

Summary Report – Research Ethics

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Name of course: Master of Arts in Creative Psychotherapy [Humanistic and Integrative Modality]

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Title of research study: The State in Play: Do Regulatory and Relational Play Skills Enhance Social Worker-Child Relationships?

Abstract: The study sets out to explore if relationships between social workers and their child clients could be enhanced by fusing regulatory and relational play skills, with existing social work practice. These play skills are comprised mainly of somato-sensory play techniques that are designed to assist the process of co-regulation between children and an “other”. In doing so, the play skills can enable greater access to the child's social engagement system and a greater relational capacity. The study also wishes to explore practitioners' views on the role of regulation and the therapeutic powers of play outlined in the ground-breaking work of Schaefer & Drewes (2014). Through the course of the study the researcher developed a neurobiologically, attachment and trauma informed model (The RRIGHT play therapy techniques) which included the trauma informed 6R's heuristic/paradigm (Perry, Hogan & Marlin 2000; Perry 2006; Gaskill & Perry 2014). The study was conducted in Tusla – Child and Family Agency, in County Mayo, Ireland between May 2018-May 2019. The sample was comprised of a group of 8 practicing social workers from the children in care and child protection teams in Mayo. Through the identification of 3 central themes, the study answered its research questions and offered potential solutions to gaps in the literature relating to current social work practice (Ungar et al., 2012; McElvaney & Tatlow-Golden, 2016; Horwarth & Tarr, 2015; Ferguson, 2017; Buckley et al., 2010; Levenson, 2017; Lanktree et al., 2012). The study found that social worker-child relationships were enhanced. A fourth theme was identified which indicated that time and bureaucratic pressures have huge potential to impact and detract from workers ability to relate, regardless of what models are being implemented. The study found

advantages to the use of the RRIGHT play therapy techniques in that it enhanced existing models of practice e.g. Signs of Safety (https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_Child_Protection_and_Welfare_Strategy.pdf, Turnell & Edwards, 1999), and offered a more sophisticated approach to incorporating play into practice. This had many benefits, including but not limited to enhancing regulation; relationships; being more child centred and creating more meaningful practice. There were limitations and implications for further study on this topic in an effort to solidify the evidence base for such an approach. **Keywords: Social Work Practice; Regulation; Play; Relational Practice; Trauma Informed Practice; Signs of Safety.**

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