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CREATING SPACE FOR CONNECTION: CREATIVE INTERVENTIONS IN COUNSELING

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ABSTRACT

Evidence-based research supports the incorporation of creative techniques in counselor supervision. There are numerous methods of implementing creative techniques within the supervisory process; sandtray is one such tool. This qualitative article discusses the power of creative approaches for supervision, explains how creative techniques assist supervisors in providing meaningful supervision, and reviews current literature supporting these arguments. This study involved the supervision of master's-level counseling students by doctoral-level counseling supervisors. Supervisors used sandtray during initial, mid-term, and final supervisory sessions. Data included student journal entries, supervisor case notes, photos of sandtrays, and video recordings of sessions. Results of the study are discussed along with clinical implications and recommendations for future research.

Introduction

Sandtray is a projective activity used in the field of counseling that allows individuals space to externalize issues and integrate knowledge and experiences by manipulating figures in the sand (Perryman et al., 2016). This creative experiential technique facilitates increased self-awareness and insight (Lev-Wiesel, 2004), which often leads sandtray participants to experience catharsis and validation (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2011). When used in the context of supervision, sandtray encourages meaningful interactions between supervisor and supervisee because it allows for holistic supervision (Arge' Nathan & Mirviss, 1998) as it takes the body, the senses, and the unconscious into account (Malchiodi, 2003). This creative approach to supervision encourages perspective-taking via the external, tangible sandtray where supervisees' inner-most struggles can be thoroughly processed, both verbally and nonverbally (Chong, 2015). In this way, sandtray offers counselors-in-training a creative modality for gaining self-awareness while simultaneously learning a technique to incorporate with their own clients. This study explored the experience of students in a counseling program who completed sandtrays as a part of their master's-level supervision.

Purpose of study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experience of master's-level counseling interns who participated in sandtray sessions with doctoral-level counseling

supervisors who were trained to utilize sandtray in supervision through the lens of Gestalt theory. Supervision with master's-level counseling interns took place weekly as required by their program, and three sandtrays were completed over the course of a semester. Supervisees were asked to participate in sandtray supervision at the beginning of the semester as a way to gain comfort in the sand and also build a therapeutic working alliance with their supervisor. Supervisees were also asked to participate in sandtray supervision at mid-term and during the final week of the semester as a way to process their growth and enhance self-awareness. Supervisees completed a guided journal after each session in order for researchers to better understand participants' lived experiences of this type of supervision. Supervisors also kept case notes and photos from each session to help further detail supervisees' experiences. From this data, common themes were developed regarding the experiential process of sandtray supervision to inform counselor educators and counseling supervisors of the benefits of creative supervision.

Literature review

Supervision

New counselors often experience feelings of trepidation and a general need for structure and orientation (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Byrne & Sias, 2010), which is provided through supervision. Utilizing creative techniques such as sandtray can offer both structure and orientation as the supervisory working alliance is built. For example, the sandtray could be utilized as a way for the supervisee and supervisor to get to know one another better or offer a tangible way to discuss the goals of supervision. As delineated by the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, ACES Executive Council [ACES], 2011) and Tromski-Klingshirn and Davis (2007), clinical supervision involves collaborative and didactic exchanges between supervisor and supervisee with the intent to advance the therapeutic experience of clients. Effective counselor supervision is vital to the growth and development of ethical and competent counselors (Graham et al., 2014) and thus requires skilled and competent supervisors.

To effectively carry out the duties of supervision, ACES (2011) stipulates that supervisors are required to be formally trained in clinical supervision with education including "models of counselor development; formats of supervision; supervisory relationship dynamics; supervision methods and techniques; multicultural considerations; counselor assessment, feedback and evaluation; executive/administrative skills; ethical, legal, and professional regulatory issues; and research on these topics" (p. 16). Additionally, theoretical and conceptual knowledge should be focal points of supervision training, along with a robust professional identity and self-awareness (ACES, 2011). Therefore, the role of the supervisor must encompass many facets to ensure successful professional development for their supervisee.

Supervision must equip supervisees for dealing with challenging clinical situations and requires various roles from the supervisor, such as counselor, mentor, teacher, and consultant (Christian & Perryman, 2018). Bernard and Goodyear (2019) denoted that clinical supervision has common characteristics with counseling while also having distinct

qualities that require its own discrete techniques and theories. Due to this, the grasp of a supervision model is an essential guide in assisting supervisors with executing intentional work and distinguishing ways to create and maintain a constructive working alliance with supervisees (Christian & Perryman, 2018). There are numerous models that outline specific ways to approach and conceptualize the supervision process (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Ethical and effective supervisors must incorporate personal and professional development into their chosen model as a way to create a holistic paradigm for viewing and working with their supervisee.

