

Uniquely Creative Together

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Abstract

This paper discusses silent group Sandplay (SP) with early adolescents in circumstances of deprivation, neglect and trauma. SP offered in multiple layers of temenos in a children's home environment provided a conducive context for inner processing. Considered from a Jungian perspective, SP revealed inner processing at work. Initial portrayals included threats, conflict and chaos, the need for protection and containment and revealed vulnerability. Later SP images and processes depicted progression and regression, uniquely creative together as well as containment and activation of movement. Silent group SP supported and facilitated transcendental and self encounters that included centring, integration, wholeness, numinous and newfound energy. The implications are potentially far-reaching in terms of the relative affordability, accessibility, efficiency and cultural suitability of this intervention that is not reliant on the verbal skills of the participants or the therapist and can be offered to several individuals simultaneously.

Keywords: silent group sandplay – early adolescence – culturally suitable intervention – multiple layers of temenos – resource-poor environment – non-verbal intervention – inner processing – centring

1 Introduction and Background

1.1 The South African Context

Almost two decades ago in South Africa, Jungian Sandplay (SP) was described as a suitable therapeutic intervention given the country's context of multiple cultures, and languages and the tremendous need for appropriate and effective therapeutic support in circumstances where long-term psychotherapy is not affordable, accessible or feasible (Davids 2005). In

2022 the political context of South Africa has changed; however, the need for emotional, psychological and developmental support remains the same if not more urgent (Mokitimi, Schneider, et al. 2018). Although SP is more familiar in South Africa, it remains relatively unused as a non-verbal group intervention despite its universal healing qualities that transcend cultural limitations (Ammann, 1991; Ferreira et al., 2014; D.M. Kalff, 1996; Snelgar, 2018). The potential for SP as an intervention in South Africa remains, given that the country is one of the most unequal countries in the world with a multitude of unmet needs due to pronounced unequal socio-economic discrepancies and inadequate education and mental health provision (Mokitimi et al. 2018; Natal 2020; STATSSA 2020). Although all stages in childhood are crucial and affected by parental, socio-economic and political intergenerational trauma, further exploration is required in early adolescence when pubertal changes (including increased consciousness, identity formation and self-reflection) start occurring (Esnaola, Sesé, et al. 2020; Fomina, Burmistrova-Savenkova, et al. 2020; Jung 2019; Van der Aar, Peters, et al. 2018). A remarkable change in personality takes place by the age of 15 and almost a third of the KwaZulu-Natal population is younger than 15 years with the average age of school dropout being 13 years (Adams et al. 2019; Jung 2008; STATSSA 2019). The province of KwaZulu-Natal has the largest child population and the highest number of orphans with isiZulu being the most widely spoken language (Alexander, 2018; Hall & Sambu, 2018). It is a province that faces unique challenges starkly highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the social, economic and political unrest of the July 2021 riots (Solomons, 2021; Somdyala, 2021). The severely constrained and limited educational, health and social development structures are profoundly overwhelmed and unable to provide interventions to mitigate the effect of collective poverty, deprivation and abuse. Unprocessed collective shadow issues result in dysfunctional behaviour whilst dealing with the shadow requires moral effort, but once accepted the shadow can become a helpful friend (Akam & Yahya 2018; Ladkin, Spiller, et al. 2016). As such, the wounds remain until processed and inter-generational effects can then be managed.

Child protection organisations in KwaZulu-Natal operate in a realm of desperate need and severely constrained systems of meagre human and capital resources (Redfern, 2022). There is an immense and urgent need for programmes and interventions placed alongside existing structures such as schools or temporary protective childcare shelters (Children's Institute 2020). Schools provide a limited opportunity to support and develop young people; however, they are overcrowded and do not take care to preserve the natural functioning of the psyche (Jung 2019; Meier & West, 2020). Child protection environments can potentially offer temporary relief and support and an opportunity to mitigate the effects of deprivation, neglect and abuse by providing a conducive environment where children can process their inner worlds and develop inner resources and life skills with which to encounter the outer world when they leave protective care (Redfern, 2022).

