play in the context of Drama Therapy, can be used to awaken the inner child of the black Indigenous African adult.

Keywords: *play, inner child, awakening, guided play, neuro-dramatic play, African, adults, Indigenous, drama therapy*

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CONTENTS:

Title	5
Background to research	5
Rationale	8
Research Questions	10
Aims and Objectives	10
Literature Review:	10
• Inner Child (Awakening)	10
• Play	12
• Play in Drama Therapy	14
• Play in Africa	15
Research Methods	17
Ethics Considerations	18
Conclusion	19
Findings:	19
• The Researcher	19
Research Analysis Discussion:	21
• Group One- “Di Noga”	22
• Group Two- “Iphupho L’ka Sarafina”	26
• Group Three- “Igama Lami”	30
Further Observations	34
Limitations	35
Recommendations	35
References	36

Title: The Awakening: Makudlalwe. A study on how play awakens the inner child in black Indigenous African adults.

Background to Research:

When the idea of awakening the inner child in adults arose, I had my mother in mind. This is because of a conversation we had. The conversation sparked my curiosity on what it would feel like for her to experience and fulfil her positive inner child wishes. The inner child as defined by Fox (2017:68), refers to one's original or true self that serves as a vault of wisdom and creativity for its adult counterpart. Through awakening the inner child, the adult counterpart engages as their younger selves (Fox, 2017). This made me start thinking about ways in which I can engage and awaken the inner child of adults. The concept of "inner child" was first proposed by Carl Jung after he examined his childlike feelings and emotions (Bradshaw, 2013:89). If children can make that connection to their environment through play, perhaps using the same method on adults who were once children would effectively work the same way.

As humans, we have the tendency and instinct to observe, imitate, and teach (Fox, 2017). This factor activates our ability to experiment, experience, ponder, and reinvent ourselves (Fox, 2017:54). Play was what I assumed would be the best to awaken the inner child. This is because I have witnessed and read through the theory that assumes that play is how children process their environment. Vygotsky (1967:8), defines play as an early part of childhood that assists children with cognitive, social, and emotional development. Awakening the inner child can assist the adult in exploring both past, present, and future explorations of the self that may lead to analysing contexts that one lives in now.

I am a black African woman who comes from a lineage of black Africans that birthed me. I mention this because it is important to note that my research aims to work with black indigenous Africans who are currently living in South Africa. Black Indigenous Africans refer to groups of people who lived in Africa before colonists or settlers arrived, defined new borders, and began to occupy the land (Mzileni& Diko, 2022). With this being noted, the significance of highlighting black history for those living in South Africa will put into context why my focus is on black Africans and specifically, why play in these communities.

Black people, as the indigenous inhabitants of the Southern African territory, lived off the land for their survivalist, social, economic, cultural, and spiritual livelihood (Mazibuko, 2000). Dladla (2018) emphasizes how land dispossession and conquest were the main features of colonialism in South Africa. The violent confiscation of African land by European colonists rendered those colonized landless and stripped of the intellectual and socio-economic assets that constrained them from practicing their basic traditions of subsistence livelihood (Mzileni& Diko, 2022). Africans also have a

history of play that may not be recorded or widely distributed however, African descendants had their livelihood and way of playing before colonization assumed it null.

Mzileni& Diko (2022), continued to report that this resulted in the forceful acceptance and practice of the living standards of European modernity, which required those colonized to work for most of the day in anticipation of wages and a public obligation to pay personal taxes. Coming to terms with these realities meant that time for family care, generational investment, and economic innovation for our black population group was reduced to almost non-existent due to the occupations that people laboured into (Mzileni& Diko, 2022). The time that was meant to be invested in the livelihood of the black population came to serve the livelihood of the colonizers. This meant that the system itself placed black people into serving their colonizers rather than themselves.

The social engineering of apartheid contributed to the systematic and systemic nature that has made it nearly impossible for black people to have decent houses, functioning family households, conducive spaces to formulate communities, and the liberty to pay attention to the cognitive and social development of their children (Mzileni& Diko, 2022). The industrialized apartheid economy came at the expense of children's authentic growth and the natural development of black families, resulting in children not having the social space and psychological support to freely and fully express their right to play (Mzileni& Diko, 2022). My mother and I grew up in different timelines and even though the latter statement may not be true for me, there is certainty that it is true for her. From my experience of being around predominantly black spaces as a child, I was not aware nor taught that play is a constitutional right and I feel this is so because our parents may have wanted to keep a certain control around when, where, and how we play as children. The traumas of being watched and having a curfew during the apartheid era may have affected how our parents allowed us to play.

In Article 31, of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Children, the fundamental human right for children to enjoy leisure time and play must be upheld by all democratic states (UN,1990). This right was made fundamental in 1990, during a time when South Africa was yet to become democratic. The black African population was still living under constraints that did not allow them to practice living and playing as free as they wished, this however, does not mean that play was not existent in these communities. The post-apartheid South African government adhered to the UN requirement by carrying out similar principles in the 1996 Constitution Bill of Rights and Children's Act of 2005 (Mzileni& Diko, 2022). Democracy was implemented in 1994 in South Africa however this does not mean that all was now equal. The systems that oppress black Africans introduced are still in play to date.

The inner child is important to mention because the research will be investigating black Indigenous African adults who are above the age of 25. I chose the age of 25 because Arain et.al, (2013), stated

that the brain finishes developing and maturing at the age of 25. The development of the prefrontal cortex is important for complex behavioural performance as this region of the brain assists in accomplishing executive brain functions (Araín et.al, 2013). It often happens that when we grow older, we lose touch with the playful, imaginative, and spontaneous side that our inner child unconsciously carries in our psyche (Jung, 2020). As I enter into the drama therapy profession, I have had a realization of the important role that plays contributes towards the awakening of one's soul. Play can navigate one's reality as the things revealed through play can reflect the lives of those who are in the play in a manner that is distanced (Jones, 2008). This research will contribute to the Drama Therapy profession in terms of looking into play as one of the core processes of the profession.

Nachmanovitch (1990:43) states, "Play cannot be defined, because, in play, all definitions slither, dance, combine, break apart, and recombine... Play is the free spirit of exploration, doing and being for its own pure joy". Even though one may not be able to coin and define play in words that others may deem satisfactory, what we can do is witness and experience it in the body through the doing and practice of it. Many play theorists have reported on and defined play according to their own best observations. However, Vygotsky (1967:8) defines play as an early part of childhood that assists children with cognitive, social, and emotional development. In South Africa, children's right to play is often connected to formal schooling and disregards informal street playing by children from disadvantaged communities as play (Mzileni& Diko, 2022). This brings difficulty in knowing how to define play for different contexts. Sutton (2008) however argues that street playing is as beneficial as play that takes place in formal schooling environments.

"What is important to underscore is that as long as playing is self-generated by children in their natural setting, it will still cultivate and improve their learning, cognitive development, socioemotional growth, language competencies, creativity, and critical thinking, regardless of the playing space being utilized" (Mzileni&Diko, 2022:74). Play is also regarded as for children because of its embodied nature that adults supposedly do not want to embrace. Adults often perceive the playfulness that happens in play as a lack of seriousness. In the development of children, play is central because it assists in individuals being able to exercise and refine their abilities that propel how they comprehend and manage the world around them (Vygotsky, 1968).

This research is driven towards accumulating knowledge and collecting data about how play can awaken the inner child of African adults. The research workshops to be held do not aim to teach ways in which one can behave. There may however be moments of gaining knowledge that may lead to adjustment of thoughts through reflective processes. As a therapist in training, I will not be using the method of play for therapeutic purposes however; one always has the hope that in interactions with individuals, there will be space for an impact that can allow one to self-reflect in their own space.

Rationale/Motivation:

It would be easy to argue and say that we are all always playing. Consider times when we shout at the TV or engage with our phones. Also, consider times when we imagine and rehearse conversations with another person. All of this is play. Most of us do not realize that we are constantly playing in our heads and out loud, with the difference being that we might not be labelling it as play. Play is necessary to affirm our lives because it is through play that one gets to answer the puzzle of their existence (Kekae-Moletsane, 2008). Play allows us to skip into an element of self-experience that opens a reflective space for one to recognize themselves, others, and their environment (Kekae-Moletsane, 2008). This means that the element of play is existent in our lives however we may not be constantly conscious of that play. Children thrive when engaging in free play as they get to participate voluntarily, be flexible, and have active engagement and fun (Weisberg et al, 2016:178). Guided play provides learning experiences through the child-directed nature of free play while focusing on learning outcomes under the guidance of a facilitator or therapist (Weisberg et al, 2016:177).

