Reviewer’s report

Title: The Clinical Effects of School Sandplay Group Therapy on General Children with a Focus on Korea Child & Youth Personality Test

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Reviewer: Lorraine Freedle

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript makes an original contribution to the field of sandplay therapy and mental health services in school settings. The idea of providing sandplay to all students in certain grades of an elementary school to improve well being is intriguing and could be of benefit not only to the students who participate in the intervention, but could also potentially improve the school environment for all students. The argument for school group sandplay is relatively strong; however, many sections need clarification, not only to strengthen the argument, but also to clarify methods for the reader.

ABSTRACT

The abstract is clearly written and outlines the study; however, there are errors in the abstract that need to be fixed. For example, the abstract states the number of participants in the study is 113, when the Methods section states the study consisted of 284 participants. There are also inconsistencies with number of males and females as well as results and conclusion. The results on the abstract mention, for example, that there is a decline in depression and improvements in self esteem. Neither of these findings are consistent with the results found. Finally, the abstract states that there were 10 to 16 students in each small group, while the methods section states that there were three to six children in each small group. It is essential that the abstract is updated to accurately reflect the participants and the findings of the study.

INTRO

In the second sentence of paragraph one of the Intro section the authors indicate that Domenico developed "a unique idea" that is different from Kalff's individual sandplay, but does not provide details related to this differentiation. Please insert a qualifying sentence to describe Domenico's approach and how it may be different than Kalffian sandplay. The type of sandplay used in the study is important to understand for clinical and research purposes. There may also be a typo in the sentence that begins with Boik and Goodwin in that I believe the authors are introducing group sandplay here, but do not mention group. At the end of the first paragraph of the Intro section, a sentence states that group counseling is more suitable "for children in the stage of psychosocial development." What is meant by this? What stage of psychosocial development?

The manuscript goes on to describe how children participate "honestly" in group counseling. Perhaps another word is more suited? In the 3rd paragraph of the Intro section the authors state that Campbell found that with 8-10 sessions of sandplay in school, children enter "a problem-solving stage." What
does this mean? Also, did the children in the Campbell study receive individual or group sandplay? This is not clear.

In the 4th paragraph of the Intro section the authors describe the setting as "in school, with teacher, as a class." It will be important to mention in this paragraph that the sandplay intervention is provided by counselors, not teachers. This is mentioned later in the methods section; however, mentioning this in the introduction section will better help orient the reader to "school sandplay group counseling" as a mental health intervention provided by counselors, not teachers.

METHODS

Please clarify how participants were chosen for the study. All 4th to 6th graders? From there, it is clear who was excluded and why, but it is unclear how they were chosen in the first place.

Please clarify how many students were in each small group- 10 to 16 as described in the abstract, or three to six as described in the Procedure section.

In the second paragraph of the procedures section "the communication sand tray of Boik and Goodwin" needs to be described. It is important for the reader to know how sandplay was conducted. The next sentence, "The session process and program were also reconstructed with the application of Kalff’s stages of ego development" is also very unclear. Perhaps this sentence could be omitted or explained better. This reviewer is an expert in Kalffian sandplay and could not make the connection between the procedures / prompts clearly articulated in Table 3 and Kalff’s stages of ego development.

The last paragraph of the procedure section makes it clear how sandplay is administered. It sounds very much like Kalffian sandplay. Then at the end we find Table 3 that shows prompts are given that are not used in Kalffian sandplay. Hence, it would help the reader to understand why these prompts were used. It is assumed they are used based on the work of Domenico or Boink and Goodwin?? Finally, a citation for Table 3 is missing from the Procedures section. Table 3 is a helpful addition.

Measure

Measure is described adequately. Please add when the measure was administered and to whom: students and/or parents. Results are only reported for either student self report OR parent report. If only one of these measures was used, please clarify which one. If both were used then results need to be reported for both self report and parent report.

Statistics
Deferred

DISCUSSION

The discussion includes a review of studies that appear to the reader for the first time. These studies may be better introduced in the literature review, then discussed further in the discussion section. The authors may also decide to leave as is, although this makes for a very lengthy discussion section. Sometimes it is hard to track during the discussion whether the authors are referring to results from the current study or other studies.
Limitations of the study are mentioned in the discussion section but are not mentioned in the conclusion or abstract.

This research would provide a valuable contribution to the field. Hopefully, the authors will make these corrections and this study will be accepted for publication.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**  
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**  
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**  
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**  
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I recommend additional statistical review

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