In short, the provision of appropriate support is scarce and the window of opportunity is narrow. Once children leave school or protective care, there is very little scope for intervention. As such, opportunities for personal development can give young people a chance not only to survive but to thrive and in the face of poverty and dire circumstances, the development of interiority has the potential to transform human behaviour (Ives, Freeth, et

al. 2020; Schwartz, Theron, et al. 2017). Within the potential for transformation lies hope and the possible sustainability of an improved future.

1.2 Early Adolescence, an Opportune Period of Development

Puberty, a transitional period in the lifespan, occurs during early adolescence when the ego frees itself from the collective unconscious and becomes more or less independent, but this is also when cognitive disorders often manifest (Jung, 1961/ 2019). This is a time of dynamic brain development that sets the scene for adult well-being and is simultaneously a critical period for achieving human potential when there are many new stressors and psychological risks (Discovery 2021; McGuire, McCormick, et al. 2019). Heightened brain plasticity, the development of key neurobiological circuitry, as well as sensitivity to the social environment, make early adolescence an opportune time for intervention (Méndez Leal & Silvers 2021). When consciousness increases, the value of submitting to unconscious impulses through creative activity is essential (Jung 1961/2019; Jung, Jung, et al. 2008). Protective life skills and coping mechanisms are still developing which adds to the vulnerability and sensitivity of early adolescents (Discovery 2021; Toska, Hodes et al. 2019). During childhood and transitional life stages the depths of the personality are accessible and thus there is an opportunity to foster acceptance and avoid psychotic disorders (Mitchell & Friedman 2021). Traumatic experiences foster dissociation and psychopathology thereby creating disconnection in the mind-brain-body system which leads to emotional dysregulation, impulsivity and lack of effortful control (Scalabrini, Mucci et al. 2018). When trauma happens before ego development, it can be emotionally catastrophic and result in unmet needs, fear of separation, hunger for the primary caregiver, depression and hopelessness (Mitchell & Friedman 2021).

During times of distress, early adolescents revert to concrete thinking and require support to negotiate between the abstract and the concrete (Lindo & Ceballos 2020). The ideal scenario is to provide for inner processing whereby the self can be encountered and a relationship with the ego can be fostered. During play the ego submits in service to creative imagination, freeing and allowing the self to emerge; the showing through of the self is a guarantee for personality development (Dora Kalff 2019; Weinrib 2004).

1.3 Inner Processing, Creative Activity and Play

Inner resources are personal resources related to spirituality that give meaning and value to life including inner peace and harmonious interpersonal relationships (Wright, Yendork, et al. 2018). They can be likened to a reservoir from which a person can draw in times of need, providing a feeling of strength that enhances well-being and builds resilience (Van Dierendonck, Rodríguez-Carvajal, et al. 2009). Inner resources involving the self are potentially transformative and lie at the heart of sustainable actions (Ives et al. 2020). The value of creative activity and play for inner processing and personal development and healing is widely accepted (Freedle, 2022; Humphris, 2019; Mitchell & Friedman, 2021; Winnicott, 1994). A wide range of research confirms the psyche's capacity for self-regulation and

increased well-being through expressive creativity in a conducive environment (Pearson & Wilson 2019; Punnett & Canfield 2020; Roesler 2019; Weinrib 2004; Yahaya, Maakip, et al. 2018; Zoja 2018). The strong connection between supported creativity, imagination and play suggests endless possibilities for growth allowing the deeper unconscious (non-verbal) implicit self to come to the fore (Dominey, 2021; Schore, 2010).

Play is natural and culturally universal; it is an activity of primitive identity in which omnipotence predominates through internal images and external objects (Axline 1994; Fordham 1985; Jarvis, Newman, et al. 2014). In the hands of the child, the play object is a receptacle for internal potentialities (Jung, Jung, et al. 2008). Only in playing can the child be creative and use the whole personality, and in creativity the self is discovered (Winnicott 1994). Play transcends preverbal trauma and improves verbal and non-verbal communication (Ferreira et al. 2014). In addition, non verbal expression through creating images reconnects neural pathways and restores balance (Freedle, 2022; Schore & Schore, 2017).

The opportunity for catharsis as a result of imaginative play supports growing awareness of physical and emotional needs and the ability to improve expression as new consciousness develops (Dominey 2021). As such, play helps with neural maturation benefitting higher executive brain development and is essential for well-being (Humphris 2019; Jarvis et al. 2014). Non-directed play is an opportunity to experience growth under the most favourable conditions (Axline 1994).

