

**THE EXPERIENCES OF COUNSELLORS CONDUCTING
A SHORT TERM SANDPLAY INTERVENTION IN A
RESOURCE CONSTRAINED COMMUNITY**

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IN A RESOURCE CONSTRAINED COMMUNITY**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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PRETORIA

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that the dissertation “*The experiences of counsellors conducting a short term sandplay intervention in a resource constrained community*”, which I hereby submit for the degree MEd (Educational Psychology) at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

Francois Jacobus Smit
June 2015

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DEGREE AND PROJECT

INVESTIGATOR(S)

DEPARTMENT

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The experiences of counsellors conducting a short term sandplay intervention in resource-constrained community

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Educational Psychology

18 June 2015

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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Liesel Ebersöhn", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

DATE

18 June 2015

CC

Jeannie Beukes

Liesel Ebersöhn

Prof C Lubbe-De Beer

This ethical clearance certificate is issued subject to the following condition:

1. It remains the students' responsibility to ensure that all the necessary forms for informed consent are kept for future queries.

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ETHICS STATEMENT

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this dissertation, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that he has observed the** ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's *Code of ethics for researchers* and the *Policy guidelines for responsible research*.

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SUMMARY

The experiences of counsellors conducting a short term sandplay intervention
in a resource constrained community

by

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Department: Educational Psychology

Degree: MEd (Educational Psychology)

There is a need in the South African context to train students to work in communities in order to address the psychological needs in the wider community. For students who work in the wider community, acquiring multicultural skills is imperative. Experiential learning has been identified as an effective training method in the training of multicultural counselling skills. Non-verbal strategies to supplement the training of counsellors in a multicultural context may be beneficial as an addition to the training. Expressive arts therapy and then significant to this study, sandplay as a form of expressive arts therapy, not only possesses possibilities of non-verbal intervention but has been noted by research as an effective intervention technique to work across cultural and socio-economic status.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of counsellors who conducted a short term intervention in a resource constrained community. This study adhered to the meta-theoretical paradigm of interpretivism, while the methodological paradigm of qualitative research was adopted. An intrinsic case study design was conducted whereby a focus group discussion and reflective notes from the counsellors were used as a data collection strategy. Through a content analysis, the data was analysed by means of a thematic analysis.

The findings of this study indicated that the counsellors experienced the sandplay intervention as a positive influence on their personal as well as their professional development. The students made various recommendations for future research and projects, but what stood out in this study was their need to have sandplay therapy included in their formal training as educational psychologists.

Keywords:

- Sandplay therapy
- Experience
- Experiential learning
- Resource constrained communities
- Counsellors

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The new democratic South Africa has been a showcase of transformative change since 1994. Regardless of all the positive change that has taken place, South Africa still has great inequality in the majority of sectors of the South African society (Pillay, 2003). Psychology theory, practice and intervention have been blamed – not only in South Africa but globally – for failing to address the needs of non-white, non-Western populations (Hickson & Kriegler, 2001; Maree, 2010). There is a call for mental health services on a preventative and primary level. In order to address the call, the training of counsellors or students to close the gap in community service delivering is in an urgent need (Hickson & Kriegler, 2001; Tomlinson-Clark & Clarke, 2010; Carolissen, Rohleder, Bozalek, Swartz, 2010).

In order to address the larger need it is imperative to train students to work in communities in order to address the psychological needs. It is imperative that students who wish to work and deliver services in the wider community, acquire multicultural skills. Counsellors can develop cultural sensitivity and awareness by direct engagement with clients from culturally diverse contexts through being part of an experiential learning experience. Furthermore, experiential learning has proved to be an effective training method in the training of multicultural counselling skills (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002). Multicultural teaching strategies that focus on the affective, cognitive and behavioural components of learning have been seen as lacking in the field of multicultural training (Kim & Lyons, 2003).

South Africa has 11 official languages and numerous non-official languages. A non-verbal strategy (for example, a therapy technique that transcends language barriers) to supplement the training of counsellors in a multicultural context may constitute a great attribute to the multilingualism in health care (Deumert, 2010; Goss & Campbell, 2004; Tunnecliff & O'Brien, 2004). Play-based strategies that are incorporated into therapies have been regarded as having fewer limitations than other forms of intervention. Through play, children can use concrete objects to give

expression to their inner worlds (Henderson & Buser, 2011; Russo, Vernam, & Wolbert, 2006). The concrete form of expression provides the child with a symbolic language of self-expression (Goss & Campbell, 2004). Children not only express themselves through play, but through play a child can learn to socialise and learn how to recount the world (Tunnecliff & O'Brien, 2004). Play is a creative process, and although verbal communication is one approach to counselling, creativity is another approach that can be used to open the door to the inner world of the client. Creativity such as art, music and play allows the client through an experiential process to elicit once latent material into the conscious awareness and may be the catalyst for turning discussion into feeling (Keller-Dupree & Perryman, 2013). Experiential processing has been detailed as particularly beneficial for therapeutic outcomes. Play therapy forms part of the expressive arts domain, as an experiential approach to traditional therapy (Keller-Dupree & Perryman, 2013).

Sandplay is a form of expressive arts therapy that allows the child through the use of sand trays and symbols to give expression to their conscious and unconscious world (Friedman & Mitchell, 2008; Weinrib, 1983). Sandplay is a highly significant creative process that occurs in a safe space, honoured by respect and non-judgement, therefore creating a safe and free space wherein transformation can take place (Kalff, 1980). Sandplay is an effective non-verbal intervention technique that can contribute positively to the multicultural challenges that counsellors may encounter (Richards et al, 2012)*. Non-verbal techniques may not only contribute to the counsellors' challenges, but have been proven to constitute an important means of therapy to address emotional challenges in children from vulnerable homes (Peleg-Oren, 2002). Therefore, sandplay is not only an effective intervention technique but also pose as beneficial to bridge language barriers and as supplement to multicultural training of counsellors (Goss & Campbell, 2004; Richards et al, 2012.).

In order to contribute to the hiatus in research on sandplay and the use thereof in a South African context, research is needed that explores the experiences of counsellors conducting a short term sandplay intervention in a resource constrained community. Through the exploration of the counsellors' experiences I attempted to gain a deeper understanding into their meaning making process and in turn, sharing

their experiences with a wider audience may provide valuable information and recommendations for training, practice and research.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This research project forms part of a broader study¹ in which the possibility and applicability of expressive sandwork in enhancing the psychological well-being of children in resource constrained communities is explored. An email request was sent to nine second-year Educational Psychology students as well as three intern Educational Psychologists to volunteer at a primary school in a medium-size town close to Pretoria. Twelve students and three interns (all henceforth referred to as counsellors) agreed to be part of a six-week, short term sandplay intervention. This consisted of six sessions, including the introduction session and the closing session. The children built six trays, weekly from March 2013 to May 2013.



Photograph 1: Mobile unit

A mobile unit, containing 12 sand trays and toys (see Photograph 1) was transported every week to the school where the intervention took place. As part of the sandplay therapy, children used the trays, toys and objects to construct a story in the trays (see Photographs 2 and 3). (The theory behind the process of sandplay is discussed in Chapter 2.) The counsellors each compiled a case file with photographs, transcribed stories told by the children, process notes and reflection notes. The

¹ Shongolollo Expressive Sandwork project (Expressive sandwork in resource constrained communities)

researcher was not present at the sandplay intervention, due to his theoretical training that coincided with the intervention project.



Photograph 2: Containers with figurines



Photograph 3: Sand tray with figurines



Photograph 4: Sand tray with figurines



Photograph 5: Sand tray with figurines

1.3 PURPOSE STATEMENT

Based on the rationale of the study and the hiatus in literature and research in the field of study, the purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of counsellors conducting a short term sandplay intervention in a resource constrained community.

1.4 PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

This research was guided by the following primary research question: *What are the experiences of counsellors in a sandplay project in a resource constrained community?*

1.5 SUBQUESTIONS

In order to address the primary research question, I attended to the following subquestions:

- *What challenges did the counsellors experience?*
- *What were the perceived benefits for the counsellors in conducting a sandplay project?*
- *How did they make meaning of their experiences?*

1.6 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

I approached the study with the following assumptions:

- Counsellors may experience both benefits and challenges in conducting a sandplay project.

- Student counsellors' experiences may elicit valuable information via their descriptions of their subjective experiences.
- Valuable information may be uncovered regarding their learning experience within a culturally different or unfamiliar context.
- An in-depth case study is the most appropriate method to generate highly detailed data in order to answer the primary research question.
- Sandplay therapy is an effective intervention strategy and the notion of a sandplay project in a resource constrained community should be supported.

1.7 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

1.7.1 EXPERIENCES

The primary objective of the research was to capture the experiences of the counsellors and the concept of *experience* is therefore an important concept to be explored. The qualitative approach concentrates on human experience as the central topic with the focus on construction or interpretation. Experiences in themselves do not carry meaning. In order to achieve a better understanding we need to pattern them, find similarities and contrasts between them, and interpret them (Angus & Mcleod, 2004), as qualitative researchers do study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Merriam, 2009). *The Oxford Dictionary* ("Ignition," 1989) defines *experience* as: "The knowledge or skill acquired by a period of practical experience of something, especially that gained in a practical profession".

1.7.2 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The Oxford Dictionary defines *experiential* as: "Involving or based on experience and observation" (www.oxforddictionaries.com). In the field of education and learning, the concept of *experiential learning* is a well documented and researched theory. Experiential learning is seen as a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984). Pertaining to this study, experiential learning is then the learning derived from experience, and here experience is seen as an important component in the development of the competencies of the counsellors (Laszloffy & Habekost, 2010).

1.7.3 COUNSELLORS

Counselling is mainly but not restricted to methods of listening-and-talking-based intervention to address psychological and psychosomatic problems and change. This may include developmental needs, realisation of human potential and prolonged human suffering, for example, grief and bereavement (Feltham & Horton, 2012). There is currently in South Africa a major need for counsellors because the number of certified professionals are limited (Naik, R., Tabana, H., Doherty, T., Zembe, W., & Jackson, D, 2012). Counselling has the potential to help greater number of clients when groups are addressed, and then counselling may intervene in the early stages of problems to prevent them from becoming major crises. The trend towards prevention has encouraged paraprofessionals (e.g. healthcare workers) to enter a variety of mental health programs (Vontress & Naiker, 1995). The above-mentioned aspects all highlight the importance of the counsellors' engagement in a sandplay project in a resource constrained community and of their experiences being investigated for future projects and counselling training. The counsellors in this study are all MEd Psychology students or intern educational psychologists, training to qualify as Educational Psychologists.

1.7.4 SANDPLAY

Sandplay is described by McNally (2001) as “the single most powerful tool for drawing the metaphoric mind into dialogue” (p. 9). Not only is sandplay unique because of the play aspect, to which most children will relate, but it can also be used as a therapy technique with all ages and may transcend cultural or language barriers (Richards, Pillay, & Fritz, 2012). Sandplay is a highly effective non-verbal, non-directive method that allows the client to express through a symbolic language their conscious and unconscious world. In educational psychology, sandplay is based on Jungian psychological philosophy and Dora Kalff's implementation thereof (Kalff, 1980). The background, theory and process of sandplay will be discussed in Chapter 2.

1.7.5 RESOURCE CONSTRAINED COMMUNITIES

Poverty is still today detrimental to the majority of rural communities in South Africa (Swartz, 2006). Residents of rural communities have been indicated by research to have scarce resources, high rates of poverty, less formal education, higher illiteracy

rates, fewer mental health resources and less access to employment than people living in urban or suburban areas (Bradley, Werth, & Hastings, 2012). The people living in rural communities often experience challenges with transport and have therefore less access to governmental, community and private resources. These factors contribute to the accessibility to health care, rehabilitation, educational and employment services (Bradley, et al. 2012; Swartz, 2006). In this study, the term *resource constrained communities* pertains to rural communities who have constrained resources due to social inequality in the current South African context.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.8.1 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

From the interpretivist meta-theoretical approach, I have constituted knowledge not as a given but as an active and continuous process where knowledge is constructed and reconstructed. I explored the meanings that the counsellors assigned to their experiences. Their intersubjective experiences are of importance in order to accomplish understanding and meaning. I have acknowledged that the counsellors have multiple realities which are context bound, mind-dependent and influenced by their process of being part of the intervention process (Garbett, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Cresswell, 2014).

