

Children's Therapeutic Puppet Theatre—Action, Interaction, and Cocreation

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ABSTRACT. This article is an account of therapeutic puppet groups with hospitalized children who have psychiatric problems related to trauma. Based on the anthropological notion that metaphors created by groups during spontaneous collaborative play are actually stories the players “tell” about themselves and their interactions with each other, Children's Therapeutic Theatre exemplifies the process theory principle that cocreative becoming results through the differentiation and interaction of coexisting opposites. In its methods, it integrates mutual story telling with adult imaginative play and psychodrama action methods (J. L. Moreno & Z. T. Moreno, 1975). What is unique is that adult facilitators engage in fantasy puppet play with groups of children. The approach provides a method for assessing coexisting opposite characteristics, feelings, and behaviors associated with trauma and abuse while at the same time broadening the range of expression of feelings and presenting options for new behavior. Strategies are illustrated through description and analysis of 7 consecutive puppet sessions.

CHILDREN'S THERAPEUTIC PUPPET THEATRE IS A THEORY BASED, group psychotherapy experience, not a performance. The main activity is cocreating stories through improvisational fantasy play that, in turn, affects the lives of those who participate (Blatner & Blatner, 1988). Puppets, instead of human players, provide the necessary safety factor for gaining access to the inner world of children through stories and metaphor. During a typical theater session, participants are invited to select a puppet and improvise stories through dramatic enactment. The action of the fantasy play is negotiated as it emerges.

Established in 1986 at a Rush–Presbyterian–St. Luke's Medical Center in Chicago, Illinois, Children's Theatre has evolved through many forms.

Described here is its current form—the Children’s Therapeutic Puppet Theatre. Puppets were introduced into the Children’s Theatre in January 1991. They have been especially powerful for young children aged 4 to 6 years and those 7 to 9 years. Most of the children are between placements, in foster families or group homes. They are in the hospital because they have been injuring themselves or hurting others, have made a suicide attempt, or have run away.

Children’s Therapeutic Puppet Theatre

In a typical theater session, the children, accompanied by the facilitators, come to theater, which is a small hospital room with no furniture. On their way, they gather floor mats to sit on, and one child brings the large black puppet bag. A facilitator puts the zipped bag of puppets in the middle of the room, and the children take their seats in a circle around the bag. The children who have been in the group previously volunteer to tell everyone what the group is about and what the general theater rules are. That provides recognition of the expertise of previous players and allows the facilitators to understand something about what the group means to these children. A facilitator gives specific rules for the session. Session rules and instructions are appropriate for the mixture of participating players and change from session to session because the players change. An array of rules provides flexibility in the basic structure and promotes listening and following directions.

Beginning Puppet Play

The children select puppets before the facilitators choose and take turns introducing their puppets to the group, using their puppet voice. That helps to place the children immediately into a play mode. The players, following the same instructions, “become” their puppets. They use the puppet’s names and offer additional information answering “What makes you feel safe?” “Where is your favorite place to be?” and asking “a question you would like all the other puppets to answer.” The responses to those queries help in eliciting themes and negotiating the play. The answers highlight interpersonal conflicts within the group and set the context for a cocreated story. After a puppet’s introduction is completed, the “puppet” selects one of the remaining puppets to be the next introduced. Those choices, along with the problems presented by the children in the introductions, provide a rich source of sociodynamic data about the coexisting forces of attraction and repulsion between and among the various players. Often signs of ambivalence and contradiction are evident, indicating that both forces are strong. Indifference indicates the forces of attraction and repulsion are weak. How do those prevail and change? What is the sequence of approach and avoidance among the players? Which

players will join together; which subgroups will be formed; how will the groupings shift during the play? What will their interactions tell us about how the players respond to each other outside the play?

Middle: Playing With the Possibilities

Once all the puppets have introduced themselves, the lead facilitator initiates the action by saying, "It is time for our story." Using information already known from the introductions, the puppets spontaneously begin negotiating the play. "I'm mean and eat snakes. You'd better watch out for me." "I'm a snake, but I'm poisonous. If you bite me, you die!" Often, the children who were together in the previous session carry the story line from the past to the present session. The current players most often modify it, as it emerges, sometimes changing it into a completely new story. Questions or comments designed to shift energy levels, to refocus attention, keep the action going, promoting a shift in direction and the interaction of complementary opposites. "How does it feel to be killed over and over again by the Dragon?" "What do you think would happen if your friend Mr. Bear were around?" "Is there anyone in the jungle who could help you, if you were able to contact them?"

The core of the sessions involves playing with possibilities. In the first clinical example, a young girl plays with a variety of behaviors as she feels a mixture of apprehension and excitement about being discharged from the hospital to a new foster home.

End: Healing Metaphors as Beacons for the Future

At the end of the puppet play, each child, still in the character of the puppet, tells everyone how the story ends. We do not act the endings out, and everyone has the final say in what happens to his or her own puppet. Although many puppets talk only about what happened to them, other puppets incorporate much of what happened to the other players. Finally, the children, as themselves again, comment about what they liked best and least about the play or provide a moral for the story (Gardner, 1981).

In puppet theater, as in life, every moment has the potential for calling forth that which was not there before. Puppets help release the power of imagination, story, and cocreative adventure. There is little time to think. In our experience in helping the children to interject their own ideas and to take action in the story, we have found the facilitator role most valuable. Students in the psychodrama program are encouraged to play and have fun with the children, rather than to think about being therapeutic. The students are playmates for the children, letting the children produce the ideas and conflicts and play with the possibilities.