2 Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

Qualitative research methods were employed in this study based on the understanding that the acquisition of knowledge is subjective and that context is relevant and meaning is constructed relatively (Sefotho 2018). In this instance, a phenomenological research design was used that begins with descriptions of another person's experience, as description is the most crucial aspect in comprehending a human phenomenon (Kowen 2020). Furthermore, phenomenology begins with wonder at what and how something reveals itself and is characterised by a tension between order and disorder, system and openness, passivity and activity, and analysis and imagination inherent in all phenomena (Van Manen 2016).

2.2 Background to Sandplay

SP is a method of psychotherapy and self-experience developed by Dora Kalff that has roots in Jung's analytical psychology, Margaret Lowenfeld's World Technique and Eastern contemplative traditions (Martin Kalff 2019). Encouraged by Jung to devote herself to working with children, Kalff adapted Lowenfeld's technique in the development of SP (SandSPiel) (Martin Kalff 2019). SP¹ is based on the premise that there is a fundamental drive toward individuation and healing in the human psyche, with the self constituting a natural symbol of wholeness (Jung & Hull 2014; Dora Kalff 2019). Essentially, SP is a projection interpreted

intuitively and explained by psychologists as the unconscious endowment of human fantasy onto an inanimate object (Eby 2021; Merrell 2008; Moore 2016). Children usually project their unconscious onto the primary attachment caregiver, the figure that plays the greatest role in their lives and SP can be equated with the maternal container into which projections are made (Jung, Jung, et al. 2008; Weinrib 2004).

Thus, SP is a psychotherapeutic process whereby the sandplayer creates three-dimensional scenes in a tray of a specific size, using sand, water and realistic figures. Interaction with the sand, water and miniatures allows the sandplayer to access the unconscious and give concrete expression to unconscious material through the creation of an image in the sand (Davids 2005; Dora Kalff 2019; Ryce-Menuhin 2015; Weinrib 2004). The sand images and miniatures are representations or symbols that form a bridge between what is familiar and what is strange and can relate reason to passion, the past to the present and the present to the future (Ryce-Menuhin 2015). In addition, symbols can have a holistic (embodied) effect if manifested as a tactile sensation (Zoja 2018). Experiencing the symbol in a safe and protected SPace is most important and non-verbal expression creates direct access to the unconscious so language is not a barrier (Ferreira et al. 2014; Dora Kalff 2019; Martin Kalff 2019).

2.3 Sandplay Model in This Study

The SP model adopted for this study consisted of six group sessions held in silence with five early adolescent participants aged 9–14 years-old at a child protection home in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Early adolescent children were purposely selected. Group Sandplay was chosen as working with a group simultaneously is potentially more cost-effective and accessible when resources are severely limited as they often are in South Africa. The Sandplay was conducted in silence to limit distractions of the group and to offer additional containment and protection for freedom of expression. Silence also takes pressure off children who are not comfortable verbalising. The children in this study had been placed in protective care by the state due to abuse, neglect, deprivation and trauma. Each child had suffered profound trauma. The children were not interviewed; the study was interested in exploring the role of Sandplay without requiring the children to talk. This was deliberate so that if the intervention worked well, it could be replicated by volunteer facilitators who are not necessarily psychologists or social workers.

Interviews with childcare staff before and after SP, photographs of completed sand tray images and researcher observation and reflections were the data that informed the study. The childcare staff were interviewed before and after the six SP sessions. SP was unknown and a group SP room was created specifically for the study in a converted container building at the youth care centre. A substantial collection of miniatures and five sand trays formed the basis of the SP room. These were arranged and set up so that each child had their sand tray positioned in the same place for each session and identified by a small cardboard shape near the tray. The miniatures were displayed so that the children could choose freely which miniatures to use in each session. Non-directed silent group SP was introduced to the children and the five participants simultaneously experienced six consecutive weekly SP sessions.

There were no restrictions in terms of how many nor which miniatures could be selected. The sessions were held in a purposefully created room: a safe, private and protected, temenos (sacred) SSpace.² Multiple layers of temenos were created including silence, the group, a safeguarded room, consecutive and reliable sessions held at the same time and on the same day of the week, the researcher as witness facilitator and significantly no involvement or interference from the youth care staff.

