



A Review of Sandplay Therapy

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Abstract

This paper describes the basic knowledge of Sandplay Therapy in detail. It includes the definition, background and origin, theory of sandplay therapy, different client populations, materials, the dimensions of sandplay, process and the role of the therapist. It introduces the current of sandplay research and the future of it.

Keywords: Sandplay therapy, Sandtray, Therapist

Contemporary constructivist theory has changed the psychotherapeutic landscape in at least twoways. On the one hand, constructivist theory provides a new lens for the interpretation and evaluation of modes of psychotherapy that have evolved and established themselves since the inception of the "talking cure" at the end of the last century. On the other hand, constructivist theory has also been the source of novel therapeutic approaches and strategies. Using constructivist Theory as a new lens from which to view sandplay therapy, our intention in this section is to highlight some of the constructivist themes evident in contemporary sandplay theory and practice (Malinda & Willian, 2000, p135).

Definition

Sandplay therapy has been defined as a psychotherapeutic technique that enables clients to arrangeminiature figures in a sandbox or sandtray to create a 'sandworld' corresponding to variousdimensions of his/her social reality (Dale & Wagner, 2003, p17).

Background and Origin

Sandplay has an accelerating history. It goes back to an early decade of the last century when H.G. Wells wrote about his observing his two sons playing on the floor with miniature figures and his realizing that they were working out their problems with each other and with other members of the family. Twenty years later Margaret Lowenfeld, child psychiatrist in London, was looking for a method to help children express the "inexpressible." She recalled reading about Wells' experience with his two sons and so she added miniatures to the shelves of the play room of her clinic. The first child to see them took them to the sandbox in the room and started to play with them in the sand. And thus it was a child who "invented" what Lowenfeld came to identify as the World Technique.

Despite Lowenfeld's valuable contribution to child psychotherapy, it was not until the late 1950s that the potential of her "World Technique" for adults was realized by Dora Kalff. Kalff learned about Lowenfeld and the "World Technique" at an international conference in Zurich, then she went to London to study with Lowenfeld. At the same time, she completed her analytic training with Emma and Carl Jung and developed her own version If sandplay by combining Eastern thought. She soon recognized that the technique not only allowed for the expression of the fears and angers of children, but also encouraged and provided for the processes of transcendence and individuation she had been studying with C.G.Jung. As she developed the method further, she gave it the name "sandplay".

Theory of Sandplay Therapy

Sandplay therapy is a more generic term referring to a variety of effective ways of using sand, figures, and a container from different theoretical perspectives. Sandplay therapy emphasizes the spontaneous and dynamic qualities of the creative experience itself. The essence of sandplay is non-verbal and symbolic. In what Kalff called the "free and protected place" provided by the tray and the relationship with the therapist, children and adults play with sand, water, and miniatures over a period of time, constructing concrete manifestations of their inner world. When energies in the form of "living symbols" are touched upon in the personal and collective unconscious, healing can happen spontaneously within a person at an unconscious level. As a more harmonious relationship between the conscious and the unconscious develops, the ego is restructured and strengthened(Lauren Cunningham,1997, p1). The process of individuation is stimulated and brought to fruition (Dora M.Kalff, 1991, p1).

Uses of Sandplay with Different Client Populations

Because of sandplay therapy is a non-verbal and symbolic, it is the most suitable for child. For example, sandplay can treat the children with language and communication difficulties (Carey.L.1990,p179), with attention deficits (Pearson.M.,2003,p204), with experienced trauma (Zinni.R.1997, p657), with behavioural difficulties (Allan.J.& Brown.K.1993, p30) and children from various cultural groups. With the development of sandplay, it can be used for adolescent and adult more and more, therapists often combine the sandplay therapy with family therapy and group therapy

Materials

In sandplay, the client creates a three-dimensional scene in a tray of sand using a selection of miniatures. Therapists usually provide two trays for clients. Each approximately 30×20×3 inches in size (in our country, the size is 57×72×7cm), as this dimension allows the client and therapist both to view the entire tray in one glance without moving their eyes and heads.

The interior of both trays is painted blue (dark blue on the bottom and lighter blue on the sides) to give the impression of water or sky when the sand is moved aside.

One tray typically holds dry sand and the other has wet sand with a container of water nearby, so clients can add water if they so desire (Mitchell & Friedman, 1994). There are many kinds of sand' colour, each serve different symbolic functions, for example, brown/earth, white/snow, and mixture of white and brown/seashore. Furthermore, wet sand could be used for tunnel making and molding

The sandplay therapy room should contain a wide variety of miniatures. There is no standard collection of miniatures, but common categories include: people (domestic, military, fantasy, mythological, from various historical periods, of many nationalities and races, and in various functions), animals (wild, domestic, fantasy, prehistoric, zoo, farm, and marine), buildings (religious and nonreligious schools, castles, and houses), vegetation (trees, bushes, plants, vegetables, and flowers), vehicles (land, air, water, space, and war machines), structures (fences, gates, bridges, doorways, and corrals), natural objects (rocks, stones, woods, seashells, pinecones, feathers, bones and eggs), symbolic objects (wishing wells, treasure chests, jewellery, and glass marbles), and so on (Mitchell & Friedman, 1994).