Processing

Immediately following each session, the facilitators discuss what happened. During the session, each facilitator mentally catalogues the choice of puppets made by each child, the sequence of play, the themes, conflicts, resolutions, affect, verbal comments, and various opposites that emerge. We pay attention to what happened and what did not happen. We are interested in the sequence of triggers of poignant or startling moments and the times when a child could not stay in character. We discuss what parallels are evident from the children's lives. We note how the children interact with each other. We assess their flexibility in handling difficult situations, identify strengths and weaknesses, consider the meaning of the cocreated story for each child and as a collective. How did the enactment reflect the personal issues of each child, and how did each one handle them? How did it reflect life on the unit? What conflicts and issues need immediate or ongoing attention?

Process Strategies

Process theory (Sabelli, 1989; Sabelli, Patel, & Sugerman, 1997) is essentially a theory of cocreative development. According to this perspective, creativity occurs as a result of the interaction of coexisting harmonic and antagonistic opposites. Everything is a process; everything is in action, continuously moving forward in time; everything is in constant interaction. Over the years, members of the Society for the Advancement of Clinical Philosophy have been articulating and applying process theory to a wide variety of fields related to natural and human development. We have built strategies on this foundation that have enabled us to provide an integrative bio-socio-psychological theory for psychiatry (Sabelli & Carlson-Sabelli, 1989), develop psychodynamic formulations (Sabelli & Carlson-Sabelli, 1991), expand sociometry to measure contradiction and distinguish ambivalence from neutrality (L. C. Sabelli, 1992; Carlson-Sabelli & Sabelli, 1992; Carlson-Sabelli, Sabelli, Patel, & Holm, 1992), produce guidelines for using psychodrama with persons having dissociative and multiple personality disorders (Raaz, Carlson-Sabelli, & Sabelli, 1993), study the relationship of emotions and heart rate variability (Sabelli, Carlson-Sabelli, & Messer, 1994; Sabelli et al, 1995), promote creativity (Carlson-Sabelli & Sabelli, 1996), and integrate mathematical dynamics with psychology, postulating an evolution towards a cosmic attractor of infinite complexity (Sabelli et al., 1997). Most recently, we have introduced the *process equation* (Kauffman & Sabelli, 1997), which demonstrates mathematically that the interaction of opposites is necessary and sufficient to generate fundamental patterns similar to those found in nature. The postulate that creativity occurs through the interaction of coexisting opposites is central

to our understanding of the dynamics of abuse and underlies our treatment strategies. Here the process method and strategies used in the theater are described in terms of action, coexisting opposites, and cocreative becoming (through the interaction of opposites).

Action

Action implies energy, a forward flow in time, sequence interaction, and activity. Action is a fundamental component of process. Everything is in action. Everything is in interaction. The focus on learning in action is central to the therapeutic puppet theater.

Puppet theater is built around action—the activity of cocreating stories. Stories convey the complexity of the process of change through experience. In stories, there is action; something happens, conflict occurs, there is adventure, things change. From the distance of a puppet character, children can play with possibilities and do heroic acts. They can experience inclusion, validation, and empowerment through personally meaningful metaphors that may continue to affect their lives after the play has ended.

The postulate of action also guides us to pay particular attention to sequence. Stories have a sequence—a beginning, a middle, and an end. Life has a beginning, middle, and an end. The histories of the children involved in the puppet theater are important, but the sequence of events of their lives are not presented in an orderly sequence at the beginning of a hospital stay. Sabelli's household method (Carlson-Sabelli, Sabelli, & Hale, 1994) is useful for documenting sequence. The households that a child has lived in are drawn in sequence as pictures on paper. A household changes when a child moves from one residence to another, when a member of the household leaves or is added. The household method allows us to organize a chronological history that is not readily apparent from the bits and pieces of information that are being gathered and charted by many different mental health professionals during the course of a hospital stay.

During the ongoing evolution of the Children's Theatre, our group discovered the work of Bannister (1992). Bannister described a British project, begun in 1987, that aimed at enhancing the practitioners' understanding of child sexual abuse. An active interactive approach for treating children who have been sexually abused emerged from that project. In her latest book, Bannister (1997) described the use of drama and psychodrama with abused children.

The concepts of action and sequence also serve as a reminders that children are evolving in time toward becoming adults, whereas adults have already been children. Brief interventions with children have the potential to have a large, long-lasting effect.

Coexisting Opposites

Coexisting opposites observed with traumatized children include the inability to trust and mistrust appropriately; feelings of helplessness and omnipotence; feelings of enmeshment and disengagement; feelings of being both special and worthless; loyalty to biological parents and also to foster parents; behaviors of approaching, attacking, avoiding, and submitting to defeat; feeling and acting homicidal and suicidal; protecting self and protecting others; being both flexible and rigid; being both controlling and helpless; being understimulated and overstimulated and becoming understimulating and overstimulating; being abused and becoming abusive. The distance created by animal puppets provides the safety to work with these coexisting opposites.

Strategies related to coexisting opposites include role reversal of puppets during stories to give players the experience of opposite perspectives, providing structure to increase spontaneity, using reality to affect fantasy, acknowledging that assessments are also interventions, using distance to promote closeness, attending to the personal and collective meaning of the story and action (Schwartzman, 1977), and viewing play as the work of the children. Improvising stories provides the players the experience of making and solving conflict and, more important, the chance to produce imaginative and creative solutions.