One of the thoughts behind my reasoning to use play is because I intentionally want people to experience play consciously and through the methods of guided play, I believe the inner child will be consciously awakened. Guided play is deliberately used as an intervention within a treatment plan as a vehicle towards growth and change, as opposed to the unguided and spontaneous play that happens naturally to children (Jones, 2008:273). The reason for my integration of guided play as opposed to free play is because of my bias as a person who can be a participant in my research. I feel that adults may want to be guided on how to play, especially in the space where the intention is to play.

Play has an important role in not only how we perceive ourselves, but also how we choose to connect with others. This can be unpredictable and personal to the person (Kekae-Moletsane, 2008). I will use play in my sessions as a way to bring forth the benefits of playing and illuminating its benefits to the Drama Therapy profession. Jones (2008) considers play as one of the nine core processes of the drama therapy practice. It is defined as the process where the client engages their body in the process and gives in playing games and warm-ups (Jones, 2008:23). Play in Drama Therapy does not operate as a separate entity although it is always integrated in all aspects within the core processes.

This research will explore embodied experimentation with consideration of the different contexts and cultures that we carry as diverse African people. Neuro-dramatic play will also be one of the methods that will assist me in the workshops. Jennings (1998:7) theorizes that neuro-dramatic play enables the development of trust and hope, and the capacity to empathize with others. With this in consideration, we will go into play and explore awakening our inner child through play. Trammell (2023:3), goes on to state that we need to redefine play as the definitions of play that people of colour experience may not be what is considered play in other contexts. As people of colour, we are exposed to and

experience different from one of our colonizers (Trammell, 2023). Kekae-Moletsane (2008), reports that most African children in South African townships and rural areas from disadvantaged families do not have toys and they improvise by playing with the materials that are freely available to them. These games do not require commercialized material and may include clay, sticks and stones, sand, and so on (Kekae-Moletsane, 2008). This means that play does not have to be commercialized for it to exist however it has been made to seem as though it is a luxury that has to be afforded by certain groups to maintain a particular system.

Children who are traumatized lose play opportunities that benefit their current developmental stage because they try to protect themselves emotionally or physically while attempting to resolve the trauma consuming much of their time (Kekae-Moletsane, 2008). The above statement illuminated to me how black Africans who have experienced and are still experiencing physical and systematic oppression may not want to consciously engage in play. This may be due to the systems that have been placed for one to perceive themselves in a particular way. Traumatic experiences that take place often hinder how a child plays and responds to play (Kekae-Moletsane, 2008). If the reality of painful memories enters the consciousness of the children, it can flood their emotions to the point of incapacitating them.

Without therapeutic intervention, when these children become adults, essential parts of their character may be missing (Kekae-Moletsane, 2008). For instance, they may find it difficult to empathise with the feeling of childhood. With this difficulty at hand, it is important to emphasise that all participants who will be partaking in the research have consented and received knowledge that the research sessions consist of awakening the inner child. Having noted that I feel it is also important to note that even though feelings of negativity and difficulty may arise, the intention behind awakening the inner child is to re-imagine ourselves positively and engage in a manner that does not harm the self or others.

This study looks to contribute to the Drama Therapy profession by exploring the theory of play; using guided play and neuro-dramatic play in the workshops. This research will explore how black African adults play. My observations have revealed that play amongst adults in the black African community is considered of childish nature, therefore using the theme of awakening the inner child will break the walls of thinking or holding yourself as an adult. The notions that we hold around play are the ones that have shaped our relationship with play. One would even argue that one of the reasons it is taking so long for Drama Therapy to make its way into African communities as a profession is because the belief is that anything that involves play is not real nor is it reality. Winnicott (1991) emphasizes how play, creativity, and cultural experiences are important to the development of a healthy and authentic individual.

Play is crucial for a child's development as it is beneficial for people of all ages. Play can help us connect to others and the world around us, add joy to our lives relieve stress can make us more productive in our personal and professional lives (Proyer, 2013). This research will make use of the methods of guided play and neuro-dramatic play. These methods will be a guide that will assist in awakening the inner child in black African adults who feel they would like to get in touch with their inner child and explore play in their adult lives.

The research is not an intervention nor is it a therapeutic process for any of the participants. The research will investigate play as a method with the acknowledgment of how necessary play is in Drama therapy. The participants came in having acknowledged that they would like to awaken the inner child using play in the sessions. If any therapeutic needs arise, there will be a therapist to assist those who feel a need. Play is philosophical and generates an attitude of expressiveness and creativity within the therapeutic process (Jones, 2008:278). The research also aims to promote expressiveness and creativity within adult African individuals and groups using play. The hope is to contribute to multiple African knowledge systems that report on the methods of play in our black communities.

Research Questions:

How does play awaken the inner child in adults?

How is play understood in the black African community?

How do Black African adults benefit from consciously integrating play into their lives?

Aims and Objectives

This research aims to:

- Explore if, and how play awakens the inner child in black Indigenous African adults.
- Understand the idea of the inner child and the benefits of playfulness in adults.
- Discover how the black African community in South Africa understands play.
- Investigate the mechanisms of play that allow the inner child to be awakened in adults.

Literature Review:

Inner child (awakening)

The inner child as defined by Fox (2017:68) refers to one's original or true self that serves as a vault of wisdom and creativity for its adult counterpart. As humans, we have the tendency and instinct to

observe, imitate, and teach and this factor activates our ability to experiment, experience, ponder, and reinvent ourselves (Fox, 2017:54). Carl Jung first proposed the concept of the “inner child” after he examined his childlike inner feelings and emotions (Bradshaw, 2013:89).

Fox (2017) has explained the inner child as part of our subconscious that has been picking up messages way before it was able to process what was going on mentally and emotionally. This is why I refer to ‘remembering’ ourselves when referring to awakening the inner child through play. Our perspectives often have to do with time where painful and trying periods are eased through gaining a larger perspective (Emunah, 2019). It happens that through remembering our past and conceiving our future, we can bear the present. “The future holds the possibility of change; we are momentarily relieved by the knowledge that later we may not be stuck in the same place. The past helps us comprehend the present and enables us to draw from a myriad of experiences that have challenged and enriched us” (Kidder, 2021:324). The inner child is an unconscious subpersonality that consists of a person who has learned experiences in the earliest years of their life (Wacks, 1994). Even though the inner child's personality is subordinate to the conscious mind, it still influences the mind and can have negative manifestations if the inner child is traumatized, wounded, or anxious (Wacks, 1994). When in the dramatic mode, time can easily be manipulated and we can be ourselves across different timelines of the past, present, or future tense (Emunah, 2019). This means that reflection happens through enacting a scene that is to take place or has already taken place.

While acting, we are both participant and observer; we are emotionally engaged in the reality that is portrayed, and at the same time, witnessing what is taking place (Kidder, 2021). The degree of identification and distancing, subjectivity and objectivity, varies according to scene and individual, but both factors are always at play (Kidder, 2021).

Often, realizing the needs that you have come with noting that we often have needs that link to the deprivation of a certain want or need that we may have had as children (Winnicott, 1991). Essentially, our inner child is the forgiving, free-spirited part of us that still feels and experiences life as a child, but, just as it carries the positive aspects of being a child (like innocence, joy, and creativity), it also carries the wounding of our past (Jung, 2020). These wounds are caused by physical or emotional abuse, bullying, or growing up in a broken family, for instance (Dayton, 2019). We may sometimes find that the resulting pain lives with us for the rest of our lives, sometimes popping up at the most unexpected moments; like when someone shouts at you and you reflect on the instance using words such as “I just went to a corner and cried because I felt like a seven-year-old” (Dayton, 2019). This supports Jung’s assertion that it is the inside part (the inner child) that influences all we do and the decisions that we make (Bradshaw, 2013). As adults, we are accustomed to and good at thinking but not always so good at feeling.

It follows then, that by allowing adults to play, the needs and wants of the inner child of the participants will eventually illuminate and be witnessed through the choices that the participants make in the play (Jennings, 2018). The natural urge for humans to act out the contents of our inner world is inborn making the use of dramatic forms as a means to communicate, teach, and heal is as old as history (Jennings, 2018). The space that the therapist opens for clients then becomes a safe space through psychological and emotional exploration and explains the issues that are close to the human heart. Ancient Greeks have been using drama and role-play as a way to explore psychological and emotional issues that are close to the human heart (Jennings, 2018). In the modern adaptation, psychodrama, sociometry, and experiential group therapy provide a controlled acting out in service of healing (Jennings, 2018). These methods may aid in assisting to awaken the inner child.

