

SECOND EDITION

Therapeutic Metaphors for Children and the Child Within



Joyce C. Mills and Richard J. Crowley



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Therapeutic Metaphors for Children and the Child Within

Winner of the 1988 Clark Vincent Award for an “outstanding contribution to the profession through a literary work” and translated into four languages, the original edition of *Therapeutic Metaphors for Children and the Child Within* was considered a groundbreaking addition to the field of child and adolescent psychotherapy. The 1986 edition was the first—and to this day the only—book that intertwines the extraordinary foundational teachings and philosophies of Milton H. Erickson and creative healing approaches for children and adolescents. With resiliency at its core, this revision now brings forward important topics related to neurobiology and cultural value of metaphor and play, along with fresh case examples and creative activities to a new generation of mental health, education, and coaching professionals.

Joyce C. Mills, PhD, is an award-winning, internationally recognized trainer, author, play therapist, consultant, and program development specialist. Founder of StoryPlay® Global and the StoryPlay® Certification Training Program, Dr. Mills is a co-director of the Phoenix Institute of Ericksonian Therapy and an adjunct faculty member of Argosy University in Phoenix, Arizona, and is on the board of directors of the Turtle Island Project. The author of numerous chapters in leading professional books, Dr. Mills is the co-author and author of eight books, including *Reconnecting to the Magic of Life*, *The Butterfly Wisdom® Transformation Kit*, *Little Tree*, and *Gentle Willow*.

Richard J. Crowley, LCSW, PhD, has completed fellowships in community mental health and internships at Harvard University’s medical and psychiatric facilities. Author of *Mentalball™: Beat Your Invisible Opponent at Its Own Game*, Dr. Crowley is an internationally recognized sports psychologist and performance coach whose patent-pending process removes mental blocks not reached by other means. He is co-creator and developer of Imagine All Better, a life-changing mobile and web app designed to remove emotional and behavioral patterns. Dr. Crowley can be reached at ImagineAllBetter.com and Sportsmaker.com.

This book is dedicated to the discovery of the teachings of Milton H. Erickson, to the delightful children and families with whom we have worked, and to the rediscovery of our own child within.

Return to the beginning;
Become a child again.
—Tao Te Ching

Foreword

In a world where shadows are inevitable, light can be found in many forms if we know where to look. One of those sources of light, warmth, healing, and hope is to be found in the theory and work of Milton Erickson. This most unorthodox therapist believed the unconscious was a repository of healthy, natural, healing resources that could be activated indirectly by storytelling, hypnotic indirect suggestion, and metaphor. Erickson's theory, methods, and creative genius have been recorded in numerous volumes by his students, most notably Stephen Gilligan, Jay Haley, Ernest Rossi, and Jeffrey Zeig. The masterful contributions of Erickson were introduced to child therapy and in one of its most dynamic forms—play therapy—by Joyce Mills and Richard Crowley in 1986 with the publication of their book *Therapeutic Metaphors for Children and the Child Within*. This was a groundbreaking book that, like Ericksonian theory itself, opened up new ways of thinking, being, and intervening in the healing process with children.

I was fortunate to attend a two-day workshop with Joyce Mills in 1988 in New York City, and my work was irrevocably changed. I learned about storytelling, metaphors, and drawing strategies that could activate the resilience and innate healing potentials in children and families, and have used these strategies to the benefit of my clients ever since. It should not be surprising given her embrace of Ericksonian theory that Joyce Mills, in my judgment, is one of the most creative, gifted, and imaginative of contemporary child and play therapists. She brings light, warmth, joy, playfulness, and zest into even the darkest, coldest, most dank and musty corners of theory and practice that for too long have been dominated by models of pathology that diminish rather than dignify people.

The language of metaphor and storytelling recognized in the original book as located in the right hemisphere of the brain has been studied extensively the last 25 years by the fields of neurobiology and neuroscience through neuroimaging studies of the brain. The language of play and metaphor are right-hemisphere dominant but integrated with the dominant language-based activity of the left hemisphere to create coherence, meaning, and well-being. The remarkable power of storytelling has been masterfully developed further by Mills into StoryPlay® to access directly the right hemisphere and the unconscious resources for healing. Child therapists are opened to new possibilities in trauma-informed work because this approach, unlike so many of the current trauma-informed treatment approaches, does not require direct confrontation with the trauma events. Some severely traumatized people, children and adults alike, fiercely resist reliving the trauma events because of fears of being overwhelmed or re-traumatized. The possibility

of doing this work indirectly using metaphor and storytelling methods will appeal to many clients and therapists alike who have seen trauma survivors decompensate, sometimes requiring inpatient hospital stays to stabilize after revisiting past trauma in therapy.