Opposites can and often do grow together and interact with each other, cycling, bifurcating, and creating new structures. Interaction calls forth diversity, new information, and the emergence of complexity through the interaction of coexisting opposites necessary for creative production. Biological and psychological evolution is an example of how the interaction of opposite processes promotes the cocreative evolution from simple to complex. This emergence of complexity is called *cocreative development* or *cocreative becoming*.

Cocreative Becoming

Sabelli (1989) recognized the existence of creation as a normal component of evolution and postulated how it occurs: The interaction of coexisting opposites creates patterns and structures that are novel, more complex, more adaptive, and often more stable than the processes that generate them. Although all processes tend toward decay, they are, at the same time, creative—flowing toward diversity, novelty, and greater complexity. According to process theory, the potential for creativity is increased as opposites grow together. Low-intensity coexisting opposites produce flux, small fluctuations around a point, whereas moderate intensity opposites produce cycles, spirals and bifurcations,

and novel organization. A simple example is the weather. Hot and cold air, increasing together, produce fog, wind, storms, tornadoes, and hail. Despite its name, *chaos* is not a route to destruction but one to self-organization and evolution toward complexity. Facilitators in the therapeutic puppet theater have to be willing not to know how the stories in the session will develop and to be accepting of the healing nature of playing. Session 1 of our clinical example illustrates a metaphor with a surprising potential for healing that is produced through the imaginative wisdom of Russ, a 7-year-old. Strategies related to cocreation involve modulating energy to promote the growth and interaction of opposites toward cocreative becoming.

Strategies to Promote Cocreation Through Energy Modulation

In Children's Theatre, energy modulation is one of the most essential facilitator roles. Energy is related to motivation and to the ability to organize action. Abused, neglected, and traumatized children can be bursting with energy that is fueled by rage. They also may feel defeated, having little motivation or energy. Brain injuries from head trauma, fetal alcohol syndrome, and medical illnesses, such as depression, bipolar illness, and hyperactivity, are both contributors and attractors of abuse. All of these conditions affect the energy levels of children in treatment. Abused children may withdraw to protect themselves from being in harm's way or may explode with outbursts of rage, hurting themselves and others. Neglected and abandoned children indiscriminately attach to any adult who is immediately available and also exhibit withdrawal and depression. Abuse and neglect often occur together, and the moment-to-moment behaviors and changes in energy are not predictable. Strategies to diminish, increase, or focus energy are useful to promote cocreative production. Energy modulation techniques are used when energy is too high, as indicated by a scattered focus, or when energy becomes too low and the storyline seems lost. To focus energy, puppet players are asked to exchange puppets at crucial moments; new puppets are entered into the story. Facilitators are taught to interject the possibility of a new direction, asking each puppet to verbalize what he or she might be thinking but not saying. That technique helps the facilitators to assess the meaning of the action to each player and decide on a direction to move that engages the most players. If the energy dies away, we might suggest a nap, asking one puppet to stay awake in case one of the sleeping puppets has a dream. When energy escalates without direction, we may call a community meeting or interject a television reporter to get each puppet's side of the story.

The fantasy aspect of puppet theater opens possibilities that are not available in life, where there are physical, biological, and economic constraints. In life, children do not choose their parents or caretakers. The maintenance of

relationships is not just a matter of choice but may involve acceptance or necessity. This brings us to the priority supremacy guidelines.

Paying Attention to the Priority of the Simple and the Supremacy of the Complex

The realities of everyday life encompass objective, consensually validated experiences and perception of those experiences. Perception, imagination, and fantasy can provide ideas for changing one's situation and the motivation to carry through. Process theory organizes processes according to levels of complexity. Every process evolves from simple to complex, while retaining its simple aspects and its identity. Process that exists first precedes and coexists with the more complex processes that evolve from them. Complex aspects are richer in information, which gives them the power of supremacy over the basic process from which they evolve; at the same time, the simpler aspects have priority because they must exist for the more complex to occur. Social and family processes are based on preexisting and coexisting biological factors; in turn, social and family processes are the matrix from which psychological processes originate and develop. Priority–supremacy guidelines include the following: Give priority to the past, supremacy to the present; give priority to objective reality, supremacy to perceptions and fantasy (Carlson-Sabelli & Sabelli, 1984); give priority to the biological aspects of a person, supremacy to the social and psychological aspects (Sabelli & Carlson-Sabelli, 1989). Thus, fantasy play is viewed as a useful tool for players to acknowledge, explore, and play with the options for changing reality.

One strategy gives priority to the biological and supremacy to the psychological aspects of a person. Consider a child with fetal alcohol syndrome, a chronic disability that comes from alcohol poisoning in the womb. A child with that disability has been abused before birth and enters the world with permanently diminished physiological functioning—with poor coordination, speech impairment, mental retardation, and hyperactivity. Those disabilities, representing biological priority, in turn, increase the potential for their victims to become continuing targets for abuse and neglect. Children with handicaps are teased by other children, have difficulty in making friends, and encounter problems in school. Their potential for adoption is diminished. Social abuse has been perpetuated on these children, who often become abusers of others. Nevertheless, injured children do respond to the mediated interaction and healing metaphors involved in therapeutic puppet play. Thus, priority is given to biological treatment and supremacy to psychological treatment. By understanding the evolution toward complexity as a hierarchical process in which complex levels of organization have supremacy over the simpler levels that comprise them, we developed a theory for explaining the healing power of play.

Clinical Illustration

The anecdotal evidence described here comes from a series of seven theater sessions involving Danny, an abused 6-year-old boy with fetal alcohol syndrome and attention deficit disorder. The sessions occur over a period of 17 days. All names of the child participants are fictitious.