The qualitative approach to the study enabled me to gain a descriptive understanding of their experiences. Qualitative research is an effective tool when attempting to gain an understanding of individuals' perceived interaction with their environment (Cresswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009). The subjective information enabled me to obtain descriptions of the counsellors' experiences and thereby gain insight into the ways which the participants experienced and gave meaning to the facilitation of the intervention programme.

1.8.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA

My selected research methodology and strategies are discussed in detail in Chapter 3. I will now provide a brief overview of the main aspects thereof.

I conducted a case study by focusing on the experiences of the counsellors. I examined in depth the experiences, processes and interactions of the counsellors within the short term sandplay intervention in a medium-size town close to Pretoria. I followed an intrinsic case study design in order to gain an understanding of the counsellor within a certain context and being part of a particular group. I conducted an inductive mode of reasoning and used my working assumptions to guide me during the exploration of the case study.

The data consisted of transcriptions of the focus group discussion and the reflections of 12 students that were emailed to the supervisor. Eight participants were invited to participate in a focus group discussion in order to elicit their experiences. I followed the data analysis process suggested by Creswell (2014), as discussed in Chapter 3). The linear steps are interactive and interrelated and were not followed in sequence. The data was analysed and the analysis then laid the basis again for further analysis. The data analysis and interpretation were guided by the primary research question and subquestions of the study.

1.9 CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to inform the reader on the purpose and rationale of the study through the exploration of the background to study, the research question and subquestions that guided the study and the discussion of the primary concepts. The concepts that were explored were *experiences*, *counsellors* and *sandplay*. I introduced the paradigmatic perspective and indicated the research methodology that was followed in this study.

Chapter 2 explores through a brief literature review the main concepts and theoretical discourses which guided the study. Multicultural counselling, experiential learning and sandplay are reviewed through selected literature.

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As the purpose of this study was to focus on the experiences of counsellors conducting a short term sandplay intervention in a resource constrained community, experiential learning served as the theoretical framework. A brief review of available literature² exploring the multicultural South African context, the need for multicultural counselling and experiential learning is provided in this chapter. Sandplay has proved to be an effective aid in delivering psychological services to communities, and *sandplay* as a concept has informed this study. I therefore conclude this chapter by exploring sandplay therapy in terms of its use within a multicultural context, its historical background, the processes of sandplay and possible challenges. Due to our significant multicultural context in South Africa, multicultural counselling would serve as a point of departure in exploring the relevant concepts.

2.2 BACKGROUND

There is still inequality in the South African context in the delivering of basic services to the majority of people. Numerous people with psychological problems and needs do not receive help due to the lack of trained professionals and a lack of financial and physical resources (Young & Campbell, 2014). Contributing factors to the great need for intervention within the larger system are societal factors such as the legacy of apartheid, poverty and oppression that have resulted in psychological problems and stressors (Pillay, 2003; Seedat & Lazarus, 2011).

There is an urgent need for mental health interventions on a primary and preventative level, especially in the context of oppressed and disadvantaged communities (Seedat & Lazarus, 2011; Pillay, 2003). But in the South African context

² According to my knowledge and literature searches on Google scholar, ERIC (ProQuest)(Education) and Eric (EBSCOHOST)(Education), using the keywords of *sandplay*, *sand tray*, *resource constrained communities*, *experiential learning*, *expressive arts therapy* and *social justice*.

it has become increasingly evident that the traditional role of the psychologist is still to deliver individual based services in more affluent communities (Hickson & Kriegler, 2001; Tomlinson-Clark & Clarke, 2010). Although mental health services have become known to previously disadvantaged communities over the past 20 years, the majority of the treatment models are based in a Western culture, which is often inapt and irrelevant in an African context (Du Preez & Roos, 1998; Seedat & Lazarus, 2011). There is therefore a call to shift the focus of psychological services to include communities through the establishment of networks and partnerships and collaboration in order to have more inclusive psychological services (Ebersohn, Bender, & Carvalho-Malekane, 2010).

The training of counsellors should therefore not only focus on the exposure to theories, but Pillay (2003) urges counsellors to gain experience by working directly with communities. In the study by Pillay (2003), various reasons were identified for educational psychologists to be engaged in community work. Firstly, community work provides an ideal stage to test theory in practical situations; secondly, it provides cross-cultural training within a South African context; thirdly, it informs the paradigm shift from working with the individual to working with groups; and lastly, it presents a platform for action research which should be directed at action and intervention in terms of meeting the needs of the community.

As early as the 1980s, community psychology as a field of study was introduced at tertiary educational facilities to reduce the gap in the training of students in psychological community work. Community psychology has emerged as a body of knowledge that focuses on domains beyond the individual, such as groups, organisations and communities (Carolissen, Rohleder, Bozalek, Swartz, & Leibowitz, 2010). The pedagogy of community psychology informed community intervention and the positive influence it may have on the development of multicultural counselling skills. Through community intervention students can acquire various skills of practice by engaging in a community across advantaged and disadvantaged environments (Carolissen *et al.*, 2010). Through such engagement, students can bring their lived experiences and identities into the learning environment, and thereby focus not only on the content of learning, but also on the learning process. The learning experience of student is consequently enhanced through reflections on the learning process

(Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Du Preez & Roos, 1998; Pillay, 2003). The whole process of learning from experience (that is, experiential learning) is discussed in the following section (see 2.3).

Another aspect that comes to bear, both in the training and with practitioners working in culturally diverse communities, is that practitioners and trainees need to draw on the strengths of diversity and need to be able to work in a range of locally spoken languages (Swartz, Rohleder, Bozalek, Carolissen, Leibowitz, & Nicholls, 2009). Multiculturalism and its influence on counselling is not only unique to the South African context, but have been observed as influential in the global development of counselling services (Kagnici, 2010). In the provision of counselling to multicultural clients extra competencies beyond basic counselling competencies are required. Multicultural counselling competencies consist of cultural self-awareness, knowledge and skills. A culturally competent counsellor needs to acquire these competencies in order to work both effectively and ethically with different cultural groups (Arredondo, 1999; Kagnici, 2010). Through direct multicultural contact, counsellors can develop cultural sensitivity and cultural self-awareness (Tomlinson-Clark & Clarke, 2010; Pillay, 2003).

It has been argued that multicultural counselling competence is difficult to teach because educators are unsure about what they actually should teach. Practitioners must possess the traditional multicultural counselling skills (knowledge, awareness and skills); however, Koch, Ross, Wendell and Aleksandrova-Howell (2014) argue that these competencies are limited by their focus on the client and not enough emphasis on social inequities and systemic problems that might contribute to the client's well-being. There is a call for multiple training formats and developmental and sequential experiences as part of the training curricula. Other possible methods of increasing multicultural and social competence include cultural immersion and service learning, or a combination of both. In addition, experiential learning strategies can prepare counsellors-in-training for multicultural social interaction (Koch, et al. 2014).

There are certain challenges for mental health practitioners/counsellors in practising psychology in rural communities. Bradley et al. (2012) identify various challenges for

the mental health practitioner, especially those unfamiliar with the dynamics of rural areas. Firstly, because of the great need, the counsellor should be able to work over a wide range of demographics, therefore be able to work with children, adults and elderly people. Secondly, counsellors are often highly visible in rural communities and may be unable to maintain anonymity. Adding to this point is the fact that rural communities often have informal information sharing and gathering networks which can be detrimental to confidentiality. Lastly, counsellors working in rural communities may often encounter dilemmas related to multiple relationships because in order to assist in developing of trust and acceptance of rural communities, counsellors often need to be involved in the community, for example as an educational consultant or a sports coach.

On the other hand, such challenges may provide valuable information in the preparation for community engagement and intervention. As mentioned earlier, experiential learning may be a successful learning strategy that combines academic learning and community engagement to educate counsellors-in-training in multicultural counselling skills (Koch et al. 2014).

2.3 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Learning from experience is both a fundamental and a natural approach to learning. (Beard & Wilson, 2013). It is evident in various research studies that experiential learning is growing and is being applied in a wide range of subjects and locations, including counselling (Beard & Wilson, 2013; Kolb & Kolb, 2009; Luke & Kiweewa, 2010). Kolb (1984) described experiential learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through transformation of experience” (p. 38) and “it is learning which illuminates that experiences and provides direction for the making of judgements as a guide to choice and action” (p. 41). Experiential learning can be used in the training of counsellors to raise awareness and help them to develop multicultural counselling skills. Experiential learning has been widely recommended as a training method that can bridge multicultural practice (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Kolb & Kolb, 2009; Tomlinson-Clark & Clarke, 2010).

Through the process of experiential learning, counsellors can be encouraged to process their experiences through both cognitive and affective domains. Firstly,

cognitive learning is important because it challenges counsellors to examine their worldview and the cognitive structures, such as beliefs about others and self that filter their experience (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002). Therefore, counsellors are encouraged within the experiential framework to consider cultural contexts and the impact it may have on their own behaviour, attitudes and beliefs, and to be reflective on the influence it has on their professional development (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Gerald & Gerald, 2008). Secondly, counsellors' training should go beyond cognitive learning and should encourage them to engage in affective learning. Experiences that bring feelings, attitudes and values to the surface can help counsellors to develop their multicultural awareness and also promote self-awareness (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Luke & Kiweewa, 2010; Tomlinson-Clark & Clarke, 2010).

Kolb (1984) defines the experiential learning process as an idealised learning cycle or spiral where the learner experiences, reflects, thinks, and acts in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned (see also Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

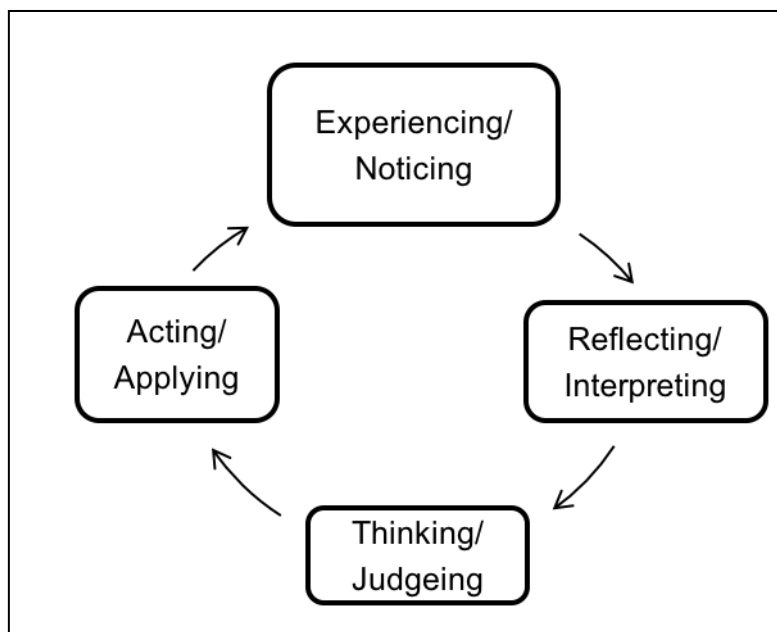


Figure 2.1: Kolb's Experiential learning cycle (adapted from Kolb, 1984)

The learning cycle is an iterative process and allows a person to join the circle at any point. The main prerequisite is that the cycle is completed so that in combining thinking with doing or applying, an effective learning process can be created (Beard

& Wilson, 2013). Concrete experiences are the root for observations and reflections. These reflections are incorporated and refined into abstract concepts from which new inferences for action can be drawn. These inferences can be actively tested and serve as guides in creating new experiences (see Figure 2.1) (Beard & Wilson, 2013, p. 43; Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

2.4 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AS A CHRONOLOGICAL PROCESS

The nature of experiential learning can be considered from a chronological perspective. Beard and Wilson (2013) suggest that the analysis of experience can be undertaken retrospectively, concurrently or prospectively, i.e. with reference to the past, the present or the future. Consequently, past, present and multiple future experiences are shaped by cognitive, affective and behavioural involvement (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Beard & Wilson, 2013; Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

2.4.1 RETROSPECTIVE LEARNING

Retrospective learning refers to diligently looking back at past experiences to obtain detailed insights about clients and/or experiences. An event can also be reinterpreted in the light of subsequent experiences and in doing that, meanings may be altered. Through the use of previous experiences, counsellors may add depth, colour and concrete reality to more abstract environments of learning and counselling. Also, through the use of a theoretical lens and/or structured learning, counsellors may revisit experiences in a different light (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Beard & Wilson, 2013; Kim & Lyons, 2003). Thus with this study, experiential learning was a reflective process whereby the counsellors looked back at the short term sandplay intervention and then they analysed their experiences.

