

GROUP CONSTRUCTIVE CREATIVE IMPROVISATION THROUGH SANDPLAY

Ileana L. Vitalia ^{1*}

University of Pitesti, Faculty of Education, Social Sciences and Psychology,
1 Târgu din Vale Street, Pitești, Argeș County, Romania

Abstract

Sandplay is considered both a therapy and a therapeutic or counseling technique that functions as a non-verbal and non-threatening mediator between the unconscious and the outer reality of the participant. The sandtray provides a free and protected space for individuals to express their inner world, allowing them to work safely through unconscious experiences, while protecting their conscious mind. So, the sandplay and sandtray are mostly beneficial to heal the inner pain of clients who had difficulty in expressing themselves verbally. The technique is particularly valuable for children with limited language skills, and is specifically effective with those who have a low self esteem, exhibit poor academic progress, depression, anxiety and/or behavioural problems. In recent years, the sand play has been used as an assessment tool when working in a cross-cultural, or language learner context. Moreover, many professionals from different backgrounds incorporated this method into their practice to address different aspects of personal development. The present study aims to investigate the effects of a creative group improvisation through sandplay on the social skills of college students. We suppose that working together in the sandplay process allows the group member to improve their communication skills and become more adaptive in their social environment.

Keywords: creative improvisation, sandplay, social skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent researches in the field of personal development, counseling or psychotherapy expressed a constant need for developing more flexible, dynamic yet efficient methods to enhance well-being and strengthen positive aspects of life, such as optimism, happiness, post-traumatic growth, and psychological capital. Many studies used sand play as a therapy, as a method or as an instrument around the world representing a significant number of cultures and contexts: To identify indicators of personal and environmental risk factors and protective resources (resilience) in young people in South Africa (Ebersöhn et al, 2017); To improve the resilience (self-esteem, stress coping ability, social support, and social skills) of Chinese college students (Wang et al, 2017); To improve the quality of peer interactions in children with externalizing behavioral problems (Han, et al, 2017); To assist children with emotional and behavioral problems (Richards et al, 2012); To facilitate college students' career decision-making in the process of career counseling (Swank and Jahn, 2018). In addition to supportive music and imagery, sand play was used as a therapeutic treatment to improve emotional (self-expression and emotions) and behavioral adaptability for Korean child witnesses of domestic violence (Kang, 2017).

Ramsey (2014) made a brief presentation of the history of sand play therapy, since 1920 when Margaret Lowenfeld first created this method. In this presentation, she emphasized the efficiency of sand play method as expressive art in children with various types of difficulties.

Traditionally, sand tray and sand play refers to a process of creating the client's inner world in the sand tray (a sand-filled box; usually 50 cm × 70 cm × 7 cm in size) using miniature figurines that come from all genres of everyday life, sand, water. The process can be repeated several times or it may even be interpreted after a single tray and, in both cases, healing is possible. The sand tray can also be used as an assessment tool (explained as a process of acquiring information which will facilitate insight into a client's development and functional abilities in the family and community) (Ebersöhn, 2017).

The present research proposed to integrate the general principles of sand play technique into a more complex provocative constructive group creative exercise. Based on the benefits and power of using natural elements in approaching different psychological aspects (Răban-Motounu, 2014, 2015, 2016; Vitalia, 2014, 2016), we replaced the figurines with elements from nature.

General objective: to evaluate the efficiency of a group constructive creative improvisation through sand play using natural elements.

Practical objective: to improve the interpersonal relations.

Hypotheses: We suppose that working together in the sand play process and using various natural elements, would allow the group members to improve their interpersonal relations and communication.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Method: In this study we used an experimental design. The variables of this research were: the general level of interpersonal problems (dependent variables) and the participation in a creative group improvisation through sandplay (independent variable). A single group was involved in this research. The participants were randomly selected. Assessments of the mentioned variable were conducted before and after the participation in the group provocative exercise.

Psychometrical methods: Inventory of Interpersonal Problems Circumplex Scales (IIP-C) and Statistical methods.