It gets easier for us to get stuck in the busy bustle of the world that we forget our dreams on waking up, and denigrate the idea of 'inner child' as the 'silly stuff' (Bradshaw, 2013). Jungian psychotherapy works with healing the inner child and does so by compassionately working with this inner child to teach them new patterns of behaviour (Jacoby, 2003). Once these patterns come in sync, the adult becomes free from the compulsion to act upon the whims of the unruly, subconscious child (Jacoby, 2003). There are various ways to awaken the inner child and they include elements of play such as writing letters to your younger self and playing games you played as a child or connecting with hobbies that you once had as a child.

The inner child is readily available in one's body and speaks more readily in the language of feelings, which consists of the body, movement, play, and the arts (Jung, 2020). Play is suitable to be used in the method of having to awaken one's inner child. It is said that our inner child is a part of us that has been present since we were conceived through utero and continues to be as we grow and develop from our young tender selves: baby, infant, toddler, young child, and middle school year (Cappachione, 1991). Following on from Cappachione (1991), it may be of use to mirror the development through play, for example, by travelling into the foetus position, inviting the participants to also explore themselves as toddlers, young children, and teen years.

Play

Play is a dynamic process that allows children to express themselves in their ways and become socialised with other children (Axline, 1974). It is the heart of childhood. It is often not easy for children to express themselves verbally therefore play can be used to express their concerns, fears, and desires in their environment (Axline, 1974). Play is a free and effortless expression of life and is important in developing imagination and guiding new ways of viewing everyday life (Axline, 1974). Play also assists in exploring the internal and external world of the individual.

Lev Vygotsky was a Soviet psychologist best known for developing a framework around cultural-historical activity. Vygotsky covers the theory of play in this research and assists me in knowing how to frame play and what happens during play. Vygotsky's play theory proposes that imaginative play is a leading factor in development as it is a unique and broadly influential zone of proximal development in children (Scharer, 2017:66). The zone of proximal development is the space between what the learner can do without assistance versus what they can do with the guidance of an adult or support of peers (Scharer, 2017). During this time children, experiment with a wide array of challenging skills as they also acquire culturally valued competencies (Block, 1982). Vygotsky's theory of play suggests that each stage builds upon previous ones, and he believed that adults learn from observing children (Berk, 1994). Vygotsky also believed that play is a form of sociocultural learning (Berk, 1994). Play is an overarching theme of this research; however, guided play will draw attention specifically to how we play as a way to awaken the inner child.

Guided play, as theorised by Weisberg et al., (2016), has three fundamental characteristics that work together to provide an optimal learning experience. These characteristics include:

- Adult guidance- the adult (facilitator or therapist) providing guidance is to have a clear learning goal in mind when setting up a playful activity (2016).
- Degree of choice and agency- the activity or interaction should allow for some degree of choice and agency over their play (2016).
- Flexibility- the adult should be flexible in their use of guidance techniques to ensure sensitivity to the child's interests and needs (2016).

Playing alone is different when compared to playing under the supervision of a therapist/facilitator during a process. The play, however, is a means of achieving a goal. The child is receiving care and permission is given to them that they are supported to play (Weisberg et al., 2016).

In guided play, the learning experience is inherently meaningful to the child as play naturally cultivates their enjoyment, motivation, and agency (Weisberg et al., 2016). The participants will create their meaning through engaging in the play. The guidance of the adult extends the scope of learning for the child beyond what they may be able to achieve on their own (Weisberg et al., 2016). It is important to note that guided play does not have to relate to a specific type of play, indeed it could include elements of several types including physical play, object play, and pretend and sociodramatic play (Hopkins, 2019:32).

Play in Drama Therapy

Neuro-Dramatic-Play (NDP), as theorised by Jennings (2011), is an attachment-based intervention that focuses on the early playful relationship between ‘mother and unborn child- mother and newborn child’. Both children and adults engage with it. Play and drama assist in emphasising a combination of basic trust, security, and ritual, with stimulation, exploration, and risk (Jennings, 2011). Clients feel safe to explore the world and feel a desire to explore it because of the ritual and risk that form the basis of these explorations. When engaged in Neuro-Dramatic-Play clients tend to become more playful and think ‘outside the box’ while encouraging independence and self-reliance (Jennings, 2011). The processes of NDP aim to affirm people’s identity and self-esteem, as well as build social relationships (2011). It is ideal to use with people who have been traumatised, neglected, or abused.

Three developmental stages are involved in Neuro-Dramatic-Play and they include; Creative Care, Therapeutic Ritual and Storytelling, and Theatre of Resilience.

Creative Care- speaks to attachment and nature-nurture. There can be rhythmic and dramatic play involving sound, voice, and movement, as well as sensory and echo play (Holmwood, 2022). Sensory involves using the body to explore the world through touch, smell, taste, sight, hearing, and movement (Jennings, 2018). Echo therapy uses play and movement as a way to increase active participation (Jennings, 2018).

Therapeutic Ritual and Storytelling- involves non-verbal creativity, structured stories and rituals, therapeutic storytelling, and creative visualization (Holmwood, 2022).

Theatre of Resilience- includes role-play and dramatization, and may include aspects of culture-based performance and interactive stories that involve celebrations and ceremonies (Holmwood, 2022).

NDP assists us in understanding the role that play has (Holmwood, 2022). It also reflects on how play expands in the contexts of its use, as well as helps us to understand the value that play has in the life of an adult (Holmwood, 2022). Following on from the early childhood focus of NDP, Jennings (2011) theorises on Embodiment-Projection-Role (EPR), which is a developmental paradigm that charts the progression of dramatic play from birth to 7 years. EPR is a progression that is parallel to developmental processes that include physical, cognitive, emotional, and social processes.

EPR is ‘value-free’: it does not rely on a particular school of psychological theory; and is integrated into any psychological model or therapeutic or educational practice (Jennings, 2011). When in a drama, the behaviours, roles, and emotions portrayed become part of one’s repertoire that draws upon life situations (Emunah, 2019). It may be difficult and rare to respond in a new way to an old situation in life however, it may not be as difficult to respond in a new way to the same situation in a dramatic

scene (Jennings, 2011). Moments of spontaneity in the dramatic options made can become life options. Awakening the inner child can assist the adult in exploring both past, present, and future explorations of the self that may lead to analysing contexts that one lives in now.

Play in Africa

The South African apartheid economy was built on mining, manufacturing, and agriculture thus creating labour-intensive industries that mainly required a high number of males, and low-semi-skilled labour (Magubane, 2013). Black people were acquired through the urban apartheid community and sold as cheap labour to colonists (Magubane, 2013). Black male labourers were working in these industries and the migration of these men to cities to work meant that the natural development of African families became disabled and fragmented (Magadla, 2016). Later, the ‘care economy’ of the urban White property class also required domestic workers in the form of Black women to provide household labour (Pitso, 2019).

The township communities developed under the apartheid reign have been referred to as constructs of landlessness, displacement, and dehumanisation of black people over centuries (Mzileni& Diko, 2022). These communities are underdeveloped, small, overpopulated, and devoid of producing well-functioning families with well-rounded children (Mzileni& Diko, 2022). Playing is a key activity that facilitates the cognitive development and emotional growth of a person therefore; Mzileni & Diko (2022) suggest that playing in these congested communities is impossible unless the children themselves invent this space under the risky conditions they live under. For decades African children whose parents were or are absent from home most of the time, for reasons such as long working hours and urbanisation, have healed and are still healing their emotions and supporting one another through play (Kekae-Moletsane, 2008).

“Play is a constructivist activity that has always been part of children's development processes in all societies, including traditional Africa. The provision of a safe space and facilities for play, diligent supervision, and enforcement of specified standards with culturally conscious, trained, and knowledgeable educators, as well as parents' education in playful learning strategies, are necessary ingredients for achieving the goals of traditional, play-based, childhood education in contemporary Africa” (Fasokun, Katahoire& Oduaran, 2005:18).

Withholding play as a form of discipline in certain African contexts emphasized how adults and children valued play (Perrins Gendron, Van Niekerk& Cloete, 2022). Adults still loved playing. Safety concerns contributed to the reasons play occurred indoors more than outdoors, despite outdoor play being preferred (Perrins Gendron, Van Niekerk& Cloete, 2022).

Hamilton (2016) asserts that adults tend to stop playing either because they consider it “childish” or because they become consumed with adult responsibilities like careers, childcare, and relationships. Despite these conflicts, most adults never lose their playfulness and all of the domains that seemingly prevent play can benefit from including it more. In Africa, as in most parts of the world, age is recognised as one of the criteria for adulthood (Fasokun, Katahoire& Oduaran, 2005: 16). By having lived for a certain number of years, an adult is widely expected to have acquired the necessary experience and maturity to teach younger members of the community how to carry out their tasks efficiently and effectively (Fasokun, Katahoire& Oduaran, 2005:16).

