

AUDIOTAPE REVIEW

Ericksonian Play Therapy

By Joyce Mills, Ph.D.

Eighth International Congress on Ericksonian Hypnosis and Psychotherapy 2001

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Ericksonian Play Therapy presented at the *Eighth International Congress on Ericksonian approaches to Hypnosis and Psychotherapy* in December 2001, is a delightful mix of the playful and serious, which typifies Mills' work with children. The presentation was done in a loose outline using a narrative, anecdotal style. Mills tells us that the full title of her presentation is *Restorative Approaches to Re-Discovering Rainbow*. The goal is to evoke the spirit in each child despite any adversities that have been experienced.

Using puppets, rocks, shells, drums and other objects and media, Mills is

incredibly flexible. She is able to be both "silly" and attentive to the moment and use what she calls the "eagle perspective"—focused but with a broad perspective. "If you have (only) one hour to spend with a child, what would you want to leave them with?" Mills asks. This point is emphasized with a child whom she left with the words "Remember one thing - you're good."

Mills credited Erickson with many ideas that she has adapted to her style of work. Among them, she quotes Erickson as having said, "Children have a driving need to learn and discover and every stimulus constitutes, for them, a possible opportunity to respond in some new way." In her discussion of Erickson, she begins an insightful examination of the differences between indirect and nondirective. Disappointingly, this discussion trails off.

She demonstrates her application of Ericksonian interspersed suggestions, and her belief that stories are seeds of change that drive healing. One story she relies on was told to her by a Hawaiian woman. Children are born with a perfect "bowl of light." Throughout life, this bowl becomes cluttered and even heaped with stones and gravel. Each child can learn how to "turn the bowl upside down and empty it" because "nothing can take the light away." Work from the heart can bring out the innate light within the child; Mills describes the job of the therapist as teaching the child skills to bring out the "perfect light of the child."

"The balance of ecology teaches us to thrive," says Mills, who advocates adopting nature as a co-therapist. Also, she emphasizes restraint from interpreta-

see *PLAY THERAPY* on next page

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tion or analysis of an individuals' behaviors or emotions. This point is illustrated by a powerful account in which a drum was being pounded and one of the therapists misinterpreted the child's participation as anger.

In this tape, Mills makes a beautiful point that scars are where we've been, not where we're going. It is a resourceful look at both the clinical and the spiri-tual, and makes the point in many different ways that, "Play is the language of children, and story is the language of play."

Reviewed by:

Roxanna Erickson Klein, RN, PhD

Dallas, TX a dialogue, which becomes personal work.

VIDEO REVIEW