The late Olga Silverstein, a masterful family therapist who spent most of her career at the Ackerman Institute for the Family, in her teaching emphasized that sometimes the notion of going back to resolve the trauma, such as with Holocaust victims, just doesn't make sense. The hope of those who faced such extreme, unspeakable horror is in going forward, such as enjoying the growth and success of their children. Ericksonian methods offer another alternative of approaching the trauma material indirectly through metaphor and at the same time activating the internal, often unconscious healing resources to move forward and achieve a psychological separation from a traumatic past.

Those readers unfamiliar with Joyce Mills's writing and work are in for a refreshing and hopeful journey. I remember a conversation over dinner with Dr. Mills at a national conference in which she stated with great affect that people in the child therapy field are hammered over and over with emphasis on the damage that trauma does. She went on to explain that what is needed is a message of hope, light, and healing. I can't think of a better description of the thrust of this updated edition of the classic first volume of *Therapeutic Metaphors for Children and the Child Within*. Joyce Mills has a healing presence that resembles the description of the work of the man she admires greatly, Dr. Milton Erickson. Readers of this book will be opened to new possibilities, genuine creativity, and an appreciation of their own internal richness, light, and warmth. Such is the gift of this rare and marvelous book.

David A. Crenshaw, PhD, ABPP, RPT-S
Clinical Director, Children's Home of Poughkeepsie
Faculty Associate, Johns Hopkins University

Foreword from the First Edition

Joyce Mills and Richard Crowley have written a book with heart, daring, and mind that is a therapeutic experience in itself to read. Their contribution to new ways of creating and utilizing therapeutic metaphors goes well beyond their excellent work with children; it opens the door to a new understanding of the entire process of problem-solving and growth facilitation in psychotherapy.

It is clear to most professionals that we are currently in a renaissance of new attitudes and methods. Mills and Crowley are on the growing edge of this new breakout. They use the work of Milton H. Erickson as an important resource, but add much original thinking of their own. They respectfully integrate their new methods with Freud and Jung, as well as with modern Neuro-Linguistic Programming, behavior, and cognitive theories. They are at their best when they use their own case material to illuminate their approaches.

I found myself intrigued by the theoretical complexity yet methodological simplicity of applying their ideas in practical daily psychotherapeutic work. In this book they introduce a variety of new methods, such as the *Inner Resource Drawings* and the *Pain Getting Better Book*, which utilize a three-step healing process. I found myself using this three-step process in new variations with my adult clients. Most people, for example, find it fairly easy to see a picture or have a feeling about their problem as they currently experience it, and they enjoy visualizing what it will be like when the problem is resolved. Then comes the surprising third step: getting a picture of the healing process itself, of how to go from the current problem to its already visualized solution.

This three-step procedure is disarming in its simplicity yet surprisingly effective in its rapid resolution of the client's sense of being mired in a hopeless muddle. This is probably the key to the usefulness of the approaches being developed by Mills and Crowley: They very rapidly move the client into a position of strength and self-efficacy.

Whatever the readers' background and training, they will welcome the freshness of these approaches, which have novel and effective applications with adults, as well as with children. This beautifully written book itself evokes the readers' own creativity, enabling them to view their clients' problems from a continually expanding therapeutic perspective. I hope to continue learning with Mills and Crowley into the rewarding future they are constructing for their clients and themselves.

Ernest Lawrence Rossi
Malibu, 1986

Preface

Bridges to New Beginnings

*And now here is my secret, a very simple secret;
it is only with the heart that one can see rightly;
what is essential is invisible to the eye*

—Antoine de Saint Exupéry

Beginning in 1981, Dr. Richard Crowley and I embarked on a mission to bridge the power and efficacy of Dr. Milton H. Erickson's work and our own therapeutic experiences of using metaphor to the field of child therapy and hypnotherapy. After almost five years of writing, rewriting, and editing, *Therapeutic Metaphors for Children and the Child Within* was released. In 1988, the book was a recognized winner of the Clark Vincent Award for an "outstanding contribution to the profession through a literary work" given by the California Association for Marriage and Family Therapy.