“The question, “who is an adult?”, is more complex than it might seem, especially in Africa, where adulthood is not determined solely by age” (Fasokun, Katahoire& Oduaran, 2005:16). There is importance in the role that a person plays and there is consideration towards the person’s ability to fulfil certain roles and functions within society (Fasokun, Katahoire& Oduaran, 2005). Fasokun, Katahoire& Oduaran, (2005), further assert that these roles and functions are determined by factors such as history, tradition, and physical, socioeconomic, political, and psychological aspects of the person. Thus, the word adult carries different meanings in different situations and circumstances. There are different criteria for categorising a person as an adult in Africa, however, Hamilton (2016), observed that the accepted age of adulthood has fluctuated back and forth throughout history as a function of the needs of each culture.

Humans are said to have an inherent “play impulse” that forces us to confront and take ourselves to a place where we introduce our twin (sometimes competing) natures of sensuality and rationality (Block, 1982). Trammell (2023:11) speaks to how the definition of play needs to be changed and rethought because it mostly speaks back to positivity in theory yet in reality when we examine the play in Black radical tradition, we will find that it includes stories of slave ships, art, and music that took place during a painful time. Trammell (2023) goes on to argue that definitions of play include suggestions that assert fun is pleasurable, and fun is universal. That definition of fun may not necessarily be true therefore; we need to find a way to redefine the concept for the black community. Trammell (2023) also writes from a black American point of view, which has a vast difference from the cultures in the African black community.

South Africa is a country that has endured both colonialism and apartheid from brutal British settler invasion only up until 1994 (Madlingozi, 2017). This means that South Africa is entangled in deep-seated social, economic, and political challenges that are entirely racialized, with land dispossession of the Indigenous majority by a white settler minority being the major feature of the apartheid-colonialism takeover (Dladla, 2018). Therefore, when children’s right to play and the right to social housing are critically and collaboratively analysed, contextualised, and historicised, they are political issues that should be prioritized, standardised, and institutionalised as the crux of unresolved social

injustices that require extensive tools of a new ‘problematizing’ social work paradigm embedded in decolonisation (Mzileni & Diko, 2022:81).

Research Methods

Practice as Research (PaR) is the overarching research method used for this research. Nelson (2013:15) describes practice as research as a practice that is submitted as substantial evidence of a certain research inquiry. This practice can take the form of creative writing, dance, musical performance, theatre, film, or other practices (Nelson, 2013:15). My PaR falls under what one would consider in this context “other practices” as it is a range of workshops that aim to fulfil the inquiry of how play awakens the inner child in adults. Practice as Research is a wide umbrella that contains Participatory Action Research as a method. Participatory Action Research aims to produce knowledge and action directly useful for a particular group through research, adult education, or socio-political action to empower people to construct and use their knowledge (Walter, 2006:1)

Knowledge is gained in various ways, which can happen through being taught or through doing, and experience may also consist of repetitive patterns that equip one with knowledge at all times (Nelson, 2013:44). The arts pedagogy requires one to do to gain knowledge as it can be collected through senses, sight, hearing, touch, and smell. The following table explains how I will collect data and knowledge through play:

WORKSHOP METHOD	DATA COLLECTION PROCESS
Session One: Introduction. Information session. Getting to know each other.	· During the introduction process, I will observe how the participants’ bodies react to the information and brief them on what the workshops are about and that we will be engaging in play. This will assist me in recognizing whether the theoretical assumptions and stereotypical observations on play being scarce in the black community are true or not. · During my observation, I will be monitoring if there will be any stereotypical movements as per my assumptions. · There will be an observation on how the connection between participants and facilitator is negotiated through play.
Session Two: Remembering childhood games	· I will pay attention to the muscle movements of the participants during the transition that will

	happen through play to enrol participants into nine-year-olds. · There will be monitoring of the participants' attitudes before and after the transition that will take place. · Attention also needs to be given to how participants interpret instruction, even during the time of play while enrolled as nine-year-olds.
Session Three: Teen Life: What was that?	· In this session, I will observe the expressions that the participants use. · I will also pay attention to emotional change that may take place as participants play in their enrolment and embodiment.
Session Four: When I grow up!	· Attention will be paid to the flexibility offered by play. There will be increased observation of how play offers different realities. · I will build and give impressions on the attitude shift that takes place during the play
Session Five: Bringing pride to our achievements	· Reflections of life that are made through the selection of choices made in the play will be analysed. · I will also be paying attention to the body language of the participants as they play out their achievements.

Ethics Considerations

The research is to be conducted through a process of play workshops centered on awakening the inner child through different play techniques and methods. Some ethical considerations for this research include:

Informed consent- the intent of having human participants that have full information on the research and understand what it means to take part and they approve to participate (Oliver, 2010:30). The participants will be given a participation information sheet that entails the details

of the researcher, the research, as well as other members included in the research and the information to be used.

Voluntary participation- the participants will participate in the research (Oliver, 2010:16). A consent form will be given to the participants to sign after having been informed about the research and their agency within the participation.

Confidentiality- when the researcher knows of the identity of the participants but protects the identity of those individuals (Oliver, 2010:77). The participants are not guaranteed confidentiality as other participants may speak of the project outside of the group. I, as the researcher, guarantee confidentiality within the research report and any information that they feel they do not want included in the research report will not be included.

Anonymity- anonymity means that the research does not collect any information that links the individual to their identity (Oliver, 2010:77). This includes their name, address, email address, etc. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed as participants. The research will use pseudonyms to write on individuals who participate and no personal information of the participants will be released.

Conclusion

The knowledge that will be gained through this research aims to contribute to new knowledge that is still to develop in the African context. The theory has provided information on how these systems can be carried out and how beneficial it might be however only the carrying out of the subject will determine what we can collect from the processes. Play is important in our societies because it assists us to connect and communicate in different ways and forms. Connecting to the inner child through play would also be able to remind one of their spontaneity. I hope that we can come back to embracing play as part of our lives in the adult world of the African community.

Findings

The Researcher:

I am a 25-year-old female who was born and raised in a township in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. As much as I was born in a township and raised there, my schooling experience placed me in the suburbs, away from my familiar space. This meant that I had two different experiences of play in terms of context. Mzileni& Diko (2022) illuminate how playing in the township is different from playing in the inner city or the suburbs because of the effects of colonization. The displacement of our families from our hometowns meant adjusting to the colonial structures that were introduced. This included me being placed in boarding school as my mother was placed in the workplace that she had to work in. Many of my cultural experiences derive from being away from home and having to adjust

myself to spaces that I was told would be good for my future. It has been said that the word ‘culture’ was derived from colonisers who asserted that culture is for ‘civilized’ nations (Raven Press, 1991). One could assert that they had now been brought into civilization when having to refer to educational experiences outside of the townships. Groups who were identified as not having culture were considered ‘non-existent’, and this contributed to the attempt to erasure Indigenous cultures that had their existing practices which the colonists felt were not worthy of being recognized.

The privilege I encountered was being able to experience play in different contexts of South Africa. Growing up in a Zulu-speaking home, in a township in Kwa-Zulu Natal allowed me to experience life as a child in a South African township. Mzileni& Diko (2022:72) describe townships as constructs of landlessness, displacement, and dehumanisation of black people over centuries. I lived in this construct of landlessness however I also had experience of going to schools that would be considered private/independent and this meant I was traveling back and forth between these different contexts. South African black people were made to practice European modernity under settler-colonial conditions of landlessness (Mzileni&Diko, 2022). This explains well my experience within the different contexts of South Africa, both as someone who grew up in the township and as someone who went to schools considered ‘civilized’. Considering my broad experience of play in different South African contexts, I shaped my sessions and interactions with participants according to my knowledge and experience of play. This involves a mixture of:

- Indigenous games- recreational activities that originate from a particular cultural group, community, or people distinct from mainstream sports (Bogopa, 2012)
- Private school games- games that independent schools create for the children to engage in those games (Gunduz, Taspinar, &Demis, 2017). Independent schools are conducted and primarily supported by a nongovernmental agency (Gunduz, Taspinar, &Demis, 2017).
- Drama Therapy games- the use of different drama and theatre techniques that include; role-play, story-making, movement, props, and masks, including but not limited to improvisation (Jones, 1996). The use of these techniques highlights the essence of play considering that to carry out these techniques, one needs to engage in play.