2.4.2 CONCURRENT LEARNING

Learning may also be a process of concurrent learning as one interacts with stimuli such as cognitive stimuli. Physical actions are in a continual process of change and assessment, and therefore also in a process of learning unremittingly and in constant adaptation to the environment and different contexts. The quality of immediate

learning may be enhanced if the learners stand back from the experience and consider and reflect on what is happening (Beard & Wilson, 2013).

2.4.3 PROSPECTIVE LEARNING

Through the lens of the social learning theory, we can reflect on and analyse experiences of other people who have been involved in similar activities. The process of investigating the future is similar to that of learning from the present and past experiences. Through in-depth investigation of other studies that have been done in similar contexts and environments, a researcher or counsellor can have reasonable expectations about what might happen and how he or she might respond. Through the process of visualisation, future activities can be planned and organised (Beard & Wilson, 2013).

2.4.4 CRITIQUE ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Despite the many strengths the experiential learning cycle has, especially for multicultural training, it has not been without criticism. Beard and Wilson (2013) have cautioned that not too much emphasis should be placed on experience in the classical curriculum; they argue that adult learning is not purely about supporting learners to grow in whatever direction they may choose, but rather about guiding in their learning with structured programmes.

In a study by Miller, Kovacs, Wright, Corcoran and Rosenblum (2005) where they explored student and field instructor perceptions of the learning process, they found that Kolb has relevance to social work but that key elements of the field learning process are not presented in Kolb's model. What remain absent are the important dimensions of relationship, the affective/emotional domain and the context in which the learning takes place. They concluded that the limitations of the Kolb model would only increase its usefulness for the field of education by having a more inclusive map of learning based on social work student and field instructor input. They thereby stress the importance of the influence of the instructor or supervisor in the process of experiential learning in the field.

Arthur and Achenbach (2002) focused on experiential learning as a teaching and learning methodology to increase students' multicultural counselling competencies.

They concluded that the extent to which experiential learning positively affects students' perceptions of diversity remains contentious because of the following:

- the lack of understanding about how experiential learning works
- the ways it has been evaluated
- the lack of attention that has been paid to developing guidelines for its use in multicultural counselling education.

Despite the above points of critique, experiential learning is recognised as underlining the concept of community work as the theory recognises the importance of experience as a contributing factor to the process of learning. Experiential learning asserts the importance of experiential activities and techniques such as practicum, learnerships and training (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Ebersohn, Bender, & Carvalho-Malekane, 2010). Experiential learning should however be used in conjunction with other methodologies to support counsellors in the development of self-awareness, knowledge and skills for working with multicultural populations (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002). Experiential learning remained the chosen theoretical framework due to its suitability for exploring the counsellors' experiences.

2.5 SANDPLAY THERAPY

Although the basis of this study is to explore the experiences of counsellors-in-training, some background on sandplay is needed. I explored sandplay therapy in terms of its use as a multicultural intervention technique, followed by a brief history of sandplay. The processes and the value of sandplay in different client populations will also be discussed. Finally the possible challenges in conducting sandplay will be highlighted.

2.5.1 SANDPLAY THERAPY AND MULTICULTURAL INTERVENTION

I concur with Ebersohn, Bender and Carvalho-Malekane (2010) that the training of counsellors within a multicultural environment should be focused not only on theory and research, but also on prevention and intervention. In this study, sandplay therapy was considered to be the intervention method of choice as the process suits all children and does not discriminate against any culture or language, which is especially relevant within the South African context (Goss & Campbell, 2004; Lu,

Peterson, Lacroix, & Rousseau, 2010; Richards, Pillay, & Fritz, 2012; Tunnecliff & O'Brien, 2004).

Expressive art therapy is an experiential approach to therapy and is an alternative means to elicit the unconscious into the conscious. Expressive art therapy uses creativity, the universal language, through mediums such as art, music, play and nature. Sandplay is play based on as well as a form of expressive arts therapy. The use of play in counselling may prove to have fewer limitations with regard to cultural differences than other forms of intervention, and therefore to be a valuable technique for the use with children from diverse cultural groups (Cochran, 1996). Play therapy has been acknowledged by major theoretical orientations as a unique technique by which children are helped to communicate and express their emotions in counselling (Henderson & Buser, 2011; Russo, Vernam, & Wolbert, 2006). Children often experience complex feelings and thoughts in relation to the events in their lives and often have difficulty communicating these verbally in a counselling context. Through a playful manner, play and the use of objects, concrete form and expression can be given to children's inner worlds and provide them with a symbolic language of self-expression (Goss & Campbell, 2004; Tunnecliff & O'Brien, 2004; Kalff, 1980). Sandplay is a natural, non-threatening form of play which transcends language and mental ability (Kalff, 1980; Lu, Peterson, Lacroix, & Rousseau, 2010; Tunnecliff & O'Brien, 2004). McNally (2001) agrees and proclaims that "sandplay is the single most powerful tool for drawing the metaphoric mind into dialogue" (p. 9). She emphasises that the visual and kinaesthetic portions of child development are also stimulated by sandplay and therefore there are numerous advantages in the use of sandplay with children.

The advantages in the use of sandplay as an expressive arts technique in multicultural contexts are as follows:

- Firstly, deeper levels of meaning are created between counsellors and clients with the use of expressive arts in the counselling process (Markos, Coker, & Jones, 2007).
- Secondly, the creative collaboration between the counsellor and the client may assist the client in his or her symbolic and metaphorical communication in an empathic and relational manner (Kalff, 1980).

- Thirdly, the metaphorical communication between counsellors and clients provides opportunities that are rich in meaning and expression and may serve as an experiential learning opportunity (Markos, Coker, & Jones, 2007).
- Fourthly, the experiential process may provide the counsellors with the opportunity to directly engage with individuals from cultures different to their own.
- Finally, the experiential learning process of sandplay intervention in a resource constrained community may raise awareness about multicultural issues, challenging counsellors' personal frameworks about cultural diversity and helping them to develop cultural empathy (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Kim & Lyons, 2003; Laszloffy & Habekost, 2010).

Sandplay is a non-directive, non-verbal technique (Kalff, 1980), which provides metaphorical communication between clients and counsellors that are rich in meaning and expression (Markos, Coker, & Jones, 2007). Sandplay therapy therefore promises to be an effective intervention technique to be used within multicultural contexts.

2.5.2 BACKGROUND

The use of the sand tray dates back to the 1920s. Numerous psychologists, including Melanie Klein, Anna Freud, Erik Erikson and Carl Jung and other theorists working with children, support the use of toys and miniatures for intervention and assessment of children. The work of Margaret Lowenfeld, a British paediatrician, contributed to the origins of sandplay therapy. Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld, who worked in the early 20th century, visited her native Poland after the war and was overwhelmed by the suffering of the children. She realised the need to discover a way to work with traumatised children (Turner & Unnsteinsdottir, 2011). After being inspired by the book *Floor Games* by H.G. Wells, she introduced variety of miniature figures to her clinic for children to play with. Margaret Lowenfeld developed the “World Technique” as a method to communicate on a non-verbal level with children in treatment. Margaret referred to the sand trays as “worlds”: a representation of a picture of the psyche (McNally, 2001; Turner, 2005; Warr-Williams, 2012). The Jungian analyst Dora Kalff (1980) further developed and refined the sandplay method by adapting it

to the Jungian theory, and named her technique Sandplay (Turner, 2005). Kalff recognised the importance of delayed interpretation in order to allow the client the opportunity to undergo transformation at the deepest levels of the psyche, whereas Lowenfeld interpreted the worlds for the children before the end of treatment (Turner & Unnsteinsdottir, 2011). Dora Kalff was influential in the formulation of the theoretical principles and in the provision of training for clinicians on an international level (Goss & Campbell, 2004). Furthermore, Dora Kalff added the dimension of the unconscious being played out in the sand by means of symbols. Jungian symbolism is used and through the Jungian analysis the focus is on the process of exploring one's psyche or soul. The symbols through which the child communicates during play may present a name, term, picture or image which is familiar in daily life and may have other connotations besides its conventional and obvious meanings. The symbol is usually known to the child but unknown or hidden from the interpreter. The symbols form the language by which the mind conveys messages from the unconscious to the conscious level.

In this study, Kalff's sandplay technique was explored and adapted as a short term intervention technique in a resource constrained community, as stated in Chapter 1. The purpose was to explore the applicability of sandplay in a resource constrained community to see whether this psychodynamically individualised approach would be relevant in another setting.

2.5.3 THE SANDPLAY PROCESS

Through the process of sandplay the child is allowed to express their unconscious and conscious worlds in a non-verbal way. Through the use of sand trays, water and a large number of figurines, shapes or objects, clients can create three-dimensional scenes that are representations of their worlds (McNally, 2001; Weinrib, 1983).

The process of sandplay involves the use of one or two sand trays that are usually 700 mm long and 500 mm wide. The sides and bottom of the inside of the tray are coloured light blue. The client can by moving the sand, represent water in a sandy landscape or may represent the sky. Real water can also be added to the sand to make it useable for sculpting and shaping. Any number of small objects or figures, people, animals, buildings vehicles, vegetation, natural objects and symbolic objects

are placed in reach of the client to use to represent all aspects of life and fantasy (Goss & Campbell, 2004; Turner, 2005). The intention is that these objects may represent people, ideas, feelings, situations and potentially a limitless range of possibilities to assist children's expression (Goss & Campbell, 2004; Tunnecliff & O'Brien, 2004).

In the first part of the sandplay process the therapist invites the client to use whatever he or she likes in the sand tray, and gives no further instructions. While the child is working in the sand tray, the therapist will sit nearby making notes of which figures the client uses and what the client says, or does, if anything³ (Turner, 2005).

Sandplay is based on the Jungian concept that suggests that the psyche has an autonomous nature to heal itself and grow toward fullness. Through the use of symbols and in the series of trays, the psyche is given the appropriate conditions for healing to take place. The sandplay process has the possibility therefore to symbolically and through a transformative process reflect the unconscious conflicts in the sand tray (Turner & Unnsteinsdottir, 2011). For children the conflicts may be representations of negative feelings and memories that exist in the unconscious mind. These conflicts are brought up to the conscious through the representations in the sand which allows them to be released and disempowered (Goss & Campbell, 2004; Kalff, 1980; Turner, 2005).

Children may engage in conversation after the completion of the sand tray in a safe therapeutic environment, to share a story or narrative about the sand picture they have created. During this stage the child can clarify personal meanings and integrate new feelings or insights that may have emerged (Turner, 2005). Kalff (1980) emphasises the importance of creating a safe atmosphere of trust. In sandplay therapy the free and protected space is said to be provided by both the therapist and the sand tray. The therapist offers a compassionate non-judgemental attitude and the sand tray provides the physical container, where it acts as an invitation for the psyche to express symbolically and in three-dimensional form. Therefore, the free and protected space is enabled by the sand tray and maintained by the therapist, thus facilitating a dialogue between the conscious and unconscious (Kalff, 1980;

³ This is how it transpired in this project.

Weinrib, 1983). Kalff (1980) also suggests that it is not necessary for the therapist to communicate his or her insights to the child in words, because in the sandplay process the primary focus is on the use of symbols in a free and protected space (Kalff, 1980). It is of significance for the therapist to develop an understanding of what is transpiring in the child's sandplay process. Young children often do not possess the skills to articulate what is happening to them. The therapists should acquire the skill to safely hold the emerging unconscious content, although the therapist may have a more conscious awareness of what is transpiring in order to allow the child to integrate and make conscious the unconscious matter (Turner, 2005). To articulate internal processes sometimes can pull us away from the soul's natural intuitive process of healing (Boik & Goodwin, 2000). As mentioned earlier, Kalff recognised the importance of delayed interpretation in order to allow the client the opportunity to undergo transformation at the deepest levels of the psyche. Turner (2005) urges therapists to engage in a continual study and work on their own symbols and life, because of the vastness and limitlessness of the symbolic content of sandplay.

