

Creative Synthesis: Sandtray

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Abstract

This paper discusses my application of a creative intervention with a pseudo-client, Michelle, who was struggling with managing the stress of two jobs. An overview of the sandtray intervention is provided, along with general application of the technique. This technique can be integrated with multiple populations, diagnoses, goals, and theoretical orientation. There is additional information on skills I have learned during the semester how I plan to approach these with future clients and supervisees. Also included is biblical integration of creative arts and how this is related to my clinical work. A link to the demonstration video is provided, with an introduction and conclusion reviewing the intervention.

Keywords: creative arts, sandtray, processing, biblical integration

Creative Synthesis: Sandtray

Sandtray is described in multiple texts (Degges-White & Davis, 2017; Gladding, 2021) as an appropriate creative intervention for processing emotions, events, thoughts, interpersonal relationship dynamics to provide a space to link both the logic and creative brain. This intervention provides a space for individuals to explore and control their inner conflict and emotional experiences when verbal processing has been difficult and can be integrated with multiple styles and counseling orientations. By providing a base of generic sand and various miniatures, individuals can create a space to represent both abstract and concrete concepts. The counselor's purpose is to orient the individual to the activity, ask for permission, and then generally remain quiet while the individual creates their piece. The counselor can incorporate various processing techniques such as reflection and open-ended questions combined with empathy and non-judgment while the individual is sharing. The combination of mindfulness, internal exploration, verbal processing, acceptance, and tactile input from the tray help to integrate split parts of the brain (Fleet et al., 2023).

Case Background

The pseudo-client, Michelle has been struggling with finding balance between her two jobs. She had a recent significant stressor in one which resulted in additional feelings of fatigue and burnout. She has verbally processed some of her experience, but sandtray provided an additional space for her to observe the differences between her work experiences. As mentioned in the video, through sandtray, Michelle recognized her need for providing herself more grace as she navigated the challenges of working two jobs.

Course Learning

Incorporating creative arts into my sessions has been an interest for the past few years, but I have struggled with confidence in applying the techniques and processing them correctly. As I've been working through this course and learned more about the techniques, I am realizing the importance of being present and helping the person process their own meaning instead of helping them find a specific from the activity. It has helped me be more present in the process and approach the processing with more curiosity and humility. Even if the activity was meant to encourage a specific aspect of their goals or story, it is okay if their meaning did not fully align with my intentions for the activity. I can approach arts interventions in the same way I approach sessions in a person-centered, humanistic manner. This can also be applied to my supervisory work, as sandtray can be used to process client experiences, emotional challenges during session, and ethical dilemmas the supervisee is facing.

Biblical Integration

From a biblical worldview, art interventions have the flexibility to be adjusted and incorporated with various value systems and beliefs. Incorporating faith may be natural for someone or may feel awkward, and both can provide value. In my creative activity, the client identified their faith as a primary link to the conflict experienced about her jobs. Exploring the meaning of her faith and her reliance on God's guidance to provide a directive allowed her to find some additional peace in the challenges. As I reflect on my own work as a counselor, I realize how the Lord has blessed me with a spirit of peace and curiosity that naturally flows during the counseling process. Instead of trying to conform to a specific way of counseling, I can sit back and allow His natural gifts to express themselves in my work. I'm able to sit back and allow the Holy Spirit to prompt my work and acknowledge this in session with my clients. The

creative process allows deeper exploration and additional meaning of an event or emotional experience.

Personal Meaning

As I finish up this semester, I am feeling refreshed from practicing so many techniques. Incorporating creative arts into my personal self-care has quickly become an important aspect of my week, and I am encouraging my clients to do the same. Although I am not particularly artistic, I have found verbal and external processing of my art piece to be especially important in my understanding of the connection between my piece and the prompt. During my COUC 714 intensive, Dr. Warden worked to normalized not knowing everything as a supervisor, which I think is also applicable to our work as counselors. I have been working this semester to learn more about accepting myself where I am while also working on my personal growth and clinical skills.

Conclusion

Integrating expressive arts provides the opportunity for me to rely less on my own interventions in a session and more on the individual's creative process. This can easily be integrated with spiritual principles, as art can incorporate larger meanings such as connection to a spiritual being or the influence of faith principles on the experience being described. Creative interventions allow individuals to move past logical blocks into a space of emotional processing, providing additional integration of various parts of the brain. As I move forward in this program, I look forward to continuing to grow in my skills as a counselor and learning additional techniques for approaching counselor education and supervision.

Video Link: https://watch.liberty.edu/media/t/1_d1a5lqbt

References

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