Danny's symptoms at the time of his hospitalization include punching himself, the walls, and other children. His behavior began escalating after he was sexually abused by his father. He tries to put his penis in his sister's mouth. He is unable to control aggressive behaviors and gets into fights that have caused his nosebleeds. He ties himself in string "so I won't hurt myself" and screams "Kill me. Kill me." He destroys property in his home and recently has begun defecating and urinating around the home. At school, he hits himself in the face, crying uncontrollably. He does not remember the incidents.

Session 1, Thursday: Beginnings and Endings

Two of the three children in the group, Marilyn (Monkey) and Russ (Eagle), have been in the theater before. Danny (Snake) is the newest of the children. The first session for Danny is the last for Marilyn who is being discharged to a new foster home. The session sets the scene for Danny's future theater experiences and illustrates many of the aspects of the process theory approach. The staff includes the lead facilitator (Bear) and Debra, a graduate student (Lion). Two nursing students are participating for the first time. At the session, the players are instructed to choose a puppet and, talking in their "puppet" voice, to tell us their puppet name, a feeling, and a problem that is bothering them, and then select the puppet they want to meet next. The facilitator says she is Big Bear and she is feeling happy. Her problem, she tells the group, is that she wants more honey, but there are too many bees by the honey. Bear chooses to meet Marilyn, the monkey. The monkey names herself "Curious George Abu," a male character, and says "his" problem is that "he" sucks "his" thumb, that "he" is bothered by the fact that "his" parents call him "baby," and that "he" has run away from home. Monkey says that "he" is curious to know Snake and asks whether or not Snake is poisonous. Monkey chooses to meet Snake. Snake says he likes the tiger (he is referring to Lion, a puppet the graduate student is using), that he is feeling fine, and that his problem is he would like to go home. Snake chooses to meet the tiger (Lion) next. Lion talks very, very fast, so fast she is hard to understand. She says that her problem is that she likes to eat lollipops and other animals think she is too silly. Lion asks to meet the Eagle. Eagle is "Mr. Eagle," who says he feels great and would like to get more field mice to eat. Eagle says he wants to meet bear Cub (a nursing student), who says she is also feeling curious. Cub wants to meet the Koala (a second nursing student).

Big Bear asks, "Where are we, and what will our adventure be?" Eagle suggests that all of the animals are in a zoo and the adventure is to take care of all the problems that everybody has. The others show agreement by plunging into action. Curious George Abu—Monkey—says she has run away from home. The animals find "him" and bring "him" to the zoo. Snake says he is lost. The animals find Snake and bring him to the zoo. Eagle says he has a broken wing. He is brought to the zoo in a cage to protect his broken wing. Lion is brought in by dog catchers. Monkey announces "he" can eat meat and threatens to eat the other animals. "He" says he especially does not like eagles. The Koala, Big Bear, and Cub are visitors at the zoo for the day. Monkey decides to give Lion some lollipops. Lion asks Eagle to bring some meat to the Monkey. Eagle decides to look for field mice, and Snake says, "I will just eat dog food." The energy in the group rises and scatters; the animals talk all at once. At least two conversations are occurring, one is about dog food and another about trying to make a cage that is more like home. Monkey is completely out of role. When Big Bear announces, "Night time has come," all the animals go to bed. Lion complains that everyone is making too much noise. Monkey says "he" is having bad dreams but refuses to talk about them. Some of the animals complain about the loud snoring from Monkey. Monkey decides to build a "snore-proof" cage so no one can hear "him." The cage has a unique characteristic—it is one from which "he" can escape. Even with the cage, Snake continues to hear Monkey's snoring and asks Eagle if he hears it too. Eagle is sleeping and does not answer. Snake goes to sleep. Eagle wakes up to look for field mice while all the other animals sleep. In the morning, all of the visitors come back, and Snake starts to eat the mice that Eagle has brought to his cage. Monkey says "his" mom is dying. Snake begins to cry and announces, "My mom died Sunday." The animals then talk about whether people can come back to life. Eagle announces he is sick. Monkey tries to help him but is unsuccessful. Lion calls a conference, and they all decide that Eagle should go to the zoo hospital. All the animals participate in carrying him to the zoo hospital, to the same cage he has been in during the story. While in the hospital, Monkey sneaks into Eagle's room and clips his wings. Snake, who has gone back to his cage, suggests that Eagle come to his hospital instead. Eagle does not say anything and remains in his own cage.

At the end of the puppet play, Big Bear announces, "Time for endings." That is a ritual in which no matter where the group is in the story, all action is stopped, the children return to a circle, and each puppet takes a turn in telling the others his or her own ending. Eagle says the doctors clipped his wings again and he is to be in the hospital for a long time and would get better. Snake tells the group that a friend of his was killed in a motorcycle accident. The person riding on the back suffered when he died, and the other person is probably out of the hospital by now. (After theater, we learn that this is a true story.

Danny had attended the funeral of a friend who had died as the result of a motorcycle accident the Sunday before he was admitted to the hospital.) Monkey's ending has everyone in a cage in the zoo. In Lion's ending, Monkey and Eagle go to Snake's hospital to get better.

Process Theory Analysis

Bear, the lead facilitator of the group, weighs the effect of influencing the story line with the need to model a complicated direction for a new patient and two new nursing students. She introduces the problem of too many bees by the honey. That carries the theme of gathering food from the previous group in which the children Marilyn (Monkey) and Russ (Eagle) had participated. Big Bear's problem also illustrates a reality that is reflected in the fantasy: Two students with no experience in theater actively influence the action. Big Bear invites Marilyn, who has chosen Monkey, to introduce herself first. Marilyn is the most experienced child in the group and is able to continue modeling the ritual of beginnings for the newer members and potentially can contribute a new theme.