Since then, a lot of water has passed under this metaphorical bridge, so to speak, and the work has continued to flow in many new directions. Dr. Crowley became a leading sports performance coach, published his new book *Mentalball* (2006), as well as co-developed an app, *Imagine All Better*TM (2013).¹ My path led me to the wisdom teachings and healing principles of Native American and indigenous traditions, of which storytelling, metaphors, and creativity are culturally integral. My inquisitive interest transformed into a heartfelt passion when I first heard Dr. Carl Hammerschlag present in 1986 at the Third International Congress on Ericksonian Approaches to Hypnosis and Psychotherapy, the same conference where this book was launched. Dr. Hammerschlag's presentation was titled *Erickson as Medicine Man*. I came to learn that Dr. H, as he is affectionately called, a Yale-trained psychiatrist, had been chief of psychiatry at the Phoenix Indian Medical Center for 14 years. As he writes in his internationally acclaimed book *Dancing Healers* (Hammerschlag, 1988), he first learned to heal when he came to Indian Country.

As it is when a little child seeks your attention by continuously pulling at your clothes, these indigenous teachings were tugging at my very core. The following year Dr. Crowley and I attended the first Turtle Island Healing Retreat² facilitated by founder Dr. H, along with two Native American facilitators, Mona Polacca and Nelson Fernandez. The group was mixed, with patients dealing with catastrophic illnesses and professionals seeking experiential learning. For me, it was a life-transforming weekend filled with storytelling, rituals, and ceremonies. The connection between what I was experiencing and my

training as an Ericksonian psychotherapist was deeply intertwined. It was clear that metaphor was threaded throughout each experience. My clinical mind expanded to receive deeper teachings than can be explained in statistical analysis and behavioral intervention. It was clear—a new path had been forged in my life and work.

Over the next several years, the principles in this book, along with my life's experiences, developed in unexpected ways. I found myself sitting in tipis singing Hebrew songs, cooking chicken soup and matzo balls on the reservation, and participating in sacred healing ceremonies that touched my heart in ways that can only be described as "numinous." In 1992, after 26 years of living in Los Angeles, my husband and I decided to give up everything that was safe and familiar and moved to the "garden island" of Kaua'i, Hawai'i, to change our lifestyle. And boy, did it ever change. Ten days after our move, Hurricane Iniki ferociously swept across the island, leaving its residents without homes, electricity, or phone service, and with limited food and water supply, for almost three months.

Working together with local residents and elders, we created the Kaua'i Westside Ohana Activities Project, funded by Office of Prevention, Child and Family Services. The three parts to the project were (1) Natural Healing Activities, (2) Parent Talk-Story Groups, and (3) The Talk-Story (counseling) Center. Each of these programs was designed to be community based and culturally respectful. Chapter 9 will provide a full description of each of these three programs.

During this time, I was encouraged to write another clinical book to include the new work I had developed since living on Kaua'i. However, whenever I tried to do so, I noticed that my writing voice had gone through a dramatic evolution from one that had been clinical to one that became inspirational. I needed to write from my heart and experience, not from my head. Thus, my personal task began to transform the principles from this book and expand them into heart-centered language. With the invaluable encouragement and support of Bernie Mazel, my dear friend and the original publisher of this book, along with the editorial talents of Suzie Tucker and Natalie Gilman, *Reconnecting to the Magic of Life* was published in 1999, and has now been translated into French and Portuguese.

After nine years of living and working on Kaua'i, my husband and I felt pulled to move again—this time to Phoenix, Arizona. Ten days after moving into our home the World Trade Center tragedy occurred. We couldn't believe the timing.

Because of the project on Kaua'i, I was honored to be invited by project manager CharlesEtta Sutton to be a part of a team of talented professionals who were focused on developing a unique program for the children and families hardest hit by 9/11, HART (Healing and Recovery after Trauma).³ This special project offered day-long programs called TAKE HART, which provided interactive, creative, and healing experiences to the families, youth, and children most affected by the World Trade Center tragedy. Additionally, HART addressed the continued threats and acts of terrorism by expanding the availability and accessibility of school- and community-based interventions. This program and its tenants will be addressed in detail in Chapter 9.