An observation that I took note of during the time of my data collection was that many of my participants were male. This made me wonder about how gender plays a role in the way that we engage with play. Neilsen-Hewett& Bussey (2014) suggest that boys are more active in their play while girls play more sedentary, focused on verbal interactions. This study may correlate with the gender of the people participating in the workshops. This is because most of my participants were male and my workshops were composed to be embodied play. I engaged the participants with all the play contexts that I am familiar with, using guided play and neuro-dramatic play to evaluate how play is understood and how it can work to awaken the inner child.

Research Analysis Discussion

Research analysis speaks to the systematic investigation of gathering facts or information about a particular subject through personal experiences, investigations, and but not limited to observations (Bolton, 1996:188). The process of research analysis involves one trying to make sense of raw data that they collected and this assists in analysing research as one gets to interpret the data collected using analytical and logical reasoning to determine patterns, relationships, or trends (Bolton, 1996:188). In my analysis, I will be providing evidence, information, and knowledge that I was able to gather during the process of my workshops of play with black African adults. This will assist in analysing whether the evidence produced supports the research assumptions that will seek to answer the research questions.

Jennings (1995) reports that the primary means of learning is the body and the learning that comes from the body is secondary to the first learning that happens through the body. The participants all have experience of being in their body. The question of whether there has been a conscious realisation of learning through the body or not still lies in question for some, however, I assert that we all have experience of learning through the body. If the primary means of learning is interrupted there can be a distorted development in embodiment (Jennings, 1995). This statement was the common drive for my research as my observations led me to believe black African adults do not engage in embodiment much. The analysis below shall show the findings that came after my assertions and research practice.

Neuro-dramatic play is the earliest form of embodied experience that begins six months before birth and continues after birth, building an impact on the brain-body connection (Jennings, 1995). It is possible to reconnect adults who have experienced trauma to types of play that will nurture them through play and drama as it is characterised by sensory, rhythmic, and dramatic influences (Jennings, 2011). During the workshops that I held, neuro-dramatic play was at the core of the techniques that I used to drive the sessions that I was having. In my analysis, I have made use of connecting neuro-dramatic play theory to the play that was initiated in sessions.

In guided play, the therapist takes a hands-on approach and leads the client through guided play activities that help the client express themselves (Weisberg et al, 2016). In using guided play, I was able to implement the neuro-dramatic play techniques as it assisted in being able to have a container for my participants. In guided play, the therapist typically gives specific instructions and supervises the client as they go through it (Weisberg et al., 2016). The principles of guided play also assisted me in being considerate of the context and background of people who were my participants as it led me through setting up the sessions, regardless of my choice to engage the participants with my background experiences.

Group One- “Di Noga”

The first group of participants was a group of three males from the ages of 25 to 31. In South Africa, a democratic nation was voted into power in the year 1994. One of the participants was born two years before democracy and the other two were born a year or two after democracy had been implemented in South Africa. These males are South African natives and they live in the inner city of Johannesburg. Even though they all reside in the inner city, they were not born and raised in the inner city. Two of the participants come from rural parts of Rustenburg (in the North West province of South Africa), and the other from Benoni (in the East Rand of Johannesburg). This information reflects mostly how one’s inner child might show up in particular spaces. It is important to look into the context of one’s environment when investigating how the inner child is awakened because this will assist in giving some perspective into why they show up the way they do. Much like myself, their play experiences range from indigenous games to private school games. I will keep referring to the concept ‘drama ready’ as a reference for participants who are familiar with Drama Therapy and are professional performers in the drama and theatre world. Two of the participants in this group were drama-ready.

This session was a session based on story-making and storytelling. Storytelling has always been part of African history dating back to the time when cave drawings were used as a means to tell stories before moving on to oral storytelling (Mendoza, 2015). Storytelling is used and has been used as a way to entertain, instruct, inform, and educate people towards a better society (Oamen, 2011).

When I met with the group, I felt the need to introduce a familiar ritual that we would all sing in the beginning as a welcome and the end as a goodbye. Rituals play an important role in how humans function in society and help individuals through their anxieties and connect (Cattanach, 2008:15). Since I anticipated a closed group, I introduced a few rituals to choose from; as it would be something, we would do consistently in all the sessions. When working with any kind of group, it is important to create a structure that can assist in making the space familiar. This is especially important for children who do not feel they have a safe space to express themselves. Having this routine for adults who want to awaken their inner child gives grace to that child who is needed and still needs a safe space. After having proposed a few rituals to the participants, they came to choose two rituals that would be our way of saying hello to each other before we begin anything. Dramatic rituals provide a sense of structure and predictability during sessions allowing clients the ability to express their feelings, witness/validate others, and social building (Cattanach, 2008).

The first ritual was us going around in a circle singing “*Sanibonani, Dumelang, Avuxeni, Hello*” with a dance move that everyone else does back to you. Neuro-dramatic play is characterised by sensory, rhythmic, and dramatic play, which influences the growth of healthy attachments (Cattanach, 2008). This suggestion from neuro-dramatic play assisted in setting up a structure for the game. I chose this

ritual as it speaks to the languages that we have in South Africa and it is a good way to include diversity in the session considering that South Africa on its own is vastly diverse and rich with a variety of cultures. Using one's native language can serve as a tool that allows people to reconnect to their past and lay out emotions and experiences in a way that is unfiltered and honest (Matoane, 2012:105). The participants were excited to engage in the ritual because they also knew the song sung in the ritual from a TV show that used to air on SABC 2 in the mornings. This made them more excited to use their bodies and create a dance for everyone in the ritual. Black Cultural life in South Africa considers the importance of popular genres and audiences in the relationship between ethical consciousness and aesthetic engagement (Saint, 2018). It is also a joy to be able to engage with people who have similarities with the content you have been exposed to as it makes the play much easier to engage in.

The second ritual that we agreed upon was a Mexican game titled "Me Toca"- which means "my turn" in English. The game is not indigenous to South Africa however it was an introduction to experiencing play differently. It is a game that can also be considered a Drama Therapy game as it can be used in therapeutic sessions. In the game, the participants are in a circle. We do a rhythmic movement with our upper bodies before giving each other turns to jump in the circle starting from one person jumping alone and the number of people jumping together increases with each completed number around the circle. There were only four of us and only three of us knew the game. The ones who did not know the game showed enthusiasm to know the game by drawing their body forward and widening their eyes to listen. This is a curiosity that can easily arise once one gets to awakening their inner child and the body reflects that awakening. Body-focused activities are important to the development of the 'body-self'- one's ability to live in their body and allow safety and containment to take space (Jennings, 2011). The participants did not know the game however they felt safe to be taught and this gave the participant the ability to trust their body.

This game aims to build connection and awareness of each other in a group as participants also had to be constantly aware of which number has one achieved to move onto the next number. The creative process used in Drama Therapy facilitates the potential for skill-building and deeper personal discovery (Sweeney, 2006). With three of us knowing the game, it was still difficult to get to the end of the game, as we would be confused by our turns and had to start from the beginning until the time for the game ran out. The important part of the game was simply playing itself and not necessarily having to reach the goal of getting the game correct. Repetition stimulates neuroplasticity, which is the brain's ability to recognize and form neural connections in response to learning (Arain et.al, 2013). Repetitive rhythms in a group session create a familiarity that makes the participants curious to continue.

The game has to have a rhythm for the jumping turns to be in accord with it. One of the participants commented on how he has experienced the rhythm always going offbeat when playing with white people. This came from an individual born post-apartheid into the democratic nation that we live in now. Play across cultural groups will yield ideas about identity, values, relationships, and myth-making (Jennings, 2011:70). It is easy to notice the difference in play when it comes to one engaging with groups outside of their own. The familiarity or non-familiarity can cause a connection or disconnect between the groups that are engaging together in that moment. Play does not only illustrate how children learn adult skills but can also show how the imagination can create narratives that serve the beliefs of people (Jennings, 2011). It is also important to note that we have experiences of play in these different contexts and rhythms that may not align even though we are playing together. The cultural hegemony of white liberal values and white bourgeois lifestyle has made it difficult for several generations of African nationalists to radicalize a system to which they owe many loyalties and allegiances (Fatton, 1986). We continue to play in these contexts however there is no speaking out about the disjoin that takes place in these engagements due to the colonial factors that existed and still exist. The contexts we grow up in determine how our inner child reflects in interactions.

The participants used their bodies to jump and they did not show physical difficulties during the time of their engagement with this activity. They were jumping high and their feet did touch the ground with the jump. Their sense of playfulness was beginning to be awakened and the inner child was beginning to show. When we start playing everything that we touch, see, hear and smell is driven by an adventurous curiosity that takes us on a journey of discovery (Gammage, 2017).