The final stage of the sandplay process is the recording and dismantling of the sand world. Maintaining comprehensive photographic records of sandplay is imperative for the proper containment of the process. The therapist should keep photographic records in order to maintain adequate records. Although some therapists make use of e-filing, saving all the data electronically, Turner (2005) suggests that a printed photograph is needed for the file and a series of photographs showing the entire sandplay with detail shots and different views, is required for analysis and study. According to the Jungian approach, the tray should never be disassembled in front of the client as the tray is the manifestation of the nascent transformation and the unseen and unknown inner world of the client (Kalff, 1980; McNally, 2001; Turner, 2005).

2.5.4 THE VALUE OF SANDPLAY IN DIFFERENT CLIENT POPULATIONS

The value of sandplay in different client populations is continuously being researched and documented. For example, studies in Australia explored the use of sandplay as a technique to use as a tool for guidance counsellors working in the context of challenging school environments. It was concluded that sandplay was a valuable

therapeutic intervention for school counsellors for use in any level of schooling, especially in a primary school setting (Goss & Campbell, 2004; Tunnecliff & O'Brien, 2004). Sandplay is also likely to be appropriate for use with vulnerable children who have experienced trauma; a study conducted in Canada among immigrant preschoolers has found that sandplay was useful in the intervention during the Asian tsunami in December 2004 (Rousseau, Benoit, Lacroix, & Gathier, 2009). Sandplay psychotherapy as an intervention technique in overcoming a language barrier, while supporting a young vulnerable child emotionally, was also employed in a South African context. The findings of the empirical study concurred with other studies; it was found that sandplay psychotherapy supported the client emotionally and that sandplay was an effective technique for overcoming a language barrier due to its non-verbal nature (Kukard, 2006). The non-verbal nature of the sandplay process means that it is also likely to be useful with children with cognitive and language and communication difficulties. A school-based action-research intervention with children with autism has shown that over the 10-week programme, the children demonstrated through sandplay increased verbal expression, engaged and sustained social interaction, and increased symbolic, spontaneous and novel play (Lu, Peterson, Lacroix, & Rousseau, 2010). In a recent study conducted in Gauteng, South Africa, counsellors also used sand trays to assist children with behavioural problems, with success. What stood out in the findings of this study was the need for training in sand tray technique considering different cultures and socio-economic status; also, how effective the sand tray technique was used to elicit underlying themes in children with behavioural and emotional problems (Richards, Pillay, & Fritz, 2012).

2.5.5 POSSIBLE CHALLENGES IN THE USE OF SANDPLAY

Despite the apparent value of sandplay, it is interesting to note that it is not widely used, especially in community settings. There is a vast lack of scientific research to support the effectiveness of sandplay. One of the reasons may be that clinicians who work with sandplay therapy may be less inclined to undertake scientific research as their work is more focused on practice (Goss & Campbell, 2004). There is also a need for more formal training of counsellors in the sandplay technique, which in turn may provide the opportunity for further research in the field (Richards, Pillay, & Fritz, 2012; Warr-Williams, 2012). The use of sandplay requires many resources such as the trays and the symbolic objects, and this may pose financial and logistical

challenges in the rendering of the intervention (Tunnecliff & O'Brien, 2004). The resources are heavy and difficult to transport. In addition, the nature of sandplay is linked with concepts such as *psyche* and *spirituality*, which may be foreign to parents and teachers and may influence the credibility of the effectiveness of sandplay as a therapy technique (Goss & Campbell, 2004).

2.6 CONCLUSION

In summary, this chapter presents a synoptic exploration of literature regarding multicultural counselling, experiential learning and sandplay. The effectiveness of sandplay as a therapeutic intervention technique was explored through the possible application thereof in a South African context. The origins and development of the theory of sandplay was described to place the practice of sandplay in context. To provide the reader with a better understanding of sandplay, the process of sandplay was described. There are some limitations in the use of sandplay and those were also briefly discussed.

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CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will explain the manner in which I planned and conducted my empirical study. I commence this chapter with a description of the paradigm adopted during this study. The particular weaknesses and strengths of the design, as well as ethical considerations relating to this study are mentioned, while arguments regarding the quality criteria of data are also considered.

3.2 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

The concept *paradigm* refers to the broad theoretical orientation to which a research study belongs. First, the notion of paradigm refers to a set of ontological and epistemological assumptions, that is, a set of shared beliefs about the nature of the social world and about the knowability of this world (Denscombe, 2008; Harrits, 2011; Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Ontology generates fundamental questions considering the nature and the content of the reality that is being observed. In this study the content refers to the information generated by the counsellors in the focus group discussion on their experiences in conducting a sandplay intervention. Epistemology questions the way in which we know the world, as well as the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The exploration of the counsellors' experiences may provide valuable information on how counsellors can use sandplay to assist their clients to make meaning of their worlds, and also have a possible impact on their own awareness as counsellors. Secondly, the notion of a research paradigm existing within a research community, carries with it a shared identity as well as a "specific problem or set of problems that are regarded as particularly significant in relation to the advancement of knowledge" (Denscombe, 2008, p. 276).

3.2.1 METATHEORETICAL PARADIGM

This study is guided by an interpretivist meta-theoretical approach, as knowledge is perceived not as a given but as an active and continuous process where knowledge is constructed and reconstructed collectively as well as individually by humans (Garbett, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Firstly, interpretivism calls attention to the meaning that individuals or communities assign to their experiences – in this study therefore the meaning that counsellors assign to their experiences. Secondly, intersubjective meanings are of importance in achieving understanding and meaning. The counsellors in this study conducted the intervention as part of a volunteer group, and through their engagement with each other their intersubjective meaning making was enriched through shared experiences. Thirdly, in view of the fact that behaviour is constructed by social conventions, interpretation is required. Fourthly, the facts or data do not speak for themselves and therefore required the researcher to make meaning through a process of analysis of the data. Fifthly, there is also a close relationship between the researcher and the participants, and therefore no distinctions are made between them. In this study the researcher was not part of the intervention due to logistical challenges and therefore no close relationship existed. Lastly, the social context, conventions, norms and standards of the particular participants are crucial elements in assessing and understanding human behaviour (Maree, 2012; Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The primary data was one focus group discussion, and the researcher therefore had limited insight into the participants' social context, conventions, norms and standards.

As an interpretivist, I regard human behaviour as meaningful and argue that human behaviour should be understood within its context (Merriam, 2009). I further believe that humans cannot simply be understood in relation to external stimuli as with natural sciences, but that humans have internal ideas, feelings and motives. As interpretivist researcher, I furthermore acknowledge individuals' subjective experiences as credible and authentic. There are therefore multiple realities which are context bound, mind-dependent and influenced by the process of observation (Merriam, 2009; Garbett, 2011). This study was concerned with the subjective experiences of counsellors in the implementation of a short term sandplay

intervention, with the aim to understand their experiences and perceptions of the process.

The information was interpreted by me from a partially subjective, interactive perspective. The group discussion transcripts and reflection notes were used to explore the richness, depth and complexity of their experiences. My study was concerned with the meaning making process of the counsellors, and as such was not concerned with widely applicable facts and truths about intervention with other vulnerable children in different contexts.

3.2.2 METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM

Qualitative research methods enabled me to gain a descriptive understanding of the emotions, actions and experiences of the participants. Qualitative research is an effective tool when attempting to understand how individuals perceive and interact with their environment (Cresswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2011). As a qualitative researcher I looked for categories, patterns, and themes which facilitated me to acquire a coherent synthesis of the data (Yin, 2011). The compilation of the data yielded a rich and thick description of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 2009).

The significance of having applied the qualitative approach to my study includes having gained in-depth and fairly comprehensive information. The subjective information enabled me to obtain rich and thick descriptions of the counsellors' experiences eliciting the meaning making process. I could also gain insight into the ways in which the participants experienced and gave meaning to the facilitation of the intervention programme. Through the use of a qualitative approach I could gain an understanding of the participants' contexts, situations and environments. I could also gain information on the process and the way that the research events influenced one another (Merriam, 2009).

3.2.3 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

The theoretical foundation of this study was supported by my own personal ethics, through reflections upon professional codes and standards, as guidelines. However, the use of a qualitative approach posed certain challenges for me. The researcher is

the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Cresswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). The human instrument which is immediately responsive and adaptive seems to be ideal for collecting and analysing data; however, the human instrument has shortcomings and biases (Cresswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). I did not try to eliminate these biases, but through a reflective process I identified them and monitored them throughout the data analysis process, as suggested by Merriam (2009, p. 17): “A questioning stance with regard to your work and life context.” I was also challenged with keeping the integrity of the data collected. In response to these challenges, I gained permission from the participants to use the data through informed consent. The group discussion was audio-recorded and transcribed, after which I applied a rigorous data analysis process in an attempt to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. The findings of the study can also not be generalised, but the aim of the study was not to generalise; rather it was to provide rich and in-depth descriptions of the participants’ experiences as counsellors conducting a short term sandplay intervention in a resource constrained community.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.3.1 CASE STUDY AS RESEARCH DESIGN

Case studies are a design of inquiry found especially in evaluation but also in many other fields. Furthermore, case studies are different from other types of research in that they are intensive analyses and descriptions of a case, often a programme, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals (Cresswell, 2014). Insight into case studies can directly influence policy, procedures and future research (Cresswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009).

Gerring (2007, p. 19) defines a case study as follows for methodological purposes: “Case denotes a spatially delimited phenomenon as a unit observed at a single point in time over some period of time.” Therefore, each case may provide a single observation or multiple within-case observations, in an attempt to explain a phenomenon through inference. I explored the phenomenon of the experiences of counsellors conducting a short term intervention mainly through a single observation. Gerring (2007) states further that a case may be created out of any phenomenon as

long it has identifiable boundaries and comprises the primary object of inference. The spatial boundaries are more often apparent than the temporal boundaries.

Case study research designs or approaches can be based on their characteristics, or on a disciplinary perspective. I selected a research design that allowed a full investigation of my research question and subquestions. Case study research designs may be classified as intrinsic, instrumental, or collective. I conducted my study by utilising an intrinsic case study design. Intrinsic case study research is used when one wants to know more about a particular individual, group, event, or organisation. My aim was to explore the experiences of counsellors and I was not interested in examining or creating general theories or in generalising my findings to the broader population (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

The main reason for choosing cases for the case studies is to learn from them. The focus remains on the case or on an issue that is illustrated by the case within its larger context. In my study I examined in depth the experiences, processes and interactions of counsellors (cases) within a sandplay project in a resource constrained community (context). In conducting a case study design, I adhered to an inductive mode of reasoning. I did not formulate hypotheses, but realised that my working assumptions could act as guides during my study. I therefore focused on a phenomenon (experiences of the counsellors) under particular conditions (in a resource constrained community), with the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the experience of conducting a short term sandplay intervention (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Radley & Chamberlain, 2012; Tight, 2010).

3.3.2 STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES OF A CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN

Case studies have certain strengths when applied as a research design. Through the use of in-depth analysis and understanding of my participants and their context, high credibility could be accomplished. A case study offers the opportunity to examine the influence of contextual factors, in ways that are not possible when large numbers of participants are studied. Another key strength of case studies is the use of multiple sources in the data gathering process. I made use of focus group transcriptions and reflection notes (Cresswell, 2014). Case study design is seen to support the three

principles of the qualitative method: explaining, understanding and describing. These advantages are consistent with the interpretivist paradigm from which I worked as researcher, and the study has enabled me to capture the complexities and depth and multiplicity of the experiences of the counsellors as well as their involvement in sandplay interventions in vulnerable communities (Merriam, 2009). A case study can also determine cause and effect, recognise the context over time, and provide a chronological narrative of unfolding events (Cohen & Morrison, 2000).