The continued evolution of the work inspired me to develop Ericksonian play therapy, which I first introduced at the Sixth International Congress on Ericksonian Approach to Hypnosis and Psychotherapy (Mills, 1992, 1994). Over the next several years, the elements of Ericksonian play therapy (Mills, 2001) naturally evolved into StoryPlay®, a

new Ericksonian *indirective* model of play therapy. With resiliency at its core, StoryPlay weaves together the essential elements of metaphor and the Ericksonian principles illuminated throughout the original text in this book, along with new material that includes indigenous wisdom teachings and the developmental importance and the neurobiology of story, creativity, and play.

Keeping in line with the integrity of Dr. Erickson's work, StoryPlay® does not polarize or diminish other modalities of therapy. Instead, it adds color and zest to the palettes already in hand. It creates new neuro-pathways that open the channel for curiosity, discovery, and unexpected rewards.

Within the revision of this book, readers will find updated material threaded throughout each of the 10 chapters. For example, a new section entitled *Metaphors and Indigenous Healing Philosophies* has been added in Chapter 1 "The Nature of Metaphor." Additionally, current research and views are added to the section on *Metaphor and Physiology* in the same chapter.

Additionally, Chapter 2, "Metaphor in Child Therapy," includes refreshed information related to fantasy and play; Chapter 3, "Ingredients of Storywriting," contains suggestions for *Releasing the Storyteller Within*; and Chapters 4, 5, and 6 offer additional stories, references, and graphics demonstrating important elements in each of these chapters. Chapter 7, "The Artistic Metaphor," provides novel, creative approaches, i.e., *The Pathway to Success Map*, *Creating a Storyteller Puppet*, etc. Chapter 8, "Cartoon Therapy," addresses fresh applications and techniques. Chapter 9, "Expanding Individual Therapy to Community Healing," and Chapter 10, "StoryPlay Therapy®," a new *indirective* model of play therapy, are two new chapters illuminating the evolution of the work.

It is my hope that the stories, metaphors, and creative activities shared on the pages of this book will encourage you to look beyond what is visible to your everyday eyes and to see with the full vision of your heart. With this expanded vision, you will be able to develop creative solutions for the children, adolescents, families, and communities with whom you work. In turn, you will feel rejuvenated and reconnected with the essence, passion, and soul of your work and life.

To this hope, questions may arise—"How do I do that? Where do I begin?" As our opening quote from the Tao Te Ching says, "Return to the beginning; Become a child again."

Joyce C. Mills

Notes

1. For more information about Dr. Crowley's app, visit www.Imagineallbetter.com.
2. For information about the Turtle Island Project, visit www.turtleislandproject.com.
3. Healing and Recovery after Trauma (HART) is a project developed under the auspices of the Office of Prevention Services & Research, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, University Behavioral HealthCare. The project was funded by a SAMSHA appropriation to the New Jersey Department of Health, Division of Addictions. The initial HART development team included CharlesEtta Sutton (project manager), LCSW, Paulette Moore Hines, PhD, Steven Crimando, MA, BCETS, Monica Indart, PsyD, and Joyce C. Mills, PhD, along with Ijeoma Achara, PhD, Joanna Rosen, PhD, and Beth Frenkel, PhD. Contributors to subsequent iterations included Robert Bonner and Cherie Castellano.

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To Margaret Ryan, whose guidance, editorial abilities, and original contributions, along with her emotional involvement and love, permeate the first edition of this book.

An acknowledgment to the memory of my mother and father, Anne and John Crowley (and the Sisters of St. Joseph), who must be delighted in knowing that all their hard work finally paid off.

Heartfelt appreciation and love are offered to my husband, Eddie Mills, for sharing the journey with unwavering love. To my sons, Todd and Casey, daughter-in-law Lynette, grandsons Tyler and Parker who continue to inspire my life. To the precious memory of my mother Rose for her soulful encouragement always present in many ways.

In addition to the names mentioned above, I would like to acknowledge appreciation to those who impacted the revision of this book to include Marilia Baker, David Crenshaw, Stephanie Frank, Carl Hammerschlag, Nathalie Koralnik, Mona Polacca, Charles-Etta Sutton, and all of the StoryPlayers throughout the world who continue to inspire me to share the work.