The next activity was playing “Fire on the Mountain” as a way to get the participants into the story world. The version of “Fire on the Mountain” was sung in IsiZulu, as participants expressed that they were more comfortable engaging in other vernacular languages. Language has shaped and continues to mediate everyday narratives about identity and belonging in South Africa (Ndhlovu, 2018). The context of your participants matters because it is important to accommodate their preferences. This also highlights the importance of knowing the background or at least the context of those you are to engage with as it will aid your engagement. The chant led us into a story circle that participants had to gather around.

Oamen (2011) expresses that storytelling is also a means to preserve memories of the experiences that people have experienced. The story world that I set up was a story circle around the fire. Oral storytelling has been around for centuries and takes many forms that include chants, poems, rhymes, songs, and more (Madros, 2010). After entering into the story world, I then read the story to them. The title of the story was- “Squircle- The Round Box”. The story covers the theme of being unique and different from all those that you had wanted to associate with. The participants had to create their own story inspired by the story of Squircle.

Embodiment-projection-role (EPR) is a progression of dramatic play for individuals and sequences alongside other developmental processes such as the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of embodiment (Jennings, 2011). The participants used Tswana in the story that they were playing out and the song that they created for themselves as a 'tribe' that was used in the story and during the time of creating the story circle. Language in drama contexts plays an important role as it reflects real life and is a means of communication used in real life, to reflect true expression from the actor (Janner, 2000). They named themselves "di noga"- meaning "the snakes" in English translated from Tswana.

The recreation consisted of a person, a dog, and a snake. The snake was always out-casted however one day the person and the dog needed the snake's help to assist them in clearing the path so they could go through. The snake assisted them and they gained respect for the snake and stopped fearing it. When the participants reflected on their play in the story, the participant who played the dog revealed that he chose to be the dog because he wanted to feel what it was like to be in the position of the dog as he is not very fond of dogs. It is important to allow individuals the opportunity to play 'distanced' roles that can activate them to come closer to their own experience rather than enacting their specific immediate situation (Jennings, 1995). He then revealed that when he was nine years old, a pit bull bit his bum and did not let go until a neighbour yelled "VOETSEK!" to the dog that was not responding to his cries but finally let go after the neighbour yelled.

Awakening the inner child can bring up repressed emotions, memories, and experiences from childhood that surface or can be experienced as anxiety or trauma (Bradshaw, 2013:63). These memories of childhood have revealed that the inner child was awakened and play was the driving source. When the participant was playing as the dog, he was crawling on four feet and was acting aggressively towards the snake by barking it loudly as though there was a danger, inserting paws into the snake. It might not have been a happy memory for the participants however; they were able to connect themselves back to why they do not like dogs today. This realization came through awakening the inner child. Stories need to be used with care in appropriate settings because they can be major agents of change (Jennings, 1995). Storytelling allows these stories to easily be recalled, expressed, or acted (Oamen, 2011). This theory was evident during the workshop as the participants travelled to certain experiences of their own after listening to the story, making their own, and playing it out.

During my childhood, we would go our separate ways while singing as a way to close off the play. The winning team would be singing songs of victory while the losing team would sing songs of sorrow and how next time would be their turn. This is why I felt it is important to introduce an exit ritual that consists of the same essence carried by the entry ritual. Ritual allows us to uncover and recover who we are whilst trying to navigate the true purpose of our lives. When ritual is used it can create a sense of predictability that allows and connects safety. In this game, the ritual welcome song

was used as a goodbye song with the lyrics changed to say goodbye. There were three versions of the goodbye song consisted of English, IsiZulu, and Sesotho. In English we sung, “Goodbye, we are leaving, goodbye”, in isiZulu we sang “Sesiya hamba, nihambe kahle, sesiya hamba”, and in Sesotho we sang “Rea tsamaya, le tsamayeng hantle, rea tsamaya”. We left singing playfully.

Group Two- “Iphupho L’ka Sarafina”

In this session, there was a group of eighteen participants aged from 25 to 42 years. Some of the participants were born into the Apartheid era and some were born into the democratic state. This meant I would have to observe particularly the difference in stories of expression when people speak of their experiences, The group had two females and sixteen males with only two of the participants not being drama-ready. One of the participants was a Zimbabwean native, another was a Mozambique native, and the rest of the group were South African natives. Even though there is experience of a certain diaspora when it comes to speaking of our origins in Africa, it does not erase that we are all African. The basis of our interactions was for shared experiences within our different contexts.

Regardless of the participants being from different countries in Southern Africa, all the participants grew up in South Africa. I was aware that this group could easily tap into their imaginations considering their performance background and this made me a bit concerned for the two that were not drama-ready. From my observations, the two who were not drama-ready did not seem overwhelmed by this. One of the two participants who were not drama-ready approached me after the session to share how participation in the workshop made him feel included and part of a community because they barely engages with people often.

Some of the individuals in the group reside in the inner city while some reside in the township. All the participants are WITS students however, some of the participants only started being exposed to other forms of play when having to engage with Drama Therapy. However, one could argue that the participant’s performance background had already exposed participants to different forms of play. In this session, the inner child was awakened using imagination, travelling to childhood, and playing Indigenous games.

We started the introduction with our names and the sound of how one is feeling. “Play is language, play is process and play is moments. Play is sometimes full of purpose and sometimes purposeless” (Kersh, 2017:13). These contributions were used to play a balloon game where one person says another person’s name and passes the balloon to the person in the circle and the same is done with the other balloon using sound. Jennings (2018) expresses that sound, voice, and movement form part of Creative Care in neuro-dramatic play and this allows for one to allow their senses to take part in the play that the facilitator carefully guides. This game required some energy and stamina from the participants as the balloon sometimes does not reach or fly directly to the position of the person being sounded and that person has to try to meet the balloon where it is.

Some of the participants, including myself, were sweating from the experience. The game was charged for the first three minutes and then began to die down as participants started walking slowly and not being enthusiastic to follow the balloon any longer. I interpreted this as the participants feeling tired and their bodies not being able to carry them any longer. The experiential nature of these activities allows for the processing and releasing of emotions that lead to a greater understanding of self (Jennings, 2011). Perhaps awakening the inner child is also heavy on the body, as it requires one to be as light as a child would be in the body of an adult. This could add, as one of the reasons why awakening the inner child is a challenge for adults.

The next activity of the session was the ritual song “*Sanibonani, Dumelang, Avuxeni, Hello*” followed by “Me Toca”. When we participated in the first ritual song people came with truly expressive movements and the excitement drew from anticipating seeing how others reflect the movement that one offers. There were cries of ‘ah’ ‘ey’ when certain participants offered a dance that included many changing parts. This was a way to challenge others physically while promptly going down and up again in a rush. Pellegrini (2009) concluded that context plays in animals and human environments allow individuals to focus on ‘means’ rather than ‘ends’, allowing them to engage in exploratory play in which they exaggerate, modify, abbreviate, or change the sequence of behaviours.

Ritual and risk are the two components of early physical play, where the infant feels safely held and contained on the one hand, but also enjoys the thrill of the ‘danger’ in the instance of the mother carrying out the ritual of cradling their child (Jennings, 2011). In the instance of this interaction, the participants feel safe to continue the ritual and enjoy the risk of doing challenges during the time of play. When participants got into playing “Me Toca”, we all had hopes that we would at least get to number four and there were only three rounds for us to play. We only managed to reach the number three. This game not only increased awareness of each other but also built a sense of united competitiveness considering that if one person made a mistake, we all had to start the game from the beginning.

The next exercise was learning a song to create the world we will all enter. To enter the world, I taught the participants a song that we would use to enter and build the world. The umbrella song contained the following lyrics:

Under the old umbrella

Under the coconut tree

Going to school together

WAITING AND WAITING FOR YOU, BYE BYE!

We sang the umbrella song as participants went around clinging onto someone’s arm while singing the song, separating from them once the chorus was finished and clinging onto another person.

Physically, the participants showed no struggle in playing the game and they even built chains with each other that had more than two in the play. It is not easy to trust people when living in a highly traumatised nation like South Africa and having to deal with daily statistics of crime increasing. Many South African adults may struggle with forming and maintaining healthy relationships due to past traumas or negative experiences to which many black South Africans have been exposed (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010). This game showed how play awakens the inner child through the participants engaging with each other as children always do instead of them analysing what they are playing.