The Dimensions of Sandplay

We can record the sandplay with pen and camera, in order to research sandplay, we should examine various dimensions of the sandplay (Cynthia R. Mathis, 2005, p16), the type of miniatures, the number of miniatures, the process of making the tray, the process of oriented behaviors within the tray, the time of making the tray, the interaction of eye contacting and verbal statements, the use of the sand, the space station, the theme of the sandplay, and so on.

Process

Most commonly, the sandplay process consists of two central stages. The first involves the construction of the sand picture, where the perceived needs for the counseling session and the intentions of the facilitator guide the specific instructions given to the child. However, sandplay pictures are generally considered to be a projection of the child's internal experiential world and a representation of his/her world view (Dale & Wagner, 2003, p17).

After the completion of the sand picture, if the child is comfortably able to engage in verbal communication, the second stage of the process involves their sharing of a story or narrative about the sand picture they have created. This stage of the process allows client to clarify personal meanings and to integrate new feelings and insights that may have emerged through the creation of the sand picture.

The Role of the Therapist

As we know, the traditional psychological therapy methods often emphasize the interpretation and help the client find the way to cure, but the sandplay therapy asks the therapist to "do nothing". Dora Kalff once said, "It is harder to do nothing than to do something." (Linda Ellis Dean, 1996, p1). The silent respectful acceptance of the images created during the sandplay process allows the client to feel increasingly safe and free. As this happens the images seem to come less from the ego and personal unconscious, and more from the deeper levels of the human psyche, or the collective unconscious.

If, as Jung believed, the human psyche has the ability to regulate its own path toward wholeness, healing comes from this deep level of the psyche rather than from outside.

So the therapist must be capable of establishing a free and protected space, they should possess an openness that is the fruit of an open encounter with one's own dark and unknown sides.

In order to be capable of carrying out the sandplay task, the therapist, in addition to psychological training, must be able to fulfill another prerequisite. Since the sandplay process expresses itself in a symbolic language, a profound knowledge of the language of symbols - as expressed in religions, myths, fairytales, literature, art, etc. - is

indispensable (Kalff, 1991, p1). This applies especially to the depth- psychology interpretation of symbols as developed by C. G. Jung. Above all, one must have experienced these symbols and their efficacy on the basis of one's own psychic maturation process. Only this practice makes it possible to accompany the client's experience effectively.

Current Sandplay Research

Nowadays sandplay research has not kept pace with the descriptive work associated with sandplay theorists and therapists. This has probably been due to Kalff's and his followers' focus on the "subjective exploration of the symbolic meaning behind the selected figures and movement in the scenes" (Mitchell & Friedman, 1994), so several researchers have attempted to remedy this issue in a number of areas. First, researchers have attempted to identify common patterns of meaning associated with specific symbols or configurations in the sand (Cynthia R. Mathis, 2005, p16). *The Story of a Sexually Abused Child's Sandplay*. Second, researchers have attempted to study similarities and differences in sandworlds between different clinical and nonclinical groups. *Characteristics of Sandplay Productions of Test Anxious Junior High School Students* (Chen Shun-sen & Zhang Risheng, 2006, p117). Third, researchers have focused on the validity and reliability of the technique itself, rather than its symbolic interpretation or diagnostic and therapeutic applications (Aoki S, 1981, p25). *The reliability of the Sandplay technique*. Fourth, researchers have attempted to create instruments or various rating techniques to describe variables such as the participant's process in creating the sandworld, the resulting structure and content of the sandworld, and the meaning or interpretation of the sandworld. (Pennington's, 1996). "Sandtray Assessment of Development (SAD)". Fifth, the sandplay has been introduced to schools. (Saran Goss & Marilyn A Campbell, 2004, p211): *The Value of Sandplay as a Therapeutic Tool for School Guidance Counsellors*. Sixth, researchers have studied the correlation between the age, the intelligence, the mental health with the producing of the sandplay. *The world test: Developmental aspects of a play technique*. (Kamp & Kessler, 1970, p81).

The Shortage of the Sandplay Therapy

The sandplay therapy is a deeper psychological method, the therapist must master the Jung's analysis psychology, so it is very abstract, subjective and controversial. In the research of demonstration, there are some problems: the internal validity of the sandplay is threatened, many sandplay therapy has few sample, which may limit its extension.

The Future of Sandplay Therapy

It is our strong belief that knowledge of the past history and present status of sand tray technique will facilitate conscious choices about the future directions of sandplay. First, the research of the sandplay therapy will come to a whole. Second, the sandtray form and sandplay organization will become diversity. Third, various analyzed dimensions will emerge. Fourth, some model technology will be introduced to the sandplay therapy.

In a word, sandtray reflects man's inner world, it is a long way to explore the sand world. With the development of society and human, new research subject will come forth, only pay attention to the sand world, we might exploit more and more field of researchment and application of sandplay therapy.

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