The progression through the process approach in that session related to the interaction of coexisting opposites that are first analyzed from the perspective of Danny, who is beginning hospitalization, and next from the viewpoint of Marilyn, who is being discharged.

Danny: Approach-Avoidance Dance

Feeling like an outsider entering a group, Danny takes the role of a vigilant Snake who does not give out information about himself. He is able to ignore, reject, and reach out. As if in a dance routine, Danny moves from approach to avoidance, reactions that are related to beginnings and endings. The "dance" goes something like this: Monkey asks if Snake, Danny's puppet, is poisonous and then selects Snake as the puppet she wants to meet next. Monkey's greeting is contradictory; she approaches, but with suspicion. Danny responds in a similar contradictory manner. He comes closer, introducing his puppet, as Monkey requests, while at the same time snubbing her by ignoring her question and withholding information about himself, and instead, declaring a liking for another puppet, Lion. He approaches Lion (a graduate student) again, by selecting her to introduce her puppet next. In this way, he brings in a third "dancer": Lion says her problem is that she talks too fast and that everyone thinks she is silly. Because Danny has a speech impediment, this is a problem with which he most likely can identify. The graduate student responds to Danny's approach by moving closer. During the story, Danny's puppet, Snake, becomes annoyed by the snoring of Monkey and asks another puppet, played

by a child, Eagle, “Did you hear it too?” In this way, he approaches Eagle asking for validation of his perceptions. Note that Eagle is the fourth dancer. Eagle’s response to Danny is contradictory—an approach–avoidance maneuver. Eagle completely ignores Snake’s request, yet offers mice as nourishment. Eagle does not respond to Snake’s request for validation but gives help in a way he chooses, offering Snake mice to eat. Snake says, “I would rather eat dog food,” and falls asleep, rejecting Eagle. Eagle, however, persists and brings Snake several mice. Snake eats the mice, quietly accepting the gift and approaching Eagle. Danny approaches Eagle again, by inviting him to come and stay in his zoo. Perhaps Danny is beginning to view the zoo as his hospital and as a safe place. He offers the gift of his safe hospital to Eagle, reciprocating Eagle’s choice to befriend him by persisting in bringing him food, even after he had rejected it. So, at the end of the group, Danny, the outsider, takes the role of insider, casting Eagle, the real insider, as the outsider, and Danny invites the outsider in. Eagle announces his ending—he stays in the hospital a long time and gets better. That is an ambiguous response to Snake’s invitation because Eagle does not move in with Snake but declares in his ending that the hospital is a place where he will heal, after staying a long time. Eagle’s ending suggests to Marilyn that she may get what she needs from her new family if she can be patient and not run away. The intervention is likely hopeful for Danny, who is just starting his hospitalization.

Marilyn: Cascade of Bifurcations

Monkey tells us all that her mother is dying. The fantasy has a basis in reality because Monkey is going to be discharged to a new foster family. Although Monkey presents an important problem, the focus is taken from her by Snake and Eagle. Feeling abandoned, helpless, and deeply sad, she is courageous enough to ask for help. Instead of getting her needs met, however, she is overwhelmed with the needs of others. She is not given what she needs—to be mothered. Rather, she is asked to help. Even Eagle, the caretaker, is sick, just like her own mother. That is consistent with her initial fantasy problem: She is a baby desperately needing mothering because her own mother is dying. She feels helpless, and the situation feels out of control. Monkey is overwhelmed by negative feelings. She has not succeeded in being either a victim or a hero. As she experiences the withdrawal of attention and her helplessness, her anxiety increases. She loses courage and feels defeated. She is forced away from her need to be taken care of into a role of taking care of others, as in her real life. Soon her familiar mother will be lost, and who will be her next mother? Fueled by the personal meaningfulness of the enactment, Marilyn is likely to cycle rapidly among many of conflicting thoughts, feelings, and actions. As the energy increases, the opposites grow together: helplessness

and courage, needing and being needed, taking care of and needing to be cared for, taking control and losing control, feeling both strength and weakness. Feelings of being sad, anxious, and angry are all mixed up inside Monkey and are growing together. Once Eagle is safely in the hospital, Monkey darts in and clips Eagle's wings. She creates a new role, attacker. Monkey has already let it be known that being able to escape is important to her. By taking away Eagle's ability to fly, she creates a situation that she, herself, fears very much. However, she then gets a surprise. By listening to Eagle's ending, she learns he views her wing clipping not as an attack, but as a treatment that was so good that it was later repeated by the doctors at the zoo hospital. Eagle's ending for Marilyn transforms her from an attacker to a healer. What a delightful cocreation! It potentially provides hope for Danny, who benefits by learning Russ's perception that hospitalization is safe and healing.

Danny participates in six additional puppet sessions. He uses five puppets—Snake, Monkey, Dragon, Fox, and Bunny. He repeatedly selects puppets that other children have used in previous sessions.