Counselor development

Counselors in training experience metamorphosis as they go through the process of learning more about themselves and how they view the world (Furr & Carroll, 2003) and their development should thus be assessed on an ongoing basis, with supervision tailored accordingly. There are various models that may be utilized for the supervision process, which include various developmental theories for counselor development. The most commonly utilized developmental approach is the Integrated Developmental Model (IDM) developed by Stoltenberg, McNeil, and Delworth (1998). The model identifies three levels that counselors-in-training experience. Level 1 individuals are novice master's students who need more structure and are dependent upon the supervisor (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Level 2 students experience conflict as they struggle between being dependent and striving for autonomy. Level 3 students are those who are post-master's and are more grounded in their development as professionals (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). From the developmental perspective, each level requires distinct skills from supervisors in order nurture the growth of supervisees. No matter the chosen model of supervision, all supervisors consider the developmental level of their supervisees.

Creative arts and supervision

Previous studies on counselor supervision have rarely focused on creativity (Graham et al., 2014) despite the perceived awareness that the evolution of the profession calls for exploration of novel supervisory practices. Counselor educators and supervisors are tasked with the preparation of competent professionals who are able to effectively address a myriad of client backgrounds and issues (Neswald-McCalip et al., 2003), and creative or experiential techniques can be helpful as a tool to achieve this goal. Ronnestad and Skovholt (1993) posit that a professionally stagnated supervisor will potentially facilitate stagnant methods in the supervisee, highlighting the importance of learning creative techniques to utilize with one's chosen supervisory model. It is therefore important that supervisors seek creative ways to interact with and offer support to supervisees to ensure they are equipped to provide ethical and appropriate services to clients while also continuing their own growth and learning.

Furthermore, using creative approaches in counseling supervision is catalytic in inspiring counselors-in-training to also employ these methods in their work with clients (Graham et al., 2014). Not only do supervisees benefit from creative supervision as it offers them a safe space for processing and an opportunity to gain self-awareness, but it also models a technique for supervisees to add to their own repertoire. Expressive arts, appropriately utilized in counseling supervision, equip supervisees with a path to connect

in deeper ways, explore expressiveness and creativity, and advance counseling skills that will support clients (Graham et al., 2014).

Endeavoring to assimilate creativity into counseling supervision depends on two ranges of focused knowledge (Koltz, 2008). The first involves formal theories established through research, and the second is the advancement of counseling expertise accomplished via the supervisory relationship (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Koltz, 2008). Utilizing creative techniques in supervision can enhance the supervisee experience. During creative supervision, supervisors and supervisees encounter a myriad of additional experiences opportunities for growth that could benefit the supervisee by activating their awareness and imagination (Koltz, 2008). Furthermore, it has been well established that clients are responsive to diverse creative and expressive interventions, theories, and counseling techniques (Gladding, 2010; Graham et al., 2014). Similarly, Graham et al. (2014) and Neswald-McCalip et al. (2003) determined that counselors in training responded positively to a myriad of interventions, theories, and supervision techniques. Creative modalities utilizing drawing, clay, role playing, sandtray, and collage have all been utilized to enhance the supervision process and the working alliance (Degges-White & Davis, 2011). The current study focused specifically on the use of sandtray as a creative modality for enhancing the supervisory working alliance as a part of one's chosen supervisory model.

Sandtray supervision

Sandtray therapy was developed by Lowenfeld (1979) when she created the world technique, which consisted of placing miniatures in a sandtray for metaphoric purposes. Storlie et al. (2018) indicate that using metaphors is not only a cognitive process but also affective, as it impacts information processing and awareness and mirrors collective and cultural ways of understanding. The sandtray scenes created by clients are portrayals of feelings, issues, or events that are challenging to verbalize. This provides participants a chance to experience new perspectives and gain insight as they view and manipulate their worlds in the sand (Homeyer & Sweeney, 1998; Stark & Frels, 2014).

The use of sandtray within the framework of a supervision model, is utilized by the supervisee being asked by supervisor to construct a representation in the sand that characterizes a facet of their therapeutic work (Stark & Frels, 2014). The type of prompts used are dependent upon both the supervisor's theoretical perspective and model of supervision. Therefore, while some verbal communication occurs during the sandtray process, much of the technique is experiential. As a result, supervisee development experienced through sandtray therapy is disparate to talk therapy (Timm & Garza, 2017) in that it utilizes the creative right hemisphere of the brain, rather than the logical, verbal left hemisphere (Badenoch, 2018). This allows the supervisee to express their thoughts and feelings without necessarily requiring the use of words.