After the participants finished playing the game and building their playground, they then had to enter the playground as grade three learners. I, alone was enrolled as the teacher. The play that took place at the time was process drama as participants define and create a role that allows them to go through a process of thinking and responding in that role (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). When the participants played the role of being grade three learners, they were visibly in the role of being in that position. Their mannerisms changed in the play as they became more chaotic and there were constant fights over whom stole a particular ball that others wanted to play with. They tried to involve the teacher who eventually left them to figure out how they would try to play together.

One of the participants revealed that they felt unseen by the teacher and they experienced body shaming multiple times during the play this hurt her because no one also wanted to play the game that she was suggesting. The personal trauma resulting from abuse and neglect that one may have experienced in childhood may affect one's resilience and coping mechanisms, which is why it is important to gain a greater understanding of the body and the brain within programmes for trauma transformation (Jennings, 1995). This awakened in her the thought of how children perceive bodies as this would be either a bullying/shaming moment or a moment of trying to fulfil the challenge of carrying this heavy body. In the role method, Landy (2009:78), proposes that drama therapy provides a dramatic space in which clients draw from, reconstruct, and reflect upon roles presented to them in everyday dramas. The session was not a drama therapy session however role method and play being approaches used in drama therapy is the reason they are mentioned as they build and form part of the play that we are utilising in the workshop. Going into characters allowed the participants to reflect on their childhood in comparison to the life that they live now to see if there are any connections. The inner child of an adult is primarily concerned with fulfilling behaviours and satisfying the needs that the inner child has not had much experience with or fulfilment in (Jung, 2020).



During the reflective tea party that was hosted, one of the participants also revealed that the play invoked a trauma that was always lingering around him. He explained that when he was a child he used to be called “Shangaan” and “lento emnyama”- meaning, “you black thing” (translated from isiZulu). Shangaan is a tribe that was colonised by Soshangane, a Zulu warrior under the leadership of Shaka Zulu (Niehaus, 2002). The colonisation attempted to wipe out the Tsonga tradition and culture by forcing them to integrate into the Nguni culture (Niehaus, 2002). These slurs were used to keep him out of playing and nobody would want to play with or invite him to play with. This caused him to always shy away and join when someone called him to play without him having to initiate. When a child is ‘under held’ and left for long periods in isolation, they develop anxiety rather than autonomy (Jennings, 1995). During this session, the participant played and involved himself in everything without worrying about others excluding him. We can now witness a sense of resilience in this individual who does not allow themselves to be bullied into not playing. Our inner child carries parts of us that carry our deepest wounds, fears, and insecurities (Jung, 2020:32).

When the group played collectively while they were enrolled, they all played out together a scene from the movie, *Sarafina*, They were singing out loud “FREEDOM IS COMING TOMORROW”. Jung (2020:19) believed that human beings possess a collective unconscious, a kind of universal reservoir of human experience that shapes our thoughts, emotions, and behaviour. Even though the group is over the age of twenty-five, most of the participants did not experience living under apartheid and none of them were born during the time of the particular day of 16 June 1976 that they re-enacted. Although the participants know this experience through watching the movie and may not have directly experienced it, having lineage that has experienced and witnessed the traumatic experience has inevitably left them with the experience. Generational trauma is centred around the trauma experiences that older generations experience and can stem from biology, learned behaviours, and collective experiences that include, abuse, discrimination, natural disasters, racism, and but not

limited to war (Quinn, 2019). Through awakening the inner child, one can be able to gain insight into the sources of our emotional pain and begin to heal the wounds of the past (Jung, 2020:66).

Group Three- “Igama Lami”

The third group initially had six participants from the ages of 25 to 33. This meant some of the participants were born a few years after apartheid and others were already a few years old when the democratic nation voted into power in 1994 took form. None of the participants had ever interacted with Drama Therapy, they do not have a performance background and drama is not something they engage in often. These participants travelled from the township into the inner city to participate in the workshop. All the participants were South African born and raised. The interaction with this group was slightly different from the interactions that I had with other groups. I had this group on WhatsApp for a few weeks before we engaged in person and we had to negotiate a time and date to meet. The modern society that we live in has influenced social interactions to be facilitated through online platforms (Prazak, 2019).

I assumed that integrating social media would make for a simpler interaction because this is the digital era. I was particularly excited to see the group expand and people interested and willing to join the group. The frequency of these interactions can be used as a way to weigh out if the individual has a well-lived life, based on their social interactions (Prazak, 2019). Although the latter statement may be true, I would argue that it is difficult to weigh out a person's life through their interaction with social media, unless you are close to them and know their habits. Online drama therapy aims to enhance personal insight and help the client freely reveal themselves (Shi& Jing, 2022). This also allowed me to play with the participants in a different way that is not indigenous to Africa but is engaging in a way of play. The participants needed to be engaged with, stimulated, and made to feel safe to play before they could come to the face-to-face workshops.

The online environment extends the participant's freedom to share ideas and sentiments (Mendoza, 2015). As we were negotiating our time to meet, I decided that I would engage the participants in online activities and give them prompts that they would be able to play with to get warm to the idea of play. Online therapy is convenient in terms of scheduling as it shortens the time between inquiry and intake to give clients enhanced access to services (Guzman et al., 2020) On the week when we were meant to meet, I gave the following daily prompts to the participants:

Monday: *Make a creative expression of your name. It can be a drawing, painting, written, and (but not limited to) body expressions.* We have been able to return to a form of visual representation that tells our stories through the technological advancements that we receive (Mendoza, 2015). I was the first to contribute to the activity and gave the group many examples that link to the creative expressions that they could do. One of the six participants in the group played and contributed to the

activity. This made me assume that perhaps the activity may have been too vulnerable for people who had not met in person and this made it easy for me to let go of the need to question any non-participation. I also made it clear that anyone who feels uncomfortable contributing to the group may send me a private message however, none of the participants did. This made me start questioning my method as it is difficult to gauge a person's thoughts through their non-responsiveness on social media.

Tuesday: *Voice notes instruction on stretching and yoga exercises. Reflections will be messages with three words about how it felt to stretch.* I assumed this would be the easiest exercise to participate in because it did not require much vulnerability from the participants. The participants were meant to stretch in their own spaces and come back to contribute only three words to the group on what that activity felt like. Therapy can also be enhanced using video along with mobile applications, advanced graphics, or virtual reality (Guzman et al., 2020). The participants had a choice on how vulnerable they could be in the activity however, only one participant partook in this activity. This same participant contributed to the previous session. No other participants responded to the messages.

Wednesday: *Find an object that reminds you of a story during your childhood. You can search for this object in your environment and send a picture of the object. You will also send a voice note or text message telling us about the object and the story behind it.* On this day, I was nervous about the contributions that the individuals would give, especially because most of them had not contributed to the previous day's activities. This made me sceptical about continuing however, I did not stop contributing to the group, as I had to keep the enthusiasm going. My traumas of being excluded from play during childhood arose from this experience. It was difficult to accept that the participants were non-responsive however I had to keep the engagement going. I believe that a therapist should allow their client the space to figure out if they would like to participate. The relationship is enhanced by both the client and the therapist therefore there needs to be a mutual agreement towards being in the session.

Thursday: *Career Day- send a riddle to the group. This answer to the riddle must be something that you have always wanted to be or achieve.* I ensured to keep building the rapport even though the participants were non-responsive to my text messages. On this day, none of the participants participated in my riddle and none of them sent one. On this day, I attempted to find information privately from the participants on what may be the reason their participation is hindered. I was met with no response. My assumptions at this point as the researcher came to the point of questioning whether it was the play suggestions that I offered that were too much for people who are not drama-ready or perhaps there was just a loss of interest in the group as a whole. My therapeutic observations came to me assuming that the participants are not used to consciously engaging in play and this was a step too forward for their experiences.

Friday: *Birthday party! Show us with your body what you would bring to a birthday party that we are all going to enjoy.* When I gave the prompt, I had considered that the participants were not drama ready, however, I assumed that being in the comfort of their own space would open up creativity and enthusiasm to participate. None of the participants contributed.

These interactions awakened my inner child because I felt closed off from the group as it reminded me of a time when people would not want to play with me as a child. Our inner child carries wounds that are related to rejection, abandonment, humiliation, betrayal, and injustice (Capacchione, 1991). Even though I felt this way on the inside, I was able to carry on prompting what I meant to do; consistently initiating play with them. Capacchione (1991) also mentions that our egos create masks that have the person believing that it protects them from the pain of being wounded. The week had gone by and it was time for the participants and I to meet. We voted on the WhatsApp poll that we would all meet on Saturday of the week that we were doing the activities. Five of the six people voted that they would be present on the day however only three of the five showed up. The absent participants reported that they would not be able to come into the session due to work obligations. The session then began with the three members that were present.