Session 2, Tuesday: Sad Monkey

In Session 2, Danny uses the Monkey puppet that Marilyn had used originally. Russ selects the Dragon. Dragon suggests the story line that the animals start the story by climbing trees and searching for honey. Almost immediately, Danny (who has very little connection with this theme) breaks the action by describing how Russ had called him "gross" for something Danny did at snack time. This leads to a volatile discussion without the animals, and Russ insists, "I didn't do anything." Danny remains annoyed with Russ, but both boys are willing and able to play together. Their differences, however, are evident in their play. Danny announces he wants to kill every animal in the group, especially Russ's puppet, Dragon. Danny takes Monkey's arm and begins shooting everybody and everything for approximately 20 min. Danny and Russ shoot each other. Monkey shoots bullets; while Dragon shoots fire. Monkey is generally bad but occasionally does good things. He attributes all the good things he does to his "monkey brother." Russ as Dragon says to Monkey, "I don't believe you are a bad brother and a good brother, but both brothers are really you." Danny uses Monkey to shoot all the puppets, including himself, over and over again. He, however, refuses to die when anyone else shoots him and revives quickly after committing suicide.

Session 3, Saturday: Sad Dragon

In Session 3, Danny selects the Dragon. He is very inactive. He reinjects the theme of a mother dying, originally introduced by Marilyn in Session 1. He

declares his mother has died of cancer and committed suicide. Further, he lies in his bed in his home and does not answer the phone so he cannot learn about his mother's death. He also asks for help for his new mother. Russ provides the ending that Snake (who may have represented his mother) did not die, after all. According to Russ, she molts her skin and becomes a new Snake. This is another of Russ's cocreative transformational endings.

Session 4, Saturday: Spider Monkey Kills Invaders of His Grocery Store

During Session 4, Danny returns to using the monkey. Spider Monkey begins Session 4 by saying he wants to kill his mother. He is very angry. The action takes place in a grocery store, with Dr. Fox (Russ) in the back of the store waiting to help people. Monkey shoots at Eagle (graduate student), then at all the shoppers Koala and Bear, yelling, "I own this store, and I don't want anyone in here. You are breaking into my store and touching my stuff, and one of you is lying to me." After killing everyone, he threatens to kill himself but does not do so. He remains alive and enraged. He is taken to jail, resisting arrest. Dr. Fox ends the story, "Everybody is alive and well and healthy." Monkey is in jail and his ending is, "I will shoot everyone tomorrow." Eagle's ending is, "We got [a chance] to say good-bye before the Monkey shot everyone, and the Monkey went to jail." Koala's ending is, "We are all safe. Monkey solved his problems about why he was so angry while he was in jail." Big Bear's ending is, "The animals talk to Monkey in jail, and he tells them why he is so angry, and they are able to help him."

Session 5, Tuesday: Mad Monkey

At Session 5, Danny is the only child in the group. Danny chooses the "Mad" Monkey and Fox, and the facilitators select Dragon and Snake. Monkey accuses Snake (who is played by a student) and Dragon of lying to him, of telling him his mother died when she did not. He shoots, killing them both, then shoots himself. Dragon asks, "What happens when monkeys die?" Monkey answers, "They are torn open and thrown in the trash, just like my doodle toy." He dissociates to a scene in which his doodle toy has been broken and is thrown into the trash. This lasts a few seconds. Danny is out of role and a bit dazed. The facilitator invites him to start a new story. He selects an additional puppet for each player. He chooses Fox, the puppet Russ had used in Session 4, and brings Monkey back alive. Again, Danny as Monkey kills all the puppets that are not his. This time he says, "I know you are faking being dead. Get up, so I can kill you again." No one obeys. Playing both Fox and Monkey, he tortures Fox with Monkey. Monkey takes off Fox's clothes and ties his four feet together with the clothes. He punches the Fox, hits him

against the floor, and batters him to death. Monkey commits suicide, and once again, Danny dissociates, showing us how he would like to handle his father when he abuses his sister. He looks up as if he is talking to someone very tall, yelling, "If you lay one hand on her, one hand, I'll smash your face in." He starts talking very fast about his father, big Danny. He talks about what his father did to him and to his sisters. He threatens his father, boldly claiming that he will not let him hurt his sisters ever again. He is the invincible big brother protector. This is the last session in which any of Danny's puppets commit suicide.

Session 6, Thursday: Killer Monkey and the Rabbits

At Session 6, Danny, the only child participant, again selects Monkey, naming him "Killer Monkey." "I'm going to do the same thing today, kill everybody," he says. Two new puppets are deliberately introduced, both rabbits. White Bunny is a very small creature with tall pink-lined ears, who survives by intelligence, not strength. Deb, the graduate student, takes White Bunny. Bonnie, a medical student who works with Danny, chooses the bigger of the two, Rabbit. The two nursing students choose Big Bear and Dragon, and the facilitator takes Lion. Danny, as Monkey, begins the play by announcing, "I am going to shoot everyone like I did before." All of the animals run for cover. Some ask, "Why are you shooting at me? What did I do?" Monkey remains silent, shooting everyone. Bunny says, "I won't come out of my hole because I am safe here. I'm not afraid of you, Monkey. I will just go deeper and deeper into my hole to stay safe." Monkey focuses on Bunny. He tries to shoot into the hole, yelling "Bunny, you come out of there. You come out of that hole right now, or I'll shoot you dead." Bunny steadfastly refuses, "Monkey, you are just wasting your bullets. My bunny hole has a steel door that is bullet proof, and I will not come out, just to be shot by you." This standoff goes back and forth for some time. Bunny asks, "Why are you shooting all of us?" Monkey replies, "Because you all lied to me, you told me my mother was dead, and she's not." Bunny says, "If I say I was the one that lied, will you shoot everyone else after shooting me?" Monkey says, "Yes," but then thinks for a second and changes his mind, "No." Rabbit, who is next to Bunny, asks Monkey, "So I'll be safe? If you shoot her, I'll be safe?" Monkey says to Bunny, "I'll shoot no one but you." Bunny, meekly asks, "For lying?" Monkey replies, "Yes." Bunny asks, "Isn't there anything I can do to make it up to you?" "Only by shooting you," says Monkey. "But I didn't mean to lie to you," replies Bunny. "I'm closing the steel door." Danny punches his arm with the monkey puppet on it, straight up into the air in apparent frustration. Lion, the facilitator, trying to help Danny stay in role as Monkey, asks, "How does it feel to have little Bunny