A total of nine childcare staff working at the youth care centre were interviewed before the SP sessions began. The first interviews provided insight into the children's general background as a group (and highlighted the reasons for their placement in the youth care home), as well as their behaviour and demeanour before starting SP. Immediately after the children's six SP sessions, the same staff were interviewed a second time to ascertain the children's response to the SP intervention. In addition, a follow-up interview was conducted at the children's home with a senior member of the centre's therapeutic team to discuss the children's behaviour and demeanour two, three and six months after their final SP.

2.4 Quality and Trustworthiness

The generation of data and analysis was iterative, simultaneously generated, processed and interpreted (Frost & Shinebourne 2011). Through first-hand experience and processing of the children's SP (actions and completed images) as well as the interview data and reflections, patterns and themes emerged indicating both wounding and healing. Interviews with adult childcare staff supported and corroborated the SP actions and images. In addition, the researcher adopted a transparent reflective process appreciating the importance of awareness of biases and assumptions that could potentially limit the study. Added to this, the supervision of the research processes and the reflective approach of the researcher assisted in mediating and mitigating bias (Bruce 2020; Davids 2005; Silverman 2017). Whether a study can be replicated is always questionable but detailed descriptions of the SP protocols and applied model were documented indicating every step of the process (Redfern, 2022).

Informed permission was obtained from the organisation, informed consent from the adult participants and informed assent from the children participants. In addition, participation was voluntary, and no adult or child participants were coerced into participating. Pseudonyms have been used to ensure confidentiality and preservation of the sacredness of the SP process and resulting images.

3 Results and Findings

3.1 Emerging Themes

This article describes the findings as they emerged from the data, namely the SP actions, images and reported behaviour and mood of the early adolescent participants. Different themes became apparent; main themes were identified from the group SP sessions whilst sub-themes pertinent to individuals were also evident. The six main group themes from SP 1

to SP 6 were: threats, conflict and chaos, the need for protection and containment, revealed vulnerability, progression and regression, uniquely creative together and containment and activation of movement. Each individual's SP theme was unique in each group session and collectively contributed to the emergence of the group themes described above. The group and individual SP themes are shown in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

3.2 From First to Final Sandplay Sessions

In this paper, images of the first and the final SP are provided and the SP process is described. It was noticeable that the SP of the five early adolescent children both highlighted and addressed the theme of the need for containment and expression. As an expressive, containing and receptive activity, SP accentuated the need for containment as expressed by the children and simultaneously provided containment. The themes were illuminated by the use of representative figures in SP. Figures, actions and SP processes support themes of wounding and healing. Both wounding and healing occurred in the same sand scene, and the extent to which either presided, was significant. As such, initial symbolic representations associated with wounding were dominant in early sand images whilst later sand images depicted representations that reflected healing themes. Group and individual SP themes are summarised in Tables 1 and 2.

TABLE 1 Group sandplay themes

Six sessions	Themes of group SP
SP 1	Threats, conflict and chaos
SP 2	The need for protection and containment
SP 3	Revealed vulnerability
SP 4	Progression and regression
SP 5	Uniquely creative together
SP 6	Containment and activation of movement

TABLE 2 Individual sandplay themes

Sand-player	SP 1	SP 2	SP 3	SP 4	SP 5	SP 6
Square	A dangerous world	Protection and containment	Minimised danger and vulnerable people	Forward-facing dragonfly	Feminine undulations	Abundance in the foreground
Triangle	A split world	An attack on the right	The prey face the predatorial attack	Three areas develop	Construction of farmlands	Less division and more balance
Oval	Bombs dropped in a rigid world	Division of fantasy and reality	No people are present in the chaos	A re-ordering from the left	Protection by the military	A convoy to the community
Circle	Overwhelming chaos and the need for containment	A messy uncontained war zone	Finding containment	Searching and exploring the limits	A beautiful backdrop	Centring in a peaceful place
Diamond	Isolation and religious rigidity	Identification of different aspects	A beautiful angel	Primal carnage	Differentiation of spirit and domestic	A pilgrimage to integration and wholeness