Instruments:

Inventory of Interpersonal Problems Circumplex Scales short form (IIP SC) measures interpersonal problems as an expression of recurrent difficulties in relationship to others. The instrument assesses various problem areas in interpersonal functionality with a five-point Likert-type scale. It consists of a total of 32 items in 8 subscales containing four items each. The subscales of IIP-C, which assesses the overall level of interpersonal problems and distress with its total score, have been named "domineering/controlling", "intrusive-needy", "self-sacrificing", "overly accommodating", "nonassertive", "socially avoidant", "cold-distant", and "vindictive/self-centered". High scores for the total scale and for its subscales indicate an increased level of interpersonal distress and specific interpersonal problems. The internal consistency by Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale was 0.868, for Romanian population, with good values for all eight scales (Raban-Motounu, Vitalia, 2014).

We also used natural elements: sand, water, rocks, seeds, dried flowers, different colored flowers, green branches, green leaves, green grass, small scallops, stones.

Participants: The experiment was conducted in the laboratory of psychotherapy, in a comfortable environment, with adequate conditions of light and temperature. The laboratory had enough space to allow movement and chairs to sit on. 10 third grade students participated in this study.

Procedure:

First, all the participants completed The Inventory of Interpersonal Problems Circumplex Scales short form (IIP-C).

Then, they gathered around a large piece of paper on the floor with a lot of sand on it and they were invited to imagine that this piece of paper is a world (their world) awaiting to be build and explored. They were invited to explore the sand and the natural elements and to involve all of their senses in this exploration (to touch, to smell with open and closed eyes, to hear the sound they make). After this exploration, each person began the process of buiding the world, by arranging the natural elements into the sand. From time to time, the participants were asked to be aware of their personal experience in this context of working together with other people as a group.

At the end of the exercise, all the participants shared their personal and group experience. After this, each of them completed the The Inventory of Interpersonal Problems Circumplex Scales short form (IIP-C) again.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Statistical analysis was used to confirm the hypothesis of this study. Student t test (SPSS 17.00) was computed to compare test results. Paired-Samples t Test was used to test the significance of the differences before and after the provocative experience. Descriptive Statistics were also performed.

Table 1: Group Statistics

<i>Interpersonal problems</i>	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Before	10	58.1	15.708
After	10	49.6	10.589

There were significant differences regarding the level of interpersonal problems after the provocative experience when compared with the initial situation ($t=3.583$, $p=0.006$).

Discussions

This type of experiential creative method combining sand play and natural elements holds potentially therapeutic and trans-formative power. The exercise provided a free and protected space, an atmosphere of trust and safety for the participants to express their inner world, which is already a healing influence. As others researches mentioned (Richards et al, 2012), healing takes place at a deeper level than that of the conscious mind, occurring instead at an unconscious level with the developmental level of the conscious making choices with regard to change. Psychological healing, using sand tray work, occurs at a pre-verbal level within the unconscious. The process of buiding together the world, allowed the participants to cultivate interaction with each other using natural elements, as a way of symbolically approaching and treating personal and interspersal problems. These actions are significant for raising self-consciousness, tapping inner resources, and resolving inner conflicts by arranging and rearranging these sand-world objects (Wang et al, 2017). The group dynamic enhanced the development of collaboration, and empowerment. The group participants felt more secure and less socially inhibited so they expressed not only positive resources but also issues or challenges, aggression and needs.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Working together in the sand play process and using various natural elements, allowed the group members to improve their interpersonal relations and to decrease the level of their interpersonal problems. They felt more secure and less socially inhibited so they expressed not only positive resources but also issues or challenges, aggression and needs. The exercise gentle created a bridge

between the conscious and the unconscious elements, providing the persons the group experiential context to gain access to inner feelings, thoughts and needs but also to explore various interpersonal situations. This could be an effective way to help people address issues and emotional experiences of persons who had difficulty in expressing themselves verbally (moreover in the context of globalization, when working in a cross-cultural, or language learner context) (Ramsey, 2014).

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