Most especially to my writing partner and dear friend Richard Crowley, who supported my intention for this revision.

Other Titles Available by the Authors

Cartoon Magic

How to Help Children Discover Their Rainbows Within

Sammy The Elephant and Mr. Camel

A Story to Help Children Overcome Enuresis

While Discovering Self Appreciation

Titles by Joyce C. Mills

Little Tree

A Story for Children with Serious Medical Problems

Gentle Willow

A Story for Children about Dying

Reconnecting To The Magic Of Life

Stories and Steppingstones for Rekindling Joy and Embracing Change

Butterfly Wisdom

Four Passages to Transformation

Title by Richard J. Crowley

Mentalball

Beat Your Invisible Opponent at Its Own Game

Introduction

Beginnings

For centuries pieces of colored glass, mirrors, and tubes were readily available. To some they were just bits and pieces. To others they were the ingredients to transform their world of colors and shapes into fantasies and new visions . . . the kaleidoscope.

Over the last several decades many volumes have been written by professionals in several related fields in an effort to comprehend and clarify the therapeutic approaches of psychiatrist Milton H. Erickson. Many of these volumes have been written by individuals who were privileged to have trained personally with Erickson. Certainly Erickson's personality was in itself a powerful learning tool, and all who worked with him were stimulated by this caring and crafty genius to reach beyond themselves in ways still unknown to many of them. Indeed, Ernest Rossi, who worked closely with Erickson from 1974 until Erickson's death in 1980, has only recently come to a full understanding of the unusual and complex learning techniques Erickson merrily devised to spur him on (Rossi, 1983). In direct ways and indirect ways, in humorous ways and serious ways, in didactic ways and metaphorical ways, Erickson continually strove to expand the mentalities, the viewpoints, and the abilities of those who trained with him.

Given the sheer dynamism and ingeniousness of Erickson's personality, how much hope is there for "second-generation" students? Can therapists who have not worked directly with Erickson legitimately expect to integrate his brilliant techniques of therapy in personally creative ways? The question to be answered is: To what degree was Erickson's phenomenal success as therapist and teacher contingent upon subjective elements—his unique combination of abilities, characteristics, and life experiences—or, to what degree was it contingent upon the objective elements of veracity and classicism contained in the ideas and insights he conceived? Ironically enough, it will be the second-generation students—those of us who never worked with Erickson—who will in the end provide an answer to this question.

The very fact that we have written a book describing our own applications of Erickson's approaches in the specific field of childhood disorders indicates that second-generation students can indeed experience the veracity of his approaches in a compelling and effective manner. Indeed, the glow of excitement we felt at our first Ericksonian workshop several years ago has only deepened with the passage of time and continued study. We now realize the excitement has endured precisely because it was not just in response to Erickson's creativity, but was rather a direct outcome of the creativity his approaches

stimulated in our own work. There was a certain “domino effect” set in motion through which each new flash of insight seemed to inevitably spark another.

Before our introduction to Ericksonian approaches, we had accumulated approximately 25 years as practicing psychotherapists between the two of us. Certainly, the work had been satisfying for the most part, and the various therapeutic methods of insight-analysis, behavior modification, family therapy, and gestalt principles had been effective. Yet we both felt that a vital dimension or level of treatment was clearly missing. We began to explore current nontraditional approaches in the field and attended a Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) workshop led by Richard Bandler and John Grinder. The colorfully presented theories and techniques captured our interest and we decided to continue exploring these concepts in a small-group learning setting with an NLP trainer. Something, however, was still missing. We found ourselves getting stuck with the “which-step-goes-where” dilemma, and experienced our creativity being somewhat blocked by such a structured approach.

It was at that time that we had our first exposure to Erickson’s ideas and techniques in an exciting and entrancing workshop given by Paul Carter and Stephen Gilligan in March 1981. Although the Bandler and Grinder techniques were derived from some of Erickson’s approaches, we found that the Carter and Gilligan workshop captured the essence of Erickson’s spontaneous, innovative methods in a way better suited to our own personalities and proclivities. It was in this workshop that the vital missing element for us as therapists became clear.