3.3 The First Sandplay

SP 1 highlighted threats, conflict and chaos both in terms of the completed sand scenes and also by the countertransference feelings evoked in the researcher as a witness participant. The frenzy with which miniatures were piled into baskets and the extent to which sand trays were loaded to capacity evoked feelings of overwhelmedness. This countertransference experience of the other through oneself and oneself through the other is critical in understanding trauma and deprivation (Kowen 2020; Mitchell & Friedman 2021). The children had never before been exposed to so many toys/miniatures. Initial uncertainty about freedom to use all the miniatures followed by their realisation that they were allowed, resulted in frenetic overloading of baskets, taking as many miniatures as they could for their sand trays. This extent of deprivation is supported by South Africa's having one of the highest rates of traumatic exposure to domestic violence and abuse in the world (Van Westrhenen, Fritz, et al. 2019).

Individual SP themes from the first SP included a dangerous world, a split world, bombs dropped in a rigid world, overwhelming chaos and the need for containment and isolation and religious rigidity. In the absence of verbalisations, SP authors, as well as the insights of the childcare staff, assisted with understanding the symbolic representations. Prone figures placed face down in the sand indicated early wounding and profound harm (Mitchell & Friedman 2021). Neglect and isolation were depicted by unattended babies and unsupported lone figures while threatening figures and buried miniatures suggested resistance or inability to deal with life issues (Mitchell & Friedman 2021). Split and divided scenes are a defence

against overwhelming feelings and indicate a sorting out within oneself and from others (Mitchell & Friedman 2021). Woundedness was also reflected in the reported behaviour and demeanour of the children before SP: chaotic, overwhelmed, acting out behaviour including violence (aggression, fighting and bullying), uncooperativeness, withdrawal, isolation and crying. Deprivation and neglect were depicted in the children's early sand images and reported by childcare staff. In addition, there were reports of a lack of cooperative support and funding from the government, highlighting the resource-poor environment.

Vulnerability and overwhelmedness were noticeable in the use of threatening and menacing figures; dominant, shadow figures are representative of aggression and danger. Snakes and black animals were particularly feared by the children and by childcare staff. Initially, the children (and later childcare staff in after-SP interviews) jumped away from the toy snakes when they entered the sand room. The childcare staff mentioned that snakes are communally feared and considered dangerous as well as black animals and they noted that the colour red symbolises blood and injury. Snakes are universally disliked and feared; they have two aspects: creative and destructive and represent vital and least psychologically accessible instincts (Park 2018). As such, snakes evoke a powerful effect, are an emblem of the visceral world and the appearance of the snake implies the potential of newly-created energy reminding us of instinctive life (Kim, Cho, et al. 2021; Park 2018). Dominant snakes were used extensively in the early sand scenes whilst later sand images featured smaller snakes indicating the threat had been minimised. In addition, snakes often appear in puberty when the transformation into adulthood reaches deeper layers in the psyche (Dora Kalff 2019).

The six sand images of SP 1 exposed threats, conflict and chaos with dangerous animals and chaotic scenes dominating. Rigidity and division were noticeable and isolation and the need for containment were evident. Division and differentiation are reflected vertically and horizontally by distinguishing between the foreground, the less deliberate actions of the collective unconscious and the background, the more deliberate actions of consciousness (Ryce-Menuhin 2015).

The process of making the sand pictures assists in further understanding the issues portrayed in the first scenes. In this instance, the extent of the children's deprivation was evident in the filling of their trays, returning several times to the display to collect more miniatures. Sand scenes displayed the need for nurture; the food items packed into the tray were noteworthy. Even death was marked by slices of bread as gravestones. Children asked for permission to take the fruit and vegetable miniatures having arrived in the sand room for the first time unsure and momentarily overwhelmed and immobilised by the choices. Not only do the first sand constructions show the inner issues and outer reality, they also suggest a way to reaching higher levels of development (Dora Kalff 2019; Mitchell & Friedman 2021).

Defencelessness was noticeable in prone figures, unattended babies, an accident, bombs lobbed into a sand tray. Death was reflected in graves and zombies while differences were starkly split. Danger and turmoil were marked by snakes, wild animals, army men carrying weapons, empty alcohol bottles, isolation and conflict. Wild animals represented the instincts that come to the surface when ego control of the self degenerates while archetypal

representations of extinct and imaginary figures were indicative of the children's separation from their parents (Kim 2018; Peters 2018; Weinrib 2004).