shutting the bullet proof door on you?" Danny turns to look at Lion and says, "I am going to shoot you right in the face, and I'm going to kick the door down and shoot the bunny and everybody." Lion responds, "Danny, I'd like you to put down Monkey puppet and take the Bunny instead." Danny asks, "Why?" "Because I want you to find out what it feels like on the other side," responds Lion. Deb and Danny switch puppets, and Danny takes Bunny into the safe bunny hole.

Rabbit whispers to Bunny, "You are my friend. I like bunnies." Now in the new roles, Deb, as Monkey, yells at Bunny, "Come out of there." Rabbit whispers to Bunny, "What are you going to do? Why is he shooting you?" Bunny whispers something back. Rabbit replies to Bunny, "You don't know? You don't know why Monkey is shooting at you? Did you lie to Monkey? Monkey said you lied to him. Let's go talk to the Monkey." Bunny looks at Monkey and meekly says, "Kill yourself." Rabbit invites Bunny, "Let's go talk to the Monkey. I'm too scared to go by myself." Bunny says, "Mr. Monkey, kill you. Kill yourself." "Why?" asks Monkey. "So you can die. So I can shoot you in the foot. So I can beat you up." Bunny turns to Rabbit and asks "Right?" "No, I don't think that's right," says Rabbit. "He's bigger than you." "I've got a gun," replies Monkey. "I have a gun too," says Bunny. "Let him know why you lied," says Rabbit to Bunny. "Maybe he'll forgive you. Tell him why you lied." Bunny whispers to Rabbit, "I didn't lie." Then he turns to Monkey and says, "I did not lie to you." Rabbit asks Bunny, "Why does he think you lied?" "I didn't lie," replies Bunny. Bunny turns to Monkey, screaming, "You are just making up stories." Rabbit persists in questioning Bunny. "Why do you think Monkey wants to hurt you?" "I don't know," says Bunny. Monkey shoots at Bunny again. "Talk to us, Monkey," prompts Rabbit. "I didn't lie," Bunny says, firmly and decisively, to Rabbit. "Please talk to us," says Rabbit. Looking straight at Monkey, Bunny repeats, "I didn't lie." Monkey pays no attention and keeps shooting. Lion asks Danny and Deb to switch back to their original puppets. Danny puts the Monkey puppet back on and starts shooting. Deb as Bunny says, "I didn't lie. Please talk to us."

Danny comes out of role. He asks, "Is theater over yet?" He mumbles to himself, "It is over because I have art. I have got to go play. I got art all by myself." Lion agrees that it is time for theater to stop and asks for endings. Monkey says to Lion, "I wanted to shoot you, and you would not even let me kill. That's my ending, and I want Bunny's ending, Bunny's and his friend's ending." Bunny's ending is, "I stayed safe in my little home, and I kept trying to talk to Monkey to find out why he was so angry with me and why he wanted to shoot me. And someday maybe he will be able to tell me, but I'm going to be safe until then." Rabbit's ending is, "Monkey stopped shooting and said, 'You didn't lie. I forgive you.'"

Process Analysis

By Session 6, more of Danny's history has been revealed through therapy visits with his mother and paternal grandmother. How Danny's participation in these sessions may reflect and affect reality can be speculated upon. During Danny's early years his father abused him when he was drunk. Whenever he was out of control, the mother, an orphan, sent Danny and his younger sister to stay with her in-laws, Danny's paternal grandparents. When Danny was 3 years old, his father tried to commit suicide by shooting himself, but his mother took the bullets away. When Danny was 5, his mother became pregnant with the child of a boyfriend. Although she remained married to her husband, she gave birth to her boyfriend's baby girl. When the new baby was 6 months old, Danny claimed he saw his father throw her down the steps. His father denied it, saying she fell off the couch. The baby was badly injured, and Danny's mother left for several weeks to stay with her baby in the hospital. Danny and his 3-year-old sister again stayed with their grandparents. After a visit with their father, the children told their grandmother "Daddy used his hot-dog with us." Grandmother reported her son to the Department of Family Services. Sexual abuse was confirmed. Danny's mother got a restraining order barring her husband from the area. He did not stay away, however. Instead, he stalked the house with a shotgun. He was arrested and convicted of child abuse, partially on the basis of Danny's testimony. At the time of these sessions, Danny's father is in jail. His mother and boyfriend are planning to marry and legally to adopt Danny's two sisters, but not Danny. That is because his mother wants him to carry on his biological father's name.