The first activity that we engaged in was to introduce our names and use our bodies to demonstrate what we enjoy doing most. Drama Therapy games can weave trauma-informed psychotherapy interventions with artistic modalities to facilitate healing and growth (Sajnani & Johnson, 2024). I was the first to participate and show a contribution towards the game to assure the participants that the process is for all of us and we may all be free to do what we feel. Nelson (2006) states that it is important to make participants feel like humans and not research subjects, which is why it is important to build rapport with your participants. I noticed that when we started the game, the participants were nervous but as the game continued, they revealed their interest using their bodies. The movements showed that they now felt more comfortable to contribute towards the game. When referring to Jennings (2011) one can identify that this can also be a reflection of an individual who was ‘underheld’ which is why there may be anxiety towards playing with others.

The ritual game of greeting that I introduced to the other two groups was introduced to this group. We sing “*sanibonani, dumelang, avuxeni, hello*” while carrying out a dance move that all the other group members reflect. Many individuals who are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder need to discover their inner rhythm that is often displaced in trauma through singing, drumming, clapping, and singing (Jennings, 1995). When the participants witnessed me being playful with my contribution, they also began to be more playful with their contribution. The same dynamic of competitiveness that the second group had was evident in this group as they attempted to challenge each other through the dynamics they added to the group. There may be difficulty for therapists or facilitators to use embodiment in the work because of the ever-present fear of being misunderstood and possible

litigation (Jennings, 2011), however, drama therapy games hold that space of containment and allow freedom to flow in expression.

We moved on to the activity of having to write your name down on a piece of paper and use words that you feel would describe and are suited to each letter of your name. The participants were given time to think of the words and come up with a creative expression that felt close to them. The participants were invited to use poems if they felt the need to. The political mobilisation of the 1980s created a massive surge in the culture of the people and allowed them to find their voice that pushed for them to express their anger, beliefs, griefs, and victories through cultural forms of expression that began to shift from *toyi-toyi* to jazz, from poster-making to workers' theatre and oral poetry (Raven Press, 1991). The participants then came up with their creative expressions with words under their names and one of the participants used their nickname for the exercise instead of their real name. This was interesting for me to witness because I had never experienced someone using their nickname in activities that required names even if that nickname is the one they use daily. The participant then explained that they used their nickname because they felt more related to it than their original name and expressing it made them feel complete. The meaning behind the participant's name is what made the participant feel as though they do not relate to their name and this was particularly touching to me as someone who truly values names. Our names form part of our identity and connect us directly to our culture, our families, and our histories (Ohion, 2014).

After the participants were done reflecting on their names, the next activity was to use those cloths to express their names. Participants had a range of cloths to choose from and these cloths had to represent how they feel about your name. Using cloths in a session allows for projection onto inanimate objects and reflects feelings through a distanced approach (Jennings, 2011). One participant was hesitant to participate in the activity as they kept watching how others were expressing themselves instead of being fully engaged in the activities themselves. This speaks to Jennings' (1995) theory about the under-held child who develops anxiety rather than autonomy which leads to the individual being mistrustful and often confused about body and spatial boundaries. The participants pretended to be doing the activity when they felt I was watching them but moved away from the activity when they thought I was not watching. The other two participants were fully immersed in expressing their names using the cloths. According to Tarbell (2017:1), the use of cloths and costumes in play therapy can assist in communicating issues of identity, self-image, the burden of external expectations for our looks and actions, and the desire to try on new roles and behaviours.

Once the music stopped playing, the participants came back into the space and we had to gather to sit in silence for a moment while contemplating the words that one would like to keep from the creation made for their names. The two individuals who were immersed in the cloth activity decided that they would keep the expression as is and not remove anything. The participant who was frozen during the

time of the activity only kept one word of the expression of their name. Jennings (2011) suggests that working in groups and doing group movement is good for social development. Perhaps this may have been a new experience for the participant and that may have been the reason for the freeze mode. We parted ways with the participants and they kept their names as expressed during the play.

The inner child is part of our mind that stores all our memories and schemas (a mental framework that helps individuals organise, process, and store information about their environment) from childhood (Cattanach, 2008). Even though we are no longer in childhood, it is a lens through that we view our experiences and the experiences that we had in our childhood helped build these schemas that build patterns on what to expect and how to react in a manner that helps one feel safe (Cattanach, 2008). Jennings (2011) states that a child who is made to feel safe and empowered in the face of trauma can develop the ability to have emotional intelligence that assists them in healthy psychological development. If the child had to develop its survival skills because the caregiver may have been absent, it affects the ability of the child to feel safe or develop emotional intelligence (Jennings, 2011). The inner child involves one being aware of their history, knowing what happened to the child growing up, knowing where this inner child comes from and where those reactions come from (Jung, 2020). When we start becoming curious about what happened to the child, we can separate the entity of the inner child and the adult, revealing how one is triggered in the body, as an adult is a clue into our childhood memories and conditioned history that we carry (Bradshaw, 2011). The inner child is readily available in one's body and speaks more readily in the language of feelings, which consist of the body, movement, play, and the arts (Jung, 2020).

Further Observations:

I had to observe closely and listen with my whole body for me to identify how play is understood in the black African community. I witnessed an emphasis on having clear rules in the play, a flexibility concerning how the game will and can go, with a strong collaborative effort in the group. As much as I noticed that there was competitiveness in the participation of these games, I was also able to identify that a collective win also fuelled the participants to work together and win together. The rituals also created a sense of belonging for the participants and felt the need to ensure it was carried out. Some individuals were playing because they wanted to learn how to connect with their children, however, I was also able to recognise that I need to consider the stamina of the individuals as they are adults with body types that have most likely shifted from the time, they were children.

Play does indeed awaken the inner child. The factors that contribute to my agreeing that play does awaken the inner child include the fact that participants were excited over the balloon game that was introduced and there was engagement towards the rules of the game. The carefree engagement of the

body also indicated the awakening of the inner child. The competitiveness that came with engaging in the games also directed that. Some of the participants were able to move quickly into the imagination and the change of body structure, as well as the voice, indicated the awakening of the inner child. The hesitation and doubt to join in the play also reflected the awakening of the inner child because not everyone has a playful inner child. The inner child can be awakened through different forms of play that include; ritual games, storytelling, song, dance, drawing, poetry, childhood games, imagination, and other forms of creative expression.

The benefits of consciously integrating play in the black African community would be that it creates a community-centred environment that allows one to understand the sense of community. Ubuntu has always been part of our heritage and culture and I believe that playing together can activate that sense of community. The play space also builds space and capacity for one to be able to reflect opening up space for vulnerability to take place.

Limitations

This research was based on experimentation and exploration of the body. Although this was an underlying factor, one had to get evidence to assist in supporting the evidence that comes from the interactions. Once you have discovered a group to work with, the context and frame in which you report need to have some theoretical background to support the assumptions. It has been difficult to find specific work that speaks to play in Africa, more specifically play with black African adults. Theoretical limits speak to the limits of the depth, scope, or applicability of the study (). When it came to the theoretical limits there was a big disconnect in finding what exactly play in Africa is. The theories that arise have shown specific African games used in therapeutic settings however the notion and definition of play in the context are hard to find theoretically. Perhaps not using an umbrella description to play may help in finding specifics. The bodily experiences that have not been reported make it difficult to link play to other cultures other than those who have reported on it. Finding specific African authors was the aim because I hoped that the work would speak to my investigations.

Recommendations

What I have come to see and understand is that the inner child lives in our subconscious and is easily triggered. One does not have to engage in play for the inner child to be awakened because our triggers are around us and they can be drawn on easily. Once we can identify this as individuals, it would be fair on ourselves to allow and accept that the inner child has arrived. The inner child can be awakened without playing however; play sets the intention to be the safe container that facilitates the awakening of the inner child. As a black African who is progressing towards becoming a Drama Therapist, these notions of play have also helped me in shaping and understanding play for my professional life and

myself. Play begins the moment you start interacting with your client and takes form throughout sessions. Play does not have to be embodied. Play is sensitive and can easily awaken, which is why it is important to consider the group you work with and the prompts you give to participants.

Finding research on play in the black African community was a challenge because the concepts differ when we are referring to play in African contexts. The topic that one has to go into to find the information that is needed is labelled “cultural expression”, and even so, there is not much information on the therapeutic processes of play in African cultures or studies on how this play is beneficial. African people carry their notions of play. What is identified as play in other academic texts can be expressed as a cultural expression in other texts. This does not take away the fact that play does exist in our black African communities. Perhaps the next researcher can look to expand on the factors that create this distinction and why this distinction exists.

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