The first SP session highlighted the ego's insufficient strength and its stage of development was reflected in scenes that mainly consisted of wild animals and plant life (Mitchell & Friedman 2021). The children's first SP images are included with the final SP images and summaries of each participant's SP process (see Figures 1–10).

3.4 The Final Sandplay

The final SP was very different to the first SP. The atmosphere was calm and the children confidently and deliberately worked in their sand trays. They assisted each other, were focused and relaxed and they lingered in the SP room. The sand images of SP 6 are in stark contrast to the first SP scenes. Individual themes include abundance in the foreground, less division, balance, a convoy to the community, centring in a beautiful place and a pilgrimage of integration and wholeness. In addition, each child's series of SP images described their inner narrative process.

3.4.1 Sandplayer Square

The youngest group member's SP themes included a dangerous world, protection and containment, minimised danger and vulnerable people, a forward-facing dragonfly, feminine undulations and abundance in the foreground. Figure 1 is a photograph of her first SP and it depicts a dangerous world while Figure 2 is a photograph of her final SP scene, showing an abundance in the foreground immediate to the sandplayer. Abundant, brightly coloured nourishment is evident. A yellow cheese arrow points to the background where home/ego interests reside and wild animal instincts are contained. This suggests that trauma had slipped into the background as improvement in the psyche was brought about by dealing with more immediate problems (Kawai 2019). The division between forefront and background commences at a pathway from unconsciousness where a man dressed in a black uniform is lying down. The man has been downed and is no longer preventing access thereby opening up movement from the left. This final scene is in contrast with the first scene which was dominated by threats and danger, and the need for protection. Ordering and a diminishing of danger followed by the creation of a powerful image of a dragonfly facing forward preceded the emergence of feminine undulations and the final scene depicts immediately accessible abundant nurture that suggested internal support was available.



FIGURE 1 A dangerous world (first SP for sandplayer Square)



FIGURE 2 Abundance in the foreground (final SP for sandplayer Square)

3.4.2 Sandplayer Triangle

The SP themes of the only boy in the group who turned 12 years-old during the SP sessions include a split world, an attack on the right, the prey facing the predatorial attack, three distinct areas developing, construction of farmlands whilst in the final SP there was less division and more balance. SP 6 was marked by the two sides moving closer together with reduced conflict. In this scene movement was possible from either side and the two sides

were evenly matched. New growth, recognition of vulnerability and strengthening had occurred. During this SP process, the numbers two, followed by three and four as well as five, featured. This is positive as immediately after three, the appearance of four suggests that there will be a solution (Jung, Jung, et al. 2008). SP 6 is a very different depiction from the initial starkly split battle scene. Figure 3 shows a split world while in Figure 4, there is less division and more balance—these are the first and final sand images of the boy, Triangle.



FIGURE 3 A split world (first SP for sandplayer Triangle)



FIGURE 4 Less division and more balance (final SP for sandplayer Triangle)

3.4.3 Sandplayer Oval

The SP themes of the middle-child of the group, sandplayer Oval, started with bombs dropped into a rigid world, followed by a division of fantasy and reality, no people present in the chaos, a re-ordering from the left, protection by the military and a convoy to the community. The first scene (see Figure 5) created in this narrative was rigid and static (a bomb site) while in the final scene (see Figure 6) there was a convoy of people. This final image showed a procession originating from the animus area (the capacity for connection and relatedness) and moving towards the family and the domestic feminine (Weinrib 2004). This was a committed procession of motor cars supported on either side by tractors and aeroplanes. The family community area that was being approached was happy, safe and relaxed. This final image of a journey to the community and the people SPEaks of a desire and readiness to connect and relate. Figure 5, showing bombs dropped in a rigid world, and Figure 6, a convoy to the community, illustrate the contrast between the middle child's first and final sand images.