The case study design of course has, along with its advantages, also limitations and challenges to be taken into account. My study focused on one group of counsellors and their unique experiences; it could therefore not provide generalisation opportunities for the larger population (Vance & Clegg, 2012). It is however not the intention of interpretivism to make such conclusions, given that each participant had his or her unique, subjective experience of reality and that each individual constructs their own unique interpretation of their world and their experiences in it. Case study designs are also prone to observer bias (Vance & Clegg, 2012). I am aware of this challenge and according to my interpretivist paradigm I did not strive for objectivity but rather to gain insight into the experiences of the student counsellors. Multiple sources of information were used to counter the bias as well, and in doing so provided more convincing and accurate information. In addition, member checking was used to check the accuracy of my data analysis with the participants in order to avoid observer subjectivity and bias (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

In the first place, the study is based on data that was generated during the focus group discussion after the completion of the short term sandplay project⁴ (also see Chapter 1: Background to the study). The focus group session was transcribed and the transcription was used as the main source of data. Secondly, the counsellors were asked after each session to write detailed reflections which had to be emailed to the supervisor. These documents were sampled and used as additional sources to supplement the transcribed focus group session.

⁴ The intervention took place at a primary school in a township that forms part of a small urban town close to Pretoria. The intervention consisted of six sessions over a three-month period.

The main aim with the data collection process was to acquire rich data that would elicit the meaning that the participants hold about their experience. The data was purposefully selected in order to assist the researcher to understand the meaning making process in the light of the research question and its subquestions. The challenge for me as researcher was not to bring my own meaning into the research but to strive through inductive analysis to elicit the participants' meaning making process. Another challenge was that the participants failed to provide rich reflections that could contribute to the focus group discussion. The available data was analysed until a point of saturation was reached, where the themes were saturated and the reflection notes no longer sparked new insights into the focus group transcriptions (Cresswell, 2014).

The research project was also purposefully selected to form part of a larger research project, and the findings of this study may contribute in a positive way to the outcome of the larger project.

3.5 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Twelve counsellors were invited but only eight participated in the focus group discussions in order to elicit their experiences in conducting a sandplay project in a resource constrained community. The criteria for inclusion in the focus group were based on the voluntary participation of the participants. The three intern psychologists were not available to join the focus group discussion, as one had immigrated and the other two are based in Midrand and Johannesburg. One of the counsellors that were a second-year masters student at the time also relocated and could not participate in the focus group.

Table 3.1: Participants in the focus group discussion

Counsellor	Gender	Race
Counsellor A	Female	Black
Counsellor B	Female	Black
Counsellor C	Male	White
Counsellor D	Female	White
Counsellor E	Male	White

Counsellor F	Female	White
Counsellor G	Female	White
Counsellor H	Female	White

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

In order to answer the research question and its subquestions, it is necessary to explore the purpose of the type of analysis I used. Data analysis can be described as a systematic process to search for meaning (Dey, 1993). Data analysis is also the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of data collected (Marshal & Rossman, 1995). The data consisted of transcriptions of the focus group discussion as well as documents, namely the reflective notes of the counsellors. We often use quality as a measure of relative worth, for instance when referring to the quality of a performance. However, it is based on an evaluation of the general characteristic or intrinsic nature of what we are assessing. What was the story? Therefore what was the meaning? In this study I therefore attempted to describe the experiences to which the data refers.

Cresswell (2014) urges “the researchers to look at qualitative data analysis as following steps from the specific to the general and as involving multiple levels of analysis” (Cresswell, 2014, p. 196). The author further suggests an analysis process consisting of six steps. Although these steps are a linear progression, it is more interactive in practice; the various stages are interrelated and are not followed in sequence. I processed the data in a circular process by which data was described and then the description of the data laid the basis again for further analysis (Cresswell, 2014; Dey, 1993).

- **Step 1:** I organised and prepared the data for analysis. The group discussions were transcribed and sorted, and I arranged the different types depending on the sources of information (Cresswell, 2014).
- **Step 2:** I carefully read through all the data, after the first step had provided me with a general sense of the information and the opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning. What were the general ideas? What was the tone of what was being said? What was the impression of the credibility and overall depth of the information (Cresswell, 2014)?

- **Step 3:** At step 3 I commenced with the coding of all the data. Coding is the method of organising the data by bracketing portions and writing a word or phrase representing a category in the margins (Cresswell, 2014; Dey, 1993). This step entailed constructing analytical codes and categories from data and not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses. An inductive process of coding was used to develop codes as the data was coded (Dey, 1993). The coding process was used to generate themes for analysis. Through thematic data analysis, codes were identified and summarised. This process was inductive and iterative, as I looked for similarities and differences in the codes that corresponded with my research question and subquestions. The coding process⁵ enabled me retrieve and collect together all the text and transcribed data associated with my research question and subquestions and working assumptions (Cresswell, 2014). (See Addendum A)
- **Step 4:** The next step in the coding process was to combine related codes into themes or categories. Thematic data analysis at its most basic simply entails inspection of the codes and then categorising or combining them into themes (Silverman, 2011). The whole process of coding is an iterative process; I continually adjusted the categories, or identify new categories that accommodated my data. (See Addendum B)
- **Step 5:** The next step was to represent the themes and descriptions through a qualitative narrative by conveying the findings of the analysis. (See Chapter 4.)
- **Step 6:** The final step involved making an interpretation in qualitative research of the findings and results. (See Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations.)

3.7 QUALITY CRITERIA

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest four constructs as tenets that stand as criteria against which the quality criteria of the project were evaluated. They are: transferability, dependability, credibility and confirmability.

⁵ I went through a process of reflection on the methods to use during the analysis of the data, using colours at first to identify the themes, and doing it by hand. The next step was to use my colour codes on the computer and to add the themes to the different colours. (See Addenda A and B.)

3.7.1 TRANSFERABILITY

The goal of qualitative research is not to generalise the findings across a population, but rather to seek insight into the participants' perspectives, experiences, attitudes and behaviours (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The aim with qualitative research studies is therefore to engage in research that investigates for a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Cresswell, 2014). From my interpretivist approach, I did not try to generalise the findings because according to Interpretivism, meanings differ with regard to various contexts and situations of human interaction (Merriam, 2009). A strategic choice to enhance transferability is the use of crystallisation. I used different data sources of information by studying evidence from the sources, and then I used it to build a coherent justification for themes (Cresswell, 2014). I used reflection notes in conjunction with focus group discussions. The data collection and process of analysis and detailed descriptions of the methods were also clearly described, to ensure that the criteria for transferability were met, and so that similar studies can be conducted and the results compared.

3.7.2 DEPENDABILITY

Dependability refers to the consistency of the research data, which should be such that if another independent researcher should analyse the raw data they would come to similar conclusions or findings (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). To ensure dependability, rich and detailed descriptions were used to illustrate how the research actions and questions were addressed, and developed out of contextual interactions. Member checking were used by which the specific themes were taken back to the participants to obtain their feedback on the accuracy of the themes and the main findings. I also used peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of the account. The supervisor was asked to review and ask questions about the qualitative study, so that the findings would resonate with people other than the researcher (Cresswell, 2014).

3.7.3 CREDIBILITY

Credibility is achieved when the study is conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through intensive reading and literature review, and additionally taking a reflective

and investigatory stance, I attempted to adhere to the goals of credibility. Hence, I strove to produce findings that are believable and convincing. Crystallisation has also established credibility in my study. Crystallisation entails the process of collecting, viewing, and reflecting on multiple data from multiple perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Using various methods of data collection facilitated the process of determining whether there were any discrepancies in the findings (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Although I used only two methods, the various parts could come together to form a more complete picture, thereby also aiding the process of crystallisation.

3.7.4 CONFIRMABILITY

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the question is whether the findings of the study could be confirmed by another, in other words, to remove the researcher and place the evaluation on the data itself. The concern in qualitative research is the subjectivity of the researcher, which may shape the research (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). There are however strategies for balancing interpretation bias: The research was completed under supervision, and therefore the research process was critically analysed. I conducted rigorous data analysis, by checking and rechecking the data, and had sessions with my supervisor to check the data analysis process and the theme analysis. The limitations of the study are stated upfront because every study has limitations; all this should give the reader a better understanding of how I came to my conclusions.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues in research demand increased attention today (Cresswell, 2014). Therefore I had an obligation towards my profession and participants to engage in this research process in an ethical manner, which is in accordance with the guidelines provided by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria (Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, 2014).

3.8.1 INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent forms were signed by the participants before they provided the data or engaged in the data collection processes (Addendum B). These forms contain a standard set of elements that ensures protection of human rights (Allan, 2011; Cresswell, 2014). This informed consent thus implies that the research participants were informed about all the potential factors that could influence their decision to participate or not, including the purpose of the study and the process of data collection (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Cresswell, 2014).

3.8.2 PRIVACY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

The participants were informed prior to the fieldwork they conducted, about the confidentiality of their information that they would share as well as the findings that may be derived from the research. Anonymity in the focus group itself could however not be maintained, as the counsellors know each other. Anonymity regarding the participants' identity was addressed by using code numbers to identify them (1, 2 etc.). The information obtained during the research process is being dealt with in a confidential manner. Ethical guidelines regarding the access to the data and sharing it with others were maintained to ensure participant anonymity. My audio material, transcripts and other raw data are currently preserved in a safe environment and will be destroyed after the required period of 15 years (Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, 2014).

3.8.3 SAFETY IN PARTICIPATION

Potential risk to the participants from whom the data was collected for this study was low; the process was considered to involve little risk or discomfort. Contact with the participants was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria.

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a detailed description of the research design, paradigm stance, and methodology. I discussed my role in choosing this methodology and how the theoretical foundation of this study was supported by my own personal ethics. I discussed the data collection strategies that I applied, and thereafter discussed the process of data analysis and interpretation. Finally, I discussed the participants and

the rigour and ethical aspects that I have considered during the study. In the following chapter I report on and discuss the results and findings of the study.

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CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the ontological and epistemological stances were discussed as well as the research design and processes. In this chapter the aim will be to present the analysed data in the form of main themes followed by the subthemes identified. A summary of the main themes identified is followed by a detailed discussion of the thematic content of the data.

The findings of the study will be discussed in concurrence with the relevant literature, the theory of the experiential learning process, the interpretivist meta-theoretical approach and a critical analysis of the results. I made use of an interpretivist approach to make sense of the different aspects of the counsellors' experiences, such as their professional and practical experiences. Through the interpretivist lens I constructed and reconstructed my own reality from the data by looking at the meanings that the counsellors assigned to their intersubjective experiences.

4.2 DISCUSSION OF THEMES

Four main themes were identified after an inductive analysis. Subsequently, some subthemes relating to each of the main themes were identified. A summary of the theme analysis, indicators and exclusions are presented in the following table:

Table 4.1 Summary of the themes and subthemes

Themes	Related themes	Indicators	Exclusions
Theme 1: Professional development	Subtheme 1.1: Benefits for the counsellor	All the instances where the counsellors referred to their own personal experiences	Instances in the raw data where the counsellors referred to their skills
	Subtheme 1.2: Skills development	Instances in the raw data where the counsellors referred	All the instances where the counsellors referred to their own personal

Themes	Related themes	Indicators	Exclusions
		to their skills	experiences
Theme 2: Benefits for the clients		All instances where the counsellors referred to their observed benefits for their clients	Instances where the counsellors made observations about the process of sandplay and of their colleagues
Theme 3: Language	Subtheme 3.1: Challenges related to language	All the instances in the raw data where the counsellors referred to challenges with language and communication	Instances where they referred to challenges with administrative aspects
	Subtheme 3.2: Sandplay and language	All the instances in the raw data where the counsellors referred to instances relating to language and sandplay	All the instances in the raw data where the counsellors referred to instances relating to personal experiences and skills development
Theme 4: Recommendations		All the instances in the raw data where the counsellors referred to recommendations associated with the short term sandplay intervention	All the instances in the raw data where the counsellors referred to challenges

4.2.1 THEME 1: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The result of the data analysis on the counsellors' experiences while conducting a sandplay intervention was obtained by means of a group discussion and reflection notes. The counsellors made several comments that referred to their professional development, in other words, reflecting on their facilitated learning experience that encompassed their development of counselling skills and sandplay skills and the application thereof in a resource constrained community context. Personal development therefore pertains to the development of knowledge, skills and awareness in order to work more confidently and effectively (Henderson & Thomson, 2011).