Because of our knowledge of Danny's life experiences, we make an active intervention in Session 6. Two new rabbit puppets are introduced into the group with the intention of stimulating differentiation of opposite characteristics—homicidal and suicidal—and roles—abuser and abused—represented by Danny through Monkey. This distinction is further facilitated through sociodramatic role reversal (Carlson-Sabelli, 1989, p. 9)—role reversal of puppets. Bunny more clearly represents the abused. Monkey more clearly represents the abuser. Monkey experiences being Bunny under attack. From his safe Bunny hole, he asks for and receives help from a friend, to confront his abuser and tell his side of the story to all the animals in the forest. He experiences the power of telling everyone the truth. When Danny, as Bunny, says, "I didn't lie to you Monkey; it is you who makes up stories," one realizes that he could be referring to his own life circumstances. He had told his mother that his father threw the baby down the stairs. He had told his grandmother that his father "used his 'hot-dog.'" He testified against his father, and his father went to jail. The therapist hopes that his experience has been expanded and his life affected by this fantasy enactment. Until Session 6, Monkey's behavior fluc-

tuated between internalized opposite roles—being suicidal, homicidal, abused, and abusing. It is expected that the opportunity to experience these as separate roles, through the use of the sociodramatic role reversal technique, is therapeutic. Danny, as Bunny, has gained knowledge in action. Helped in telling the truth by a trusted friend, he learns to experiment with his own power of trust and distrust, and whether to choose to keep or share thoughts, feelings, secrets. In this story, the consequences for Bunny are good; he is acknowledged and validated when Rabbit acknowledges that she knows Bunny did not lie.

Session 7, Saturday: "Shooting Monkey" Fights to Keep the Forest From Being Bulldozed

In the seventh session, Danny's last, he is joined by three new players. He introduces himself as "Shooting Monkey" and says he is going to shoot everybody. However, he is invited to join the others to fight against people who are destroying the forest with bulldozers. He allows himself to be disarmed of his bullets (much like the situation with his own father) and joins those who are disarmed (this was the role of his mother in his real life experience) fighting against the people who are being destructive to the forest.

Discussion

In his play sessions, Danny enacts physical abuse, abusing himself and others. He struggles with the part of himself that is good and the part he believes is bad. He deals with feelings of homicide and suicide and struggles to separate his own identity from that of his father. The fact that Danny has to carry on his father's names (both first and last) makes this a more difficult task.

The dynamics of trauma have been well described in the psychiatric literature (van der Kolk, 1987). It is known that repetitive and severe trauma in childhood can generate dissociation and multiple personality disorder (Braun, 1984; Wilbur, 1984). The process theory view (Sabelli & Braun, 1987) postulates that the contact between the immature and readily dissociable self of the child with an unpredictably loving and abusing "parent," a strongly contradictory other, causes a creative split or bifurcation within the self in which the positive and negative aspects of the contradictory other are separately coded. Over time, formation of multiple opposite personality pairs may occur. These creative structures embody a more complex response than simple separation from the pain through dissociation. In interpersonal relationships, when conflict occurs, normal responses involve asserting oneself, separating, and accepting. Each of these responses can become extreme. Asserting becomes fighting and corresponds to rage. Separating becomes flight and corresponds

to panic and anxiety dissociation; accepting leads to surrender, defeat, and depression. Danny clearly had dissociative symptoms at the time of hospitalization and also during theater play. The scenario in Session 2 in which he did good things but attributed them to "his brother" might support the notion of an internal split between representing the negative and positive aspects of his abuser. His play involves high energy fluctuations between being good and being bad. His bad behavior is perpetrated not only on others but also on himself. Sad Monkey does not accept himself as being good but attributes that quality to another character, his "brother." Although these are not by any means developed personalities, they may represent the seed of a good-bad personality pair. By Session 6, Danny has become Killer Monkey. He portrays his killer side exclusively and focuses his fury and abuse on one particular puppet, Bunny. The focus is facilitated by adding the vulnerable bunny to the puppet collection. Through sociodramatic puppet role reversal, an opportunity for Danny to separate this abuser self from the abused self is provided. By experiencing the action from the role of Bunny, who is protected by a friend and a heavy steel door, Danny has the opportunity to be heard, understood, and validated. The abused part of him that identifies with Bunny knows that despite all of Monkey's hateful accusations and antics, he, as Bunny, did not lie. He realizes it was his accuser who lied and that he, Bunny, did nothing wrong. He experiences this knowledge in action, and the truth of it is powerful. Although he returns to the role of Monkey and denies Bunny's accusations, Danny's perceptions of Monkey and the abuser Monkey represents have been altered. Whenever he plays Mad, Shooting, or Killer Monkey, he is likely to access this new information. Although as Monkey, he starts threatening to continue to kill, he is likely to know, deep down inside, that Bunny and Rabbit and the others now know what really happened. Therapists hope a process of healing has begun. Evidence of this occurs in the next session, when Monkey starts by telling everyone he is going to shoot them all but readily gives up his bullets when invited to do so. Perhaps this shift represents the beginning of reintegration of Danny's dissociated self. Prigogine's (1980) concept of nucleation of new structures as a result of high amplitude fluctuations provides a possible mechanism for otherwise unexplained psychological processes, such as dissociation and reintegration (Raaz, Carlson-Sabelli, & Sabelli, 1993; Sabelli & Braun, 1987).

Conclusion

In the puppet theater, play is the work of the children, assessments are interventions, distance promotes closeness, fantasy affects reality, structure is used to channel spontaneity, and the expression of opposite puppet qualities are acknowledged. Puppets are asked to role reverse with each other. Stories have

both personal and collective meaning. How the players cocreate, that is, how they organize themselves in the creative endeavor, provides a wealth of information about the specific actions children have in their repertoire for dealing with others and handling conflictual situations. By using energy modulation techniques to increase the interaction of opposites, the children can externally experience separation of complementary roles and play with different options for handling conflict. Intervention within an ongoing action provides the opportunity to facilitate each child's personal contribution to cocreating his or her own continuing life-story.

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