FIGURE 5 Bombs dropped in a rigid world (first SP for sandplayer Oval)



FIGURE 6 A convoy to the community (final SP for sandplayer Oval)

3.4.4 Sandplayer Circle

SP themes of the second-oldest group member (referred to as sandplayer Circle, see Figures 7 and 8) include overwhelming chaos and the need for containment, a messy uncontained world, finding containment, searching and exploring the limits, a beautiful backdrop and centring in a peaceful place. The final image of centring continued the theme of the need for containment. Various types of containers were used throughout, from the first to the last sand scene. Most notable were brass vases/jars, a symbol of the feminine receptive principle, out of which sharp porcupine quills protruded (Kwak 2019; Mitchell & Friedman 2021). One vase had fallen over and the porcupine quill remained inside it; next to this Wonder Woman had also fallen over suggesting that the fantasy was undefendable, not imagined—it was real. The psyche’s movement was predominantly from the left, shaping into a circular formation in the central area of the sacred space. The first sand scene was overwhelmingly filled with miniatures chaotically presented; however, each figure and object was important. A process was evident that stemmed from overwhelmedness in messiness to an emerging self, in a beautiful landscape. The beginnings of a circular area took shape at the start and moved towards a final centring image amidst the detritus in the surrounds. The containing/receiving feminine vessels remained, some upside down, empty and closed or fallen over, whilst some were upright and continued to hold sharp porcupine quills. Figure 7 depicts overwhelming chaos in the first sand image and the need for containment while Figure 8 shows centring in a peaceful place.



FIGURE 7 Overwhelming chaos and the need for containment (first SP for sandplayer Circle)



FIGURE 8 Centring in a peaceful place (final SP for sandplayer Circle)

3.4.5 Sandplayer Diamond

The SP themes of the oldest group member, Diamond, included isolation and religious rigidity, identification of different aspects, a beautiful angel, primal carnage, differentiation of spirit and domestic and a pilgrimage to integration and wholeness. In the final image (see Figure 10), a numinous scene repeated a depiction of the self in the form of both head and heart. The circular head representing the unconscious was encapsulated by spiders (threats of a primitive nature). The torso or heart region, representing consciousness, had limbs that enabled movement shown by motor cars. A centring was evident of head, heart and activation of mobility for integration. Horses forming a processional movement around the head hill could represent the sexual energies of a pubertal 14-year-old girl. The square shape demarcated by seashells and butterflies contained a shiny heart area nestled within. Conscious grounding appeared to be occurring on the right where the land vehicles constituted the feet and moved from the family area (Ryce-Menuhin 2015). A figure of eight was underway: clockwise from the left and anti-clockwise from the right, a crossing over convergence of movement. This is the second numinous image in this narrative and it repeats the connection of head and heart by movement. There was also a bridge of butterflies, representing the transformative capacity of the neck, between the head and the heart. The first and second sand images depicted rigidity and isolation. These were followed by a numinous angel in SP 3 and thereafter a regressive plunge into primal carnage in SP 4 and a re-ordering and distinguishing in SP 5 and the final session. The identification of aspects and capacities indicates an opening of pathways and resourcefulness and suggests the healing process was underway. The emergence of the self, evident more than once during the six weeks of SP, and the numinosity of the displays was significant and encouraging for positive development. In two of the six scenes, the self constituted the entire sand scene with the final image portraying movement towards integration and wholeness. Figure 9, Diamond's first sand image, portrayed isolation and religious rigidity while in Figure 10, the final image, a pilgrimage to integration and wholeness was evident.



FIGURE 9 Isolation and religious rigidity (first SP for sandplayer Diamond)



FIGURE 10 A pilgrimage to integration and wholeness (final SP for sandplayer Diamond)

4 Discussion

4.1 Individual Sandplay Reflections

It is appropriate that the children's sand images and actions should have the last word. The on-site educational psychologist noticed a change in Triangle after SP; he was willing to talk about his problems, for the first time. Square's portrayal of threatening impenetrable fences on the perimeter of her tray in initial sand scenes culminated in a display of accessible, abundant nurture in her final sand image; she was later able to hold her own during the court proceedings of her abuse. Circle tore open a silica sachet,³ sprinkling the contents onto her sand image thereby leaving her mark; tiny silica beads will be discovered with delight by subsequent sandplayers using the same tray. Oval's rigidity was transformed, reflected in a relational game of soccer with her father, an unusual and rare occurrence for a daughter and father in this context. And, finally, Diamond, always an outsider as an amaXhosa amongst the amaZulu, demonstrated an increased sense of belonging at the children's home and a strong desire to play and adapt, never evident before.

