

## **Abstract**

The aim of the study was to compare the theory and practice of play therapy and gestalt psychotherapy for links in the two approaches.

A phenomenological method was used to explore the experiences of eight play therapists. The data was analysed thematically. The following themes emerged from the exploration: - Play therapy acknowledges the wider social context and environment of the client. The client is focal. The therapist meets the client where they are at. Metaphoric and symbolic play externalise the internal. The therapist works relationally with the child at re-integration.

Although there were nuances of difference in the underlying theories of both play therapy and gestalt psychotherapy, the main difference was in the language used to explain the concepts. The research concluded that there were strong links between both disciplines.

The research also identified a dearth in the literature regarding the use of gestalt with children. Play therapy's use of gestalt is also very much in its infancy and very underdeveloped. This finding, although exciting because of the potential for growth, is also disappointing given that strong links and potential richness of complementation identified by incorporating both approaches. The research concludes that lessons learnt and models of practice created from both play therapy and gestalt psychotherapy could be blended to create a strong, effective way of working therapeutically with

children. For this model to move forward more research would also need to be conducted to measure effectiveness and outcomes, strengthening play within gestalt psychotherapy with children.