Through their reflection it became clear that their theoretical frameworks had been challenged. Experiential learning encourages students not only to consider cultural

contexts but may also promote cognitive learning through reflection on their professional role (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002). Their conceptualisation of the theory of sandplay was enriched, and in that they had come to a better understanding through the experiential process. Counsellor A stated how she had acquired a new understanding of the theory:

“Knowing the difference between sandplay and sand tray going into the theoretical aspect of it ... sandplay is giving you the opportunity to learn” (p. 1, lines 23-30).

Multicultural competence has received increased attention in the training of counsellors. Multicultural competence in counselling has been defined as: “involving awareness of one’s own cultural assumptions and biases, understanding the worldviews of culturally diverse clients” (Ancis & Marshall, 2010, p. 277). Counsellor C commented on his awareness of the multicultural experience and his awareness of differences, especially with language and communication, by stating:

“It was nice to see play is multi-lingual” (p. 2, lines 27-28).

“It was quite nice to see regardless of language, culture or socio-economic status” (p. 2, lines 25-27).

Through the process of experiential learning they have not only grown on a personal level, but have also acquired counselling skills.

Many studies have endorsed the importance of professional development, regardless of the gaps in our knowledge about factors and experiences associated with personal development and awareness during counselling training (Kiweewa, Gilbride, & Luke, 2013). The acquisition of basic counselling skills is stressed by experts in the counselling fields as a basis for effective counselling. Van Velsor (2004) offers and revisits information to guide counsellors’ learning experiences and to use micro-skills or “communication skill units” to support more purposeful engagement with their clients. Children have more limited vocabularies than adults, and counsellors that work with children need to find and develop skills to communicate effectively with children (Tunnecliff & O'Brien, 2004; Van Velsor, 2004).

4.2.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Benefits for the counsellor

In the theme under discussion, **benefits for the counsellors**, the counsellors reported on their positive personal experiences while they were conducting the intervention. Counsellor A commenced her reflection on the intervention in a positive manner by saying that it was the most beneficial experience she had had in her formal training:

“... it was one of the best things I have done this year and I think it should become part of the course” (p. 1, lines 2-3).

Counsellor A continued to describe the positive experience as follows:

“... it was not a bad time-consuming experience but part of your weekly planning; it was not something I regret doing” (p. 1, lines 13-17).

Counsellor C also agreed by saying:

“For me it was probably the best experience of the year” (p. 2, line 20).

Literature advises counsellors to be in a continual process of development, growth and expansion. Self-awareness, whereby the counsellor is aware of his or her own feelings and thoughts, is of importance when working with clients. A positive experience can contribute to a positive regard in the building of relationships in the counselling context (Gerald & Gerald, 2008). In another study done at a primary school in Gauteng, South Africa, the experiences of school counsellors assisting children with emotional and behavioural problems were also explored. They initially had several reservations and challenges but the school counsellors' experiences were largely positive. The positive experience contributed to the creation of a space where they could apply their counselling skills (Richards, Pillay, & Fritz, 2012). A similar finding emerged here.

Kalff (1980) described the relationship and the development of a therapeutic working alliance between therapist and client as a “moment when free and sheltered space is created” (p. 29). Kalff declared that this free space occurs when a therapist fully

accepts their client. The quality of the consciousness of the therapist also has an effect on the healing and transformative process of sandplay. The therapist's presence has the capacity to greatly influence the client's symbolic transformation (Turner, 2005). Counsellor C described the process of sandplay and the influence it had on his experience as follows:

"Sandplay therapy gives you that calmness" (p. 3, line 10.)

The counsellors' primary role is to provide a safe and emotionally lenient environment for the child to express feelings and emotions (Goss & Campbell, 2004). Counsellor C in his description revealed that the essence of his sessions was calm, which may suggest that he has unconsciously created a safe space for the client.

Counsellor H conveyed that her engagement with the sand trays had an influence on her personal life. The experiential process of the intervention supported the counsellor to make meaning of her knowledge and training, and she could therefore come to more in-depth understanding of the sand trays and how they fit into her structures of understanding:

"This year the sand trays have spoken to me like never before" (p. 5, lines 25-26).

Therefore this theme suggests that sandplay techniques could make a valuable contribution to counsellors' personal experiences when working with children in resource constrained communities.

4.2.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Skills development

The subtheme skills development explores the development of counselling skills as noted by the counsellors. Skills development pertains to acquired verbal or non-verbal skills that enhance communication and help a counsellor to establish good rapport with a client (Henderson & Thomson, 2011). There are different areas of skills, for example listening skills and therapeutic skills. Skills may also refer to a level of competence or acquired knowledge and how to apply the knowledge to make or implement sequences of choices to achieve certain objectives within the intervention

process. Experiential learning activities and reflective journalling are regarded as effective methods in the training of counsellors and are valuable tools for professional development. Writing reflective journals can record counsellors' internal processes, experiences, personal values or beliefs (Hubbs & Brand, 2005).

During the short term sandplay intervention, the counsellors noted that the experience was contributing to their development of counselling skills. Not only did they gain counselling skills but their skills in sandplay also seem to have improved.

A recent study in the United States explored the influence of experiential learning on the personal development and awareness of counsellors. The counsellors identified 30 systematically interconnected aspects that contributed positively to their learning process and acquisition of skills. The 30 aspects were grouped into four main themes: intrapersonal, whole group (group-as-a-whole), interpersonal and action strategies (supraGroup), which included the facilitators' interventions. The majority of the participants all had positive experiences in being part of an experiential group (Luke & Kiweewa, 2010). Tomlinson-Clark and Clarke (2010) concurred with other studies on the importance of the need to train counsellors through experiential learning and through a process of cultural immersion.

The experiential learning experience in this study contributed positively to the counsellors' level of confidence. Counsellor A reported on how the sandplay process contributed not only to her knowledge and skills with the sandplay intervention, but also to her overall professional development and confidence, and the transference of skills to her practical training:

“Even learning about sandplay was not only valuable for sandplay but for everything we did at the clinic as well” (p. 1, lines 3-5).

“Yes, you are much more confident” (p. 1, line 10).

Counsellor C agreed that he had developed more trust in the process of intervention and in his own counselling skills, by stating:

“... taught me a lot; less is sometimes more; you don’t need to plan so far ahead, you don’t need to be in control ... sometimes it is nice to sit back and see what your client can do” (p. 3, lines 6-9).

According to Kalff (1980), the environment is of great importance throughout the process of sandplay therapy. A free and protected space should be created, so that the client can feel safe to express verbally or non-verbally their deepest thoughts and feelings (Turner, 2005). The counsellors shared their experience with the creation of a safe space; counsellor C noted (as seen above):

“Sometimes it is nice to sit back and see what your client can do” (p. 3, lines 6-9).

Counsellor B affirmed the importance of creating a safe space for the client in order to allow the client to transform issues:

“It was nice just being present with your client” (p. 2, lines 22-23).

Counsellor G noted the positive effect of a safe space and the influence it had on the rapport as well as the attitudes of the clients to be committed to the process:

“I think that is why they were so loyal to come” (p. 9, lines 8-9).

“It is about containing the space and trust so that they can share their experiences (p. 9, lines 13-14).

Counsellor F reflected on the safe space of sandplay and compared the experience to a different context where intervention was done in another resource constrained community, when she said:

“... we did not get the same experience at the other sandplay project; at this sandplay project they [the children] were not afraid at all” (p. 5, lines 32-35).

The counsellors also made numerous comments on their sandplay skills that have developed during the intervention. Counsellor C felt that it contributed to his sandplay skills by saying:

“I think it is what sandplay is giving you; you don’t actually build with them or do anything – you just stand there and ask questions” (p. 3, lines 12-15).

Counsellor C elaborated further that it forced him to stay out of the scene and let go of the control to become an observer and follow the client’s lead.

Counsellor G concluded by reflecting on her sandplay skills and how she had experienced the process:

“I think the way we did it was just fine. I feel like if you give too much structure it will be guided” (p. 9, lines 4-5).

Counsellor A concluded by saying that she had acquired remarkable additional sandplay skills during the process which informed and added value to her as a therapist.

“... but for me, I have gained a clinical insight and it gave me much more confidence as a therapist” (pp. 1-2, lines 34-35 & 1).

The counsellors in this study identified the importance of the relationship with their clients; this awareness added a positive value to their counselling skills. It is generally agreed that in child therapy, the child-counsellor relationship is considerably significant in influencing the effectiveness of therapy (Gerald & Gerald, 2008).

Counsellor D came to realise the importance of rapport building in the intervention process by stating:

“... that told me that there must be a relationship between us” (p. 4, line 7).

Counsellor C reflected on his professional growth by articulating his awareness of the intervention process as a holistic experience, and mentioned that the intervention was more than just sandplay therapy and processes within the therapy; he realised that it was the whole process of interaction between the counsellor and the client:

“... it was not only about the figurines and the story but the whole process” (p. 6, lines 30-31).

The counsellors also reported on their awareness of the multicultural dimension of this study. Experiential learning is regarded as a valuable tool to develop cultural awareness within a multicultural context. As mentioned earlier, sandplay as a form of play has many advantages in multicultural contexts. Kim and Lyons (2003) contributed to the literature addressing experiential learning with their study and focused on the use of playing games in an experiential activity to train counsellors. They contributed to the call to provide experiential training strategies to counsellors in a multicultural context in order to enhance multicultural counselling competencies.

Counsellor E reflected on his professional growth regarding being unbiased, non-judgemental, and acknowledging the individual differences in clients from culturally diverse backgrounds:

“... just accepting the child for he/she is throughout the process even though all your children are different” (p. 4, lines 31-33).

Counsellor A realised the added skill in terms of therapy knowledge and the application thereof that she had acquired with the involvement with the sandplay intervention in the resource constrained community:

“It was something else that you could tell your supervisor that you could do as a therapy, so it did inform part of my training” (p. 1, lines 19-21).

Counsellor A reported on her repertoire of skills and knowledge that had been enhanced, and referred to the training facility where they had received formal training at the tertiary institution.

The data that was analysed supported the theme of skills development through numerous notations from the counsellors that suggested that their skills as counsellors had developed during the sandplay intervention. However, the counsellors also noted benefits for their clients.

4.2.1.3 THEME 2: BENEFITS FOR THE CLIENTS

The theme of benefits for the clients emphasised the benefits that the counsellors observed and reflected on in the data collected. The counsellors constructed their own understanding during the stages of the study and maintained that they had experienced the children's participation in the project as positive, and that the clients actually made progress during the sandplay process. Labovitz Boik and Goodwin (2000) and Weinrib (1983) hold similar views and argue that very positive non-verbal and/or unconscious change is taking place in clients' worlds. Richards (2011) found at the end of her study that all the school counsellors had socially constructed a perception that the learners benefited from sand tray techniques and that they had even in the short time that they had with the learners, witnessed encouraging progress. Contrary to this viewpoint, Labovitz Boik and Goodwin (2000) argue that sandplay does not always provide initially obvious results. Kalff (1980) argued that if there is no apparent progress during the intervention process one must allow for the possibility that the clients are gaining further unconscious discernment into their challenges or problems, and that time may be a beneficial contributor to a positive outcome.

The counsellors commented on their clients' acquired confidence; they seemed to have experienced the method as easy to understand, knew what was expected from them and then enthusiastically took part in the process. Counsellor A noted that:

"... after the first day we had been there they knew exactly what to do" (p. 2, lines 24-15).

Counsellor C added that his client also enjoyed the process and that all the other clients could easily follow the instructions of the sand play therapy:

"... they know exactly what to do and how to play; it was quite nice to see" (p. 3, lines 25-27).

"... that everybody could do it" (p. 3, line 28).

He also commented on the feedback by the client's mother regarding the change in behaviour that she observed during the intervention:

"His mom asked me one day, what do you do? He is so much calmer; he is not so busy anymore!" (p. 3, line 34 and p. 4, line 1).

Bradway and McCoard (1997) emphasised the importance of the sandplay process and the ability of the sand tray to create a safe place that is free, where children can transform issues from the unconscious to the conscious, in a verbal or non-verbal way. Through a non-judgemental and confidential environment the child can move into a space of trust with the therapist where transformation can take place (Kalff, 1980). Counsellor E shared a conversation that he had with the client's mother, when she reported back on the change in behaviour of the client at home, after having been part of the intervention program:

"He has become quieter and he is not that busy anymore" (p. 3, line 1).

Counsellor E commented on his client's increased self-confidence after the first session:

"... it was also a lot to do with the actual process and how children would change as the process went on, how much my child became more confident as well" (p. 4, lines 21-23).

And he noted that the children's confidence with communication had also improved during the sessions:

"I think actually his confidence speaking English has also improved" (p. 4, lines 26-27).

"He became more confident with the process" (p. 4, lines 29-30).

The data provided evidence that the children not only enjoyed the process but also did not experience the process as threatening. Sandplay therapy can be regarded as a form of play, and thus as part of a singular central activity of childhood, namely playing (Goss & Campbell, 2004). Play is the mode also chosen by most child psychologists and we may therefore assume that there is something curative in play

(McNally, 2001). Counsellor E reflected on the children and their engagement with the creative aspect of sandplay and perceived their participation as enjoyable, because it replicates play:

“I think just the creativity itself – some of these kids don’t get the opportunity to play” (p. 6, lines 7-10).

“... good for every child to experience” (p. 6, line 11).

The counsellors also remarked on the children and their process with the sandplay and the choosing of figurines; counsellor D stated:

“They really enjoyed it, it was something on their level, something they could relate to” (p. 7, lines 11-12).

During play, children usually relate stories to real life experiences, things they imagine but also things that they despise. Through play, children may come to terms with many fears and hurts to which they are vulnerable (Kekae-Moletsane, 2008).

During the reflections of the counsellors they commented on the trust and rapport that they had established during the intervention with their clients. The positive thread that ran through their reflection on the observed benefits for their clients, indicated that the clients indeed benefited from the short term sandplay intervention and that they had witnessed real progress.

4.2.3 THEME 3: LANGUAGE

This theme examines particularly the use of language while using sandplay techniques. According to Kalff (1980), sandplay is a non-directive, non-verbal technique, which provides symbolic communication between clients and counsellors that are rich in meaning and expression (Markos, Coker, & Jones, 2007). Play-based therapies also have fewer limitations in respect of cultural differences than other forms of intervention, and therefore promise to be a valuable technique for using with children from diverse cultural groups (Cochran, 1996). The non-verbal or silent process of sandplay makes sandplay an effective therapy to use in communities where South Africa has 11 official languages. Few counsellors are proficient in all of

these languages. Counsellors therefore very often have communication difficulties and may misunderstand the culture and the impact of culture on the counselling process (Thompson & Henderson, 2011).

The guiding perspective in therapy today is greatly influenced by the theoretical framework of social constructivism, with the understanding that the individual has the capacity to know the world and to act within the world through adaptation. The therapist is seen as the co-creator of knowledge in collaboration with the client and the client is seen as the expert of his or her own life. Within the social constructivism approach, language is the vehicle used to give meaning to the observed world of the client (McNamee & Gergen, 1992).

4.2.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Challenges related to language

Language is seen as very important in the process of therapy, and language barriers within a multicultural context may pose challenges in the provision of therapy (Minnis, Bradby, Oglethorpe, Raine, & Cockburn, 2003). The subtheme challenges related to language gave evidence of the initial challenges that the counsellors experienced in their engagement with their clients. Language barriers may impede the intervention process, especially in the case of assessment (Deumert, 2010). The use of skilled interpreters is of great importance within the intervention process to translate the language of a particular scenario (Squires, 2008); however, there is a vast lack of trained paraprofessionals in the health care disciplines (Jain & Krieger, 2011). Some of the counsellors reported that they did use translators and it helped their process, but some of the children were more fluent in English and their confidence in speaking English actually improved during the sessions:

Counsellor A expressed her initial fears and discomfort to communicate with her client:

“... it is the scariest thing everyone is talking about, everyone always talks about the language, am I going to be able to communicate with the child” (p. 2, lines 8-12).

Counsellor C commented further by saying:

“... at the end the language barrier was a bit difficult” (p. 3, line 16).

The other counsellors also experienced difficulties initially to communicate; counsellor F said:

“I found the language difficult in the beginning when I got there” (p. 5, lines 1-2).

She stressed the importance of translators and that she could not have done the intervention without a translator:

“I believe that you can't really do it in a disadvantaged community if you don't really have interpreters” (p. 5, lines 7-9.)

Counsellor E added the following:

“I couldn't really understand what they were saying” (p. 8, lines 3-4).

Although the counsellors had initial fears and challenges with communication, it seems that with the improvement of their confidence as counsellors during the intervention, language as a barrier dissipated in the counselling process.

4.2.3.2 Subtheme 3.2: Sandplay and language

Sandplay techniques can be used as a non-verbal or silent approach and may consequently assist the counsellors in dealing with the challenges relating to communication and language. During the analysis of the data collected, the counsellors' experience of the non-verbal process was clearly demonstrated. Counsellor A had a positive experience:

“... it is a nice non-verbal therapy for everyone” (p. 3, line 19).

Counsellor C was as impressed with the non-verbal process:

“... it was quite nice to see, regardless of language” (p. 2, lines 25-26).

It also had a positive influence on the therapy process:

“... you did not need to do a lot or talk a lot” (p. 2, lines 23-24).

He concluded by saying that he did not need to say or do anything – he could just observe the process:

“... just observing ... which I think was actually amazing” (p. 5, line 24).

The counsellors concurred that sandplay transcends barriers to learning. Although they had initial fears and challenges regarding language, they experienced the intervention as successful despite the language barrier and observed growth and change within their clients. The counsellors experienced the beneficial advantages of the non-verbal approach and developed it as a skill throughout the duration of the intervention.

Counsellor D observed the non-verbal communication through noticing body language and how the process of sandplay contributed in a non-verbal way to rapport building:

“You can see it in their body language, you don’t have to hear it” (p. 4, lines 17-18).

“... it was a lot to do with the actual process and how children would change as the process went on” (p. 4, lines 21-23).

Counsellor F reflected on the non-verbal aspect of the sandplay technique and how information about the child could be gathered without speaking to the child:

“She worked through a lot of stuff that had to do with protection, threatening and fear ... just what I picked up was amazing” (p. 5, lines 16-22).

Sandplay techniques can bridge these challenges because of the silent or non-verbal dimension.

Counsellor B commented on the effectiveness of the non-verbal aspect of sandplay by reporting on the observed influence the process can have on a client, regardless of the challenge of communication:

“... how big [an] impact that can make even if you don’t understand what your client is saying” (p. 2, lines 16-18).

The theme of language highlighted the importance of the non-verbal approach of sandplay therapy. In a study that used expressive techniques with vulnerable children, the researcher found that non-verbal techniques constituted an important means to address emotional challenges in children from vulnerable homes (Peleg-Oren, 2002). Non-verbal counselling techniques, where symbols that are universally understood are the means of communication, are important within the multi-lingual South African context. In a study by Maiello (2008), she found that language was valued differently in the Western cultures that it was within the African traditions. In African traditions, words do not have the same value and do not occupy such a high ranking position. She further argues that there is evidence within the African literature of how unimportant verbal interaction is for the development of interpersonal relations. Within the South African context the non-verbal aspect of sandplay has been identified as a valuable asset that contributed positively to the therapeutic environment. Kukard (2006) used sandplay psychotherapy in her study to overcome a language barrier while assisting a vulnerable child with emotional problems. Richards et al. (2012) found that sand trays could be used successfully within a school counsellor environment and concluded that there was a dire need to train counsellors in the sand tray technique, considering how effective sandplay could be used to assist children with behavioural and emotional problems from different cultures and socio-economic status. Labovitz Boik and Goodwin (2000) urge counsellors to use and develop the skill of the non-verbal approach as it is not threatening to the client and therefore creates a safe and free space where the client can express their feelings.

Counsellor B commented on the process of sandplay and how the ‘play’ facet of sandplay is a universal language for children; it therefore makes the engagement with the intervention for a client an easy and understandable process:

“... regardless of language, culture or socio-economic status, they know exactly what to do” (p. 2, lines 27-30).

Seen from the evidence of the data collected within this study, the counsellors shared their experiences with rapport building and the effectiveness of sandplay as a non-verbal intervention technique to establish positive interpersonal relations.

4.2.4 THEME 4: RECOMMENDATIONS

Seen from the third step in Kolb’s learning cycle (Kolb & Kolb, 2009), the counsellors utilised their experiences and challenges to provide opportunities for reflection and to draw some tentative conclusions in the form of recommendations. Much of experiential learning involves looking back at an event and analysing it. Through the group discussions they even recollected more closely what happened, and reflected and learned to a greater depth (Beard & Wilson, 2013). The majority of the counsellors felt that sandplay should be utilised and formalised as part of the **training** of counsellors.

In counsellor A’s words:

“... it should be part of the course” (p. 1, line 2).

Counsellor A stressed the importance of formalising sandplay therapy as part of the course:

“Yes, I think everyone must be part of it and you must start formalising the sandplay so that it can become part of the module” (p. 1, lines 11-13).

In a study by Butler-Byrd, Nieto and Senour (2006), they identified pressing societal needs and the call for professional guidelines to train multicultural competent counsellors who are able to successfully work with diverse individuals and communities. Through the development of their Community-Based Block (CBB) Programme, they have built on existing literature that examines needs, conditions and strategies for incorporating multicultural competence and social justice content into counsellor preparation curricula. They urge the research community to

acknowledge the diversity within multicultural training and that all the role players should be aware that diversity will continue to increase and that counsellors should be prepared and need to be ready for all the challenges it will bring (Butler-Byrd, Nieto, & Senour, 2006). This view is in accordance with the view of Luke and Kiweewa (2010), who point out that counsellor education literature has relied heavily on theory and draw attention to the need of experiential learning and the positive influence it has on trainees' personal growth and awareness. Ieva, Ohrt, Swank and Young (2009) concur with these views, and report on the experiences of the counsellors and their perception of the influence of experiential learning on their interpersonal learning, self-awareness and empathy for future clients after having been part of an experiential group.

The data provided evidence of recommendations regarding **multicultural guidelines** that may contribute positively to intervention in a resource constrained community. Counsellor C recommended sandplay as an accessible technique for children from a multicultural background:

"It was nice to see that play is multi-lingual, everybody could do it and everybody knew what it is all about. I think personally for me it is something that I will use" (p. 2, lines 27-30).

Only one of the counsellors felt very strongly about the issue of **translators** (as mentioned in subtheme 3.1), and suggested that one cannot do sandplay therapy without a translator: Counsellor F stated:

"I believe that you can't really do it in a disadvantaged community if you do not really have translators" (p. 5, lines 7-9).

But counsellor D said that she sometimes used the intervention without a translator:

"I did not always use the translator" (p. 4, line 25).

However, counsellor G felt that the advantages of using sandplay as a therapy technique in a multicultural context surpass the need for a translator:

“Yes, it is nice to hear the story, but even if I did not have someone to translate the story, even if I don’t understand, that is enough. That is so amazing about sandplay therapy” (p. 6, lines 2-5).

They stated the urgency to have the technique formalised as part of the training curriculum. Formalising sandplay as part of the training curriculum can address many of the practical challenges they had. The counsellors reflected on **practical guidelines** regarding the sandplay intervention that may benefit future interventions. Counsellor E suggested that the toys were effective but that there should be ample toys because of the children’s need to use many toys:

“The toys were awesome, I think we need more toys” (p. 10, lines 2-3).

Counsellor B suggested that the colours of the toys are important and that the brighter toys are selected first:

“... the bright toys are always taken first” (p. 10, lines 9-10).

Sandplay can be used as an intervention even with limited resources; counsellor C reflected on how they used wooden blocks as objects to represent many things:

“I was surprised to see that they used the wooden blocks for many things” (p. 10, lines 16-18).

This counsellor further suggested that in working with groups of children it would assist the process to have more structure in the selection of toys and in the use of toys:

“... play around a little with different approaches ... maybe more structure” (p. 10, lines 22-24).

Counsellor C added that the use of a bucket per child to put the toys in, might also help:

“... we did ask the children to take a bucket and only fill the bucket” (p. 11, lines 1-2).

Counsellor D recommended that there should be enough toys for both genders to choose from:

“... we need a little more stuff for the girls” (p. 10, lines 25-26).

Counsellor G concluded by saying that it is of importance to have a system in place before the enhancement of the session to assist the process of record keeping and the making of process notes:

“The importance is that you have a system to keep note of the processes” (p. 11, lines 14-15).