Actually it was more than a missing element; it was more like a sweeping shift in dimension and focus. In Erickson’s work we saw how the psychology of pathology that had historically dominated psychotherapy was unobtrusively transformed into a *psychology of potentials*; how the traditional authoritarian approach of the therapist was mellowed with respect and care into a *utilization approach* of patient potentials; and how the ever-revered edifice of analysis and insight was nudged off the pedestal in favor of *creative reframing* and *unconscious learnings*.

Even more important than these conceptual innovations, however, was the personal element of respect and dignity that infused the work—even without the benefit of Erickson’s presence. We had both received training in traditional hypnosis, yet we had found it to be artificial, limiting, and authoritarian. It also had seemed disrespectful of the patient, who was, after all, being told to enter some strangely disconnected state in which he or she would be the passive recipient of someone else’s suggestions. In the Carter and Gilligan workshop, however, just the opposite occurred: trance became a natural inner movement of concentration and focus, and hypnotic suggestion became a natural outer means of evoking one’s own solutions. Each time we went into trance during the workshop, it was as if something profound and personal was being touched within each of us. Like a window shade that suddenly lifts upward and allows the sunlight to enter and brighten a darkened room, Erickson’s approaches lifted our awareness just as suddenly and brightly toward another, more creative way of working. We emerged from the workshop literally enlightened by the experience.

It is one thing to be dazzled by the light of discovery, but it is quite another to anchor that light in one’s life in a personally relevant way. We soon discovered that the *vision* of what was to be accomplished was only the starting point of the process. Translating that

vision into a *reality* then required many long months of work, practice, and study. We continued our learning by attending another intensive workshop presented in August of 1981 by Carol and Steve Lankton in which additional Ericksonian approaches were presented. We strove to expand these new hypnotherapeutic strategies through our own research and through our exploratory application of the strategies with our clients and ourselves.

With our introduction to Steven Heller in 1982 we took our next step forward. His concept of “unconscious restructuring” (Heller & Steele, 1986) extended the neurolinguistic theory of communication by introducing a new model of mental functioning that included what he termed an *out-of-conscious system*. Heller’s emphasis on the use of metaphor to integrate the out-of-conscious system gave us an even more focused approach to therapeutic intervention. This collaboration continued for some two years.

During this time we benefited from the guidance and encouragement of several leading teachers in the Ericksonian field, in particular Jeffrey Zeig, director of the Milton H. Erickson Foundation. Jeff was not only emotionally supportive of our work, but also played an active role in bringing this book to fruition. It was through his networking efforts that we met Margaret Ryan, who has been invaluable to us not only as a collaborator on this project, but indeed as a dear friend in our lives. Through Margaret we then met Ernest Rossi, who generously contributed the foreword to this volume. Finally, Jeff put us in contact with Brunner/Mazel, who became our publisher.

Learning to use Erickson’s techniques (as well as techniques based on his approach) is always challenging and often disconcerting. In the beginning it is not unusual to feel clumsy and self-conscious. We found it awkward, for example, to interrupt an adult patient in mid-sentence with the unexpected lead-in, “And that reminds me of a story.” Yet we did it because we intuitively believed in the validity of telling a metaphor to get across a point that ordinary conversation or discussion could not. Our fear that a client would become annoyed and say, “I’m not paying this kind of money to hear stories,” never came true. What did come true was our growing confidence as patients responded favorably, and soon it seemed perfectly natural to be “telling stories” to children as well as adults.

Children, of course, are generally receptive to such an approach. In most cases they *prefer* hearing stories to being talked at by some adult. Indeed, children often provide the best training ground for the development of Erickson’s metaphorical approaches precisely because metaphor is such a familiar (though unconscious) reality for most of them. Part of childhood identity in our culture is woven out of bits and pieces of fairy tales, cartoons, and movie heroes that have most affected the child. Even the role modeling of parents can be viewed as a metaphorical process whereby the child learns to act “as if” he or she were the parent.

Given this natural receptivity to metaphor that characterizes childhood, we found that a conscious and directed application of a therapeutic metaphor via storytelling produced effective and gratifying results. Certainly storytelling is not a new or unique form of child therapy, but the particular combination of techniques used to create the story can result in something quite special. When this happens, the story as experienced by the child is an effortless flight into an inner world. As crafted by the therapist, however, the story is a complex interweaving of observations, learnings, intuitions, and goals that ultimately leaves the child with a very important message.