4.2 Conclusion: Follow Up Two, Three and Six Months after the Final Sandplay

Three of the children (Diamond, Square and Oval) were reunited with their families two and three months after the final SP. When Diamond, the oldest, arrived at the home she had no identity, having been rescued from being taken by an old man for marriage. SP offered her a glimpse of childhood that she had been denied and she was able to experience play through her participation in SP. Remarkably, Diamond was instrumental in demanding additional opportunities to play after the SP sessions ended. The youngest group member, Square, left the home connected to self whereas she had arrived at the home emotionally unstable. The third child, Oval arrived at the children's home withdrawn and isolated and living with hiv/Aids. When she left the home, she was more responsive, open and integrated and her health was well managed.

The remaining children, Triangle and Circle, continue to show progress at the home six months after their final SP. Triangle is excelling in all activities and is more assertive on the soccer field and while playing games. Circle is described as being transformed. She is coherent, progressing at school, helping the little ones, knows her space in the world and has 'found herself'. She is no longer violent and neither does she cry or make up stories. Circle is content to speak about how she has changed and matured and is also happy to sit quietly in silence with staff, who initially feared she would not even be able to manage participating in the sandplay study.

Not only are the children altered by the SP but the staff have also been positively affected by their involvement. Parallel journeys are evident of increased awareness and growth for both children and adult participants as well as the researcher participant. Different exposure and involvement in an SP project increases awareness and fosters parallel growth processes to the extent that a permanent purposeful group SP facility is currently being developed at the children's home.

4.3 Overall Sandplay Reflections

Silent group SP with early adolescents in a resource-poor environment facilitates inner processing and supports and activates healing. The provision of SP in multiple layers of temenos, including the group, highlights the value of additional containment for vulnerable children. Such provision of SP supports the unique processing and development of inner resources as reflected in individual SP actions, processes and sand images. Inner self-exploration and processing mobilise healing and inner resilience in the face of wounding and were remarkable in this study, a testimony to the self-regulatory function of the psyche in a conducive environment. Reconnection with the mother (as in the archetype, Mother Earth) through SP supports the restoration of unity and the release of creativity. The purposeful accommodation and holding presence of the mother is vital. As such, SP facilitators or witnesses must be solely and purposefully trained and should not be involved in day-to-day interactions with the children.

Multiple layers of temenos, including silence, create a beneficial containing 'womb' in which individual inner processing can be facilitated and supported. The regulating effect of the group in silent SP cannot be underestimated and children who have suffered from a range of different kinds of trauma could benefit. This lends impetus to the value of group SP as a supportive, identity-forming bridge between early adolescence and early adulthood when inner attunement assists with increased awareness and improves outer interactions (Redfern, 2022). The provision of silent SP as a group activity during early adolescence is ideal, providing an opportunity for being uniquely creative together. Community or organisation willingness and receptivity to being a part of an SP initiative add to the conducive environment and provide additional temenos. Additional support and accommodation of SP within a purposefully created and protected temenos space hastens and facilitates the inner process.

In circumstances where the outer world imposes unprecedented deprivation and trauma on children, supportive, containing interventions facilitate inner processing and are imperative to mediate the effect of trauma. Thus, in situations of wounding and constrained resources, safe, sacred and appropriate opportunities that allow and foster inner development are essential to support and enable positive youth development. The interrelatedness of inner and outer is noteworthy. The inner is reliant on the outer circumstances whilst the outer world is better placed for future sustainability in the hands of attuned and aware individuals. This study has shown that silent group SP in early adolescence supports and facilitates inner processing and thereby the development of inner resources that enable positive relationships with the self-system and instil a sense of uniqueness, containment and activation of energy.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Notes

¹ The authors Jung, Kalff, Weinrib, Ryce-Menuhin, Pattis-Zoja and Mitchell and Friedman are referenced multiple times as sources of original Jungian and SP information.

² In this article temenos refers to a sacred and protected space.

³ Silica sachets were in the boxes in which the miniatures were transported to protect them from moisture. Circle rummaged in the empty boxes and secured a sachet. The sachets were not a part of the display.