Through the counsellors' cycle of experiential learning, they reflected on their experiences and gave ample examples of recommendations regarding the sandplay techniques and the intervention in a resource constrained community. The challenges that the counsellors experienced provided opportunities for reflection and recommendations to improve future programmes.

4.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the results obtained from the analysis of the data. The data consisted of transcripts from group discussions and reflection notes collected from the counsellors. The counsellors' experiences were analysed for recurring themes, which included the following four main themes, with relevant subthemes:

- Theme 1: **Professional development**, with subthemes, **benefits for counsellors** and **skills development**
- Theme 2: **Benefits for the clients**
- Theme 3: **Language**, with subthemes, **challenges related to language** and **sandplay and language**
- Theme 4: **Recommendations**

The final chapter will address the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the particular limitations and contributions of this study will be addressed, while also offering several recommendations for the implementation of similar programmes in the future, for training and future research.

The first chapter presented a brief orientation and background to the study, and the rationale of the study was also addressed. Chapter 2 gave a review of the available literature, which addressed primarily sandplay therapy as an intervention technique, multicultural counselling and experiential learning. The epistemological and ontological stance that directed this study was addressed in Chapter 3, as well as the methodology, the design and essential ethical considerations for this study. After the process of theme analysis whereby themes and subthemes have emerged, the findings of this study were discussed in Chapter 4.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

This study focused on the experiences of counsellors conducting a short term intervention in a resource constrained community. The study intended to contribute to the lack of existing literature relating to sandplay as a therapy technique and the use thereof in a multicultural South African context. Through the reflections of the counsellors on their experience after having conducted a short term sandplay intervention in a rural community close to Pretoria, they illustrated their learning experience. The experiential learning cycle of Kolb and Kolb (2009) has informed my understanding of the process. As seen in Figure 5.1, the sandplay intervention laid the basis for the concrete experiences which are the root for observations and reflections. The counsellors reflected on their own feelings and experiences in their construction of their own understanding of the sandplay experience, and assigned certain meanings to their experiences which are represented in their recommendations. This study was therefore represented in the first, second and third

step of the experiential learning cycle of Kolb and Kolb (2009). The final step in the cycle would be the practical application of their recommendations that can be utilised in projects in the future (see Figure 5.1).

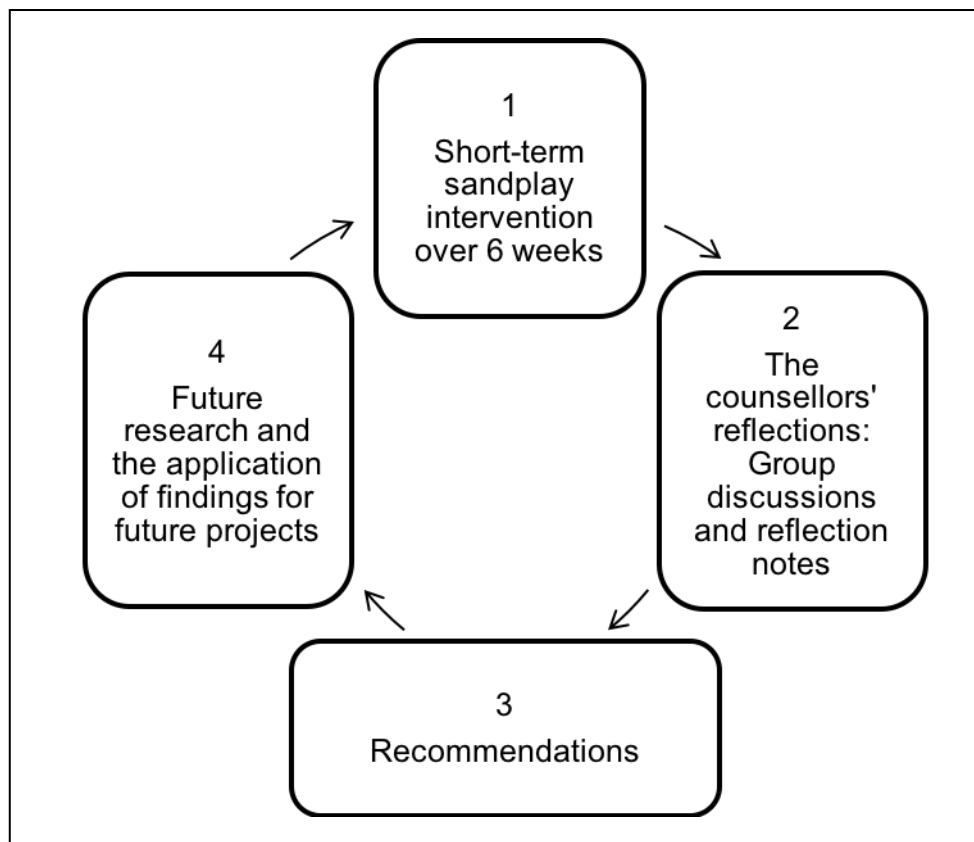


Figure 5.1: Adapted Experiential learning cycle of Kolb and Kolb (2009)

Three main themes were identified and were discussed in Chapter 4 with regard to the counsellors' experiences. Firstly, the counsellors reported on their meaning making process of the experience, and the influence it had on their personal and professional development. They had positive personal experiences and felt that the sandplay intervention has contributed to their development of professional skills. The counsellors also noted the observed benefits it had for their clients' experience of the intervention process.

Secondly, they reported on their initial fears and challenges with language; however, they recounted the effectiveness of the non-verbal dimension of the technique and how it contributed to positive relationship building. Moreover, the added skill also contributed to their overall positive experience of the short term intervention.

Thirdly, the counsellors expressed a dire need for the inclusion of sandplay therapy as part of their curriculum after they had experienced it as a valuable technique to add to their repertoire of counselling and therapy techniques. Formalising the intervention technique may address the practical challenges they had, through more in-depth training and preparation.

The three main themes were central to the experiences of the counsellors in the implementation of a short term sandplay intervention, and therefore answer the primary research question of the study:

What are the experiences of student counsellors conducting a short term sandplay intervention in a resource constrained community?

5.3 REVISITING THE SUBQUESTIONS

➤ ***What challenges did the counsellors experience?***

The counsellors expressed initial fears with the language barriers they may encounter in the community. For one of the counsellors it was a challenge to work if she was not supported by a translator. They also expressed some practical challenges with the organisation of their clients and with the selection of toys.

➤ ***How did they make meaning of their experiences?***

Through a process of retrospective learning, the counsellors looked back at the experience when they were part of the focus group discussion, and in the reflection they could make sense of the experience. Through the process of making reflection notes and reflecting orally, they could recollect even more closely what happened – and thus learning transpired at a greater depth. Through reflecting about the experience they could make sense of it in their own minds, in effect attempting to fit the experience into their mental schema, and then adjusting it or altogether replacing it (Cresswell, 2014). They had on the whole a positive experience and claimed that the experience was one of the most outstanding experiences of that year.

➤ ***What were the perceived benefits for the counsellors in conducting a sandplay project?***

The counsellors conveyed, as discussed earlier, that they had grown on professional as well as personal level, and claimed that they could add valuable skills to their repertoire of counselling and therapeutic skills.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Participants were selected on a voluntary basis and this can be considered as one of the limitations of the study. The study has therefore a limited scope since only eight counsellors participated in the group discussion. This limits the transferability of the study. I did not try to generalise the findings because according to interpretivism, meanings differ with regard to various contexts and situations of human interaction (Merriam, 2009). Despite the limited scope, this does not mean that the information derived from this study may not be valuable for similar studies as it may inform future practice (as discussed in recommendations below).

The reflection notes were not all rich and descriptive as the study was done on a voluntarily basis and the supervisor of the project did not emphasise enough the importance of rich descriptions and meticulous recordings of the processes every week. Some of the counsellors did provide rich descriptions; others' notes were not done diligently.

For the purpose of this study, the main data source was the one group discussion as well as their reflection notes. Despite the care that was taken in the transcription of the data there may be a possibility of minor inaccuracies. The verbatim transcripts were therefore compared to the reflection notes in an attempt to increase the accuracy of the data. Also, I was only able to conduct one focus group discussion due to the demanding schedules of the counsellors and due to other logistical challenges. More focus group discussions may have provided more data to study; however, the content shared reached data saturation after about 70 minutes. The counsellors were asked to send further reflections or comments via email, but none were received.

I was also not able to attend the intervention as the intervention time clashed with my theoretical training; therefore I was not able to do any observations. Furthermore, the study is part of a larger research study and may therefore present a one-sided view.

The counsellors' experiences should be seen by the reader as only one perspective on this intervention.

Finally, the data analysis was conducted by means of theme analysis. The human instrument which is immediately responsive and adaptive seem to be ideal to collect and analyse data; however, the subjective manner of the researcher has shortcomings and potential biases (Cresswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). I did not try to eliminate these biases, but through a reflective process I identified them and monitored them throughout the data analysis process. Furthermore, through a subjective manner I could have given more prominence to certain themes and on the other hand some may not have received prominence. However, my supervisor and I looked at my analysis process on two different occasions and one external reader was also involved.

5.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

There is a scarcity of studies discussing the use of sandplay therapy as a short term intervention technique in resource constrained communities. The insights gained in this study may therefore contribute to a deeper understanding of the practice of sandplay therapy by giving voice to counsellors and their experiences. This study has focused particularly on the counsellors' experiences in conducting a short term sandplay intervention at a school in a medium-size town close to Pretoria. One of the main themes out of this study emphasised the need to formalise sandplay as part of counsellors' training; it therefore has an educational value. This may inform future research for the development of training curricula. This study may also make a valuable contribution to the great need for information on experiential learning experiences of counsellors in the South African context. This study has raised the awareness on the effectiveness of sandplay as a technique to transcend language barriers and may contribute to the development of counselling skills in a multicultural environment. The positive thread that ran through the counsellors' perceived experiences has brought a measure of urgency to the need that the technique has to be used more frequently within the South African context.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH

The following recommendations are made for future research:

- a) To gain a deeper understanding of the themes that emerged in this study:
 - Sandplay as an experiential learning method to enhance professional development in counsellor training
 - Sandplay as an experiential learning method to enhance multicultural awareness and the development of multicultural counselling skills
- b) To explore the clients' experiences with sandplay techniques and their progress
- c) To explore sandplay as a non-verbal technique to address multi-lingual challenges within the South African context
- d) To explore parental and communities' experiences on the influence sandplay has
- e) Broader sampling
- f) Looking at gender/race differences of students
- g) Looking at the use of MEd second-year students versus Educational Psychology interns as counsellors
- h) Development of curricula, as stated above.

5.6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND TRAINING

The following recommendations for training and practice are made, in the light of the findings:

- a) With regard to the effectiveness of sandplay as a non-verbal technique in the South African context, it is recommended that formal training of sandplay as an intervention technique should form part of the curriculum of multicultural training for all professional rendering of mental health services in South Africa. Not only will the students benefit, but vulnerable children might also benefit from this intervention technique.
- b) Sandplay as a play therapy technique appears to be a non-threatening, healing activity with children and contributes to the creation of a safe, trusting environment that adds positive value to rapport building. The recommendation is therefore that the notion of play and the expressive arts

- should be part of any practice in the helping professions (including educational psychologists, clinical psychologists, social workers and doctors).
- c) Sandplay is an effective experiential training technique to expose students to multicultural contexts for the development of multicultural counselling skills.
 - d) The value of community outreach programmes in order to expose students to diversity in language and culture should be explored further.

5.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study concentrated on the experiences of counsellors conducting a short term sandplay intervention in a resource constrained community. In conclusion, I propose that the counsellors had a positive experience on a personal as well as a professional level. They also reported observed positive benefits for their clients.

I foresee that this study will be of value to the counsellors as well as to the clients. Through my engagement with the literature and the data, the experience has been educational and motivational, as I continue on my journey as educational psychologist. I am passionate about community work and this study has improved my knowledge regarding how sandplay can be applied as a counselling and therapy technique which could be of great value in the South African context.

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LIST OF ADDENDA

Addendum A

Transcriptions of group discussion in digital format

Addendum B

Transcriptions with thematic analysis in digital format

Addendum A

Transcriptions of group discussion in digital format

Addendum B

Transcriptions with thematic analysis in digital format