A model for incorporating sandtray for play therapy supervision was developed by Perryman et al. (2016). This model was applied specifically to the IDM and the Discrimination model, developed by Bernard (1979), illustrating the utility of sandtray to be incorporated into various supervision models and to various stages of development. Others have also highlighted the benefits of sandtray within these supervision models to meet developmental needs and as a creative intervention, addressing counter-transference, etc. (Anekstein et al., 2014; Hartwig & Bennett, 2017). This creative approach can offer all supervisors an opportunity to explore various aspects of supervision through a non-threatening and playful approach. Therefore,

Graham et al. (2014) specified that an essential part of sandtray supervision is the supervisor's responsibility to secure a protected space conducive to supporting the supervisee's experience. It is crucial that there is a strong supervisory alliance built on trust and respect to ensure that the supervisee feels safe to explore vulnerable areas. Within this safe environment, supervisees are able to externalize reactions to clients or client issues in the sand and are able to explore areas that may be inhibiting therapeutic progress (Graham et al., 2014). The tangible representation in the sand can offer a cathartic experience for the supervisee and provide needed perspective.

Gestalt sandtray

Eberts and Homeyer (2015) outline the sandtray process from the Gestalt perspective. While the client is building their sandtray, the counselor is observing the client's building process and attending to their affect, body language, and expression of emotion, as well as any conflicting thoughts and feelings exhibited. Once the sandtray is complete, the Gestalt facilitator assesses the complete scene and invites the client or supervisee to process it. In addition to the exploring the participant's thoughts, emotions, and bodily reactions, the Gestalt clinician also brings into their awareness any polarities, or opposing feelings and thoughts, the client may express in an effort to help the participant achieve a sense of balance and connect to their whole self (Eberts & Homeyer, 2015).

The benefits of sandtray work are as diverse as the theoretical frameworks that guide it (Timm & Garza, 2017). The sandtray supervision research for this article was conducted through a Gestalt lens. Timm and Garza (2017) concurred that Gestalt therapy serves the purpose of increasing clients' cognizance of themselves and milieu in the here-and-now through awareness of body language, words, and expressions. The Gestalt perspective, specifically in the context of sandtray, focuses on the participant's processing of their "world" and the immediate reactions elicited, which helps bring holistic awareness and understanding of their authentic self (Eberts & Homeyer, 2015; Timm & Garza, 2017). Gestalt theory also places emphasis on the client-counselor relationship, wherein the counselor is attuned to the client, identifying and facilitating exploration of the client's reactions to their sandtray, processing in the here-and-now, and integrating the counselor's own awareness of their shared relational experience by use of immediacy (Timm & Garza, 2017). The choice of sandtray miniatures and specifics of the story are less important; instead, the facilitator's focus should be on the client's phenomenological experience, including their moment-to-moment processing and reactions.

Another important aspect of the Gestalt approach to sandtray is the focus on the client or supervisee actually processing as though they are each item or miniature in the tray. Oaklander (1988), a Gestalt play therapist, described her approach to using sandtray as being very similar to the way she processes dreams or drawings. She asked clients to describe the scene and tell a story, which includes what is happening or is going to happen. She encouraged dialogs between objects placed in the sand to maintain the here and now. She may also made observations in the form of reflections to bring awareness back to the client's own situation. By doing this, she encouraged both left and right brain processing of the tray (Badenoch, 2018).

Methodology

Research questions and design

This study explored the lived experience of master's-level counseling interns who participated in three sandtray supervision sessions over the course of a semester. The research question for this study was: What is the lived experience of master's-level counseling interns who participate in three Gestalt sandtray sessions over the course of a semester? A phenomenological qualitative approach was utilized to convey the experiences of master's-level internship students participating in sandtray supervision sessions. The purpose of this type of research inquiry is to understand the meaning of participants' lived experiences specific to each individual's perception. Patton (2002) stated, "Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (p. 104). In this study, the phenomenon being studied is the use of sandtray in counseling supervision.

Participants and procedure

This study utilized purposeful sampling to choose supervisee participants from a public university in the southern region of the United States. (Patton, 2002). All supervisees were master's-level counseling students from a CACREP-accredited counseling program. Nine supervisees participated in Sandtray 1, seven in Sandtray 2, and four in Sandtray 3. All participants identified as Caucasian females. Doctoral-level counseling supervisors included two females and one male, all of which also identified as Caucasian and received supervision from the primary author throughout the duration of the study.

Master's-level counseling supervisees met for supervision with a doctoral-level counseling supervisor for one hour each week for supervision throughout the course of the semester. Each supervisor was trained by the primary author in sandtray supervision. Supervisors also received one hour of weekly supervision from the primary author. The procedure utilized for sandtray supervision combined Gestalt techniques and Person-Centered core conditions; this technique was developed by Perryman and Anderson (2011) and later adapted for use in supervision (Perryman et al., 2016). This supervision model takes the developmental readiness of the supervisee and the supervisory relationship into consideration and divides the supervision session into three distinct phases: 1) introductory, 2) working, and 3) culminating (Perryman et al., 2016). The authors suggest that this technique may be best utilized with either the Discrimination Model or the Integrated Developmental model of supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Additionally, they suggest beginning supervision with a mindfulness or breathing exercise in order to help focus and relax both supervisor and supervisee. This technique has been utilized for working with clients as well as supervisees, but no research has been previously conducted on it until now. Appendix A includes directions outlining the sandtray process.

Data sources

Master's-level counseling students were asked to journal about their individual experiences from three sandtray supervision sessions. The supervisee's completed a guided journal after each sandtray session (see Appendix B). Supervisors also completed a weekly sandtray case note (Perryman, 2015) to provide further detail of participants' experiences (see Appendix C). The doctoral-level supervisors received weekly supervision by the primary author who trained them in the use of sandtray for supervision. Each supervision session was also video recorded to provide feedback for the doctoral-level supervisor. In addition to the journals and case notes, photos were taken of the completed sandtrays and utilized as an additional form of data. The subjective nature of each supervisee's experience was considered valuable as the source of rich, qualitative information (Creswell, 2014). Sandtray journals, session case notes, sandtray photos, and video recordings were triangulated, ensuring trustworthiness of the data.

Establishing trustworthiness

Shenton (2004) noted trustworthiness as the framework for creating rigor in qualitative research. The trustworthiness of a study indicates thorough description of measures utilized to preserve the quality of a study and progression of data collection and analysis (Connelly, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) proposed four major criteria that denote trustworthiness, which include credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. These measures of trustworthiness were established through various means throughout the study.

Credibility takes into consideration the truth and value aspect of qualitative research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researchers established credibility through prolonged and persistent engagement with participants, meeting weekly for the duration of a 15-week semester, and triangulating data sources that included existing literature, member checks, supervisee journals, and supervisor weekly case notes (Connelly, 2016). Documentation of the data collection and analysis processes and researcher reflexivity about assumptions and biases helped ensure credibility (Kornbluh, 2015).

Dependability refers to the stability of findings over time and involves participants' assessment of the findings, clarification, and endorsements of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Dependability guarantees homogeneity between described events and emergent themes from recorded data (Patton, 2002). Dependability was achieved through in-depth dialogue among researchers regarding the data collection and analysis, an explicit coding framework, a vivacious description of triangulation, peer debriefing, and confirmation of precise conclusions through external auditing (Connelly, 2016; Patton, 2002).

Transferability, as denoted by Patton (2002) and Polit and Beck (2010), is the capability of replicating the study in other contexts, i.e. times, places, and participants. With transferability, Connelly (2016) clarified that the researcher's objective is to guarantee that individuals who utilize the study will be able to verify the pertinence of the findings to more personal settings. The researchers ensured transferability in this study through rich, thick descriptions, and quotes (Patton, 2002), which allowed for accurate interpretation and experience comparison.

Confirmability establishes the magnitude to which results of a study can be confirmed by other investigators (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Demonstrating that findings are evident derivatives from the data rather than illusions of the researcher's mind is crucial to confirmability (Tobin & Begley, 2004). The researchers of this study have demonstrated confirmability by participating in reflexive journaling, achieving triangulation, and utilizing of audit trials.

Researcher reflexivity and bracketing

When conducting qualitative research, it is crucial that researchers immerse themselves within the context of the research to further enhance trustworthiness and rigor (Patton, 2002). This immersion occurs by addressing one's life experiences and culture while also bracketing beliefs and values or information that may bias the findings (Etherington, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). The research team consists of four members. The primary researcher is a play therapist supervisor and counselor educator, whose research has focused on play therapy and use of expressive arts in supervision and who has practiced clinically using sandtray. Two researchers in this study are doctoral students who are trained in play therapy. One of them is trained in sandtray supervision, and both have experienced it as a part of their own supervision process. The remaining researcher is a master's students who was trained in play therapy and has also participated in her own sandtray supervision sessions.

All researchers must consider the inherent biases and assumptions that can be present with these backgrounds and experiences. Such biases have the potential to influence the research and, when left unchecked, can skew findings (Etherington, 2004). The goal of this research was to provide an accurate and detailed description of the lived experience of the participants rather than an interpretation heavy in the authors' personal opinions. The researchers exercised caution via methods of trustworthiness to bracket personal opinions and assumptions, reducing the risk of imposing their values and assumptions during data collection and analysis. Due to the experiences with sandtray of all the researchers, an external auditor who was a counselor educator was used to ensure accurate interpretation of the data. While they had received some training in the use of sandtray, they had never personally utilized it.

Data analysis

In order to achieve triangulation of the data, multiple forms of data were collected and analyzed, such as existing literature, participant journals, supervisor case notes, and photographed artifacts to ensure themes trustworthiness (Denzin, 1978). The journals, case notes, and photographs of the participants' sandtrays were used in the coding process. Open, axial, and selective codes were used to organize the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The research team coded the journals and case notes by sandtray supervision session via line-by-line analysis, using word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase microanalysis to create two sets of open codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These sets of codes were synthesized into axial codes and condensed into selective themes. Themes from the photographed sandtrays were used to confirm the selective themes created by the research team from the journals and case notes.

All researchers reviewed the emergent themes and engaged in a group dialogue around these thematic identifications to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the collected data. Several initial emergent themes were apparent in Sandtray 1 and included anxiety and stress, frustration, enlightenment, vulnerability, awareness, excitement for growth, and awkwardness regarding the sandtray process. Emergent themes for Sandtray 2 at mid-term included feeling conflicted, preoccupied by stress, new awareness, validated, grateful, catharsis, independence, discomfort as counselor, overwhelmed by responsibilities, and comfort and perspective gained from turning the tray. Emergent themes for Sandtray 3 at the end of the semester included feelings of accomplishment, wisdom gained, confidence, comfort with the sandtray experience, and an awareness of new kinds of anxiety (new job, etc.). Photographic artifacts of the sandtrays were viewed to clarify and support themes. As coding continued, the themes became prominent and were integrated to precisely reflect participants' described experiences.

Results

Themes were delineated by each sandtray session. Table 1 lists the distinct themes that emerged regarding the experience of participating in the sandtray supervision sessions. The table is organized by sandtray session. Participant and supervisor quotes from both participant journals and supervisor case notes are provided to demonstrate the themes. Participants were supposed to complete a total of three sandtrays; however, Sandtray 1 had nine participants, Sandtray 2 had seven out of the nine original participants, and four out of the nine participated in Sandtray 3.

Themes revolving around Sandtray 1 emphasized participant unease regarding the sandtray process due to lack of experience with creative supervisory techniques and the frustration and vulnerability that is an inherent part of supervision. For example, one supervisee stated, "It was intimidating at first because I wasn't sure what to expect … I was also anxious about feeling vulnerable." Sandtray 2 themes exposed participants as feeling conflicted about sandtray supervision; the catharsis and validation experienced was greatly appreciated while supervisees also struggled with the stresses and responsibilities of being a counseling intern. One supervisee journaled, "I (realized) how much I've been stressing myself out and how my mind is elsewhere … I have felt a lot of pressure to find a job and start finding a focus with my career … (but) the final sandtray scene which had me counseling at a school in the place I'll be moving, and I felt happy." Lastly, themes from Sandtray 3 involved confidence regarding both clinical skills and self-awareness, along with a newfound openness to the sandtray experience. The supervisor of the same student noted the lack of hesitancy to put her story in the sand and stated in their case note from Sandtray 3, "She also became aware that despite the challenges ahead, she feels like she will do just fine and everything will come together."

The themes suggest that supervisee participants experienced personal and professional growth over the course of the 15 sandtray supervision sessions. As participants became more familiar with the sandtray process, they felt safer to explore their clinical needs and the needs of their clients. This enabled supervisees increased autonomy, a sense of catharsis, and feelings of increased competence and abilities as future professional counselors.

Table 1. Sandtray session themes.

Sandtray	Theme	Example
1	1. Initially anxiety provoking, surprisingly insightful by the end.	(a) " … *She came to terms with being scared, and realized it was ok to feel this way.*" [supervisor] (b) "*I did end up giving in to the process after a while, and just let it happen.*" [supervisee]
	2. A cathartic opportunity to promote self-awareness and express feelings surrounding counselor identity development.	(a) "*It was a little awkward at times, but also surprising and enlightening, putting me in touch with thoughts and feelings I did not know I had.*" [supervisee] (b) "*I definitely felt her joy and was excited to see her school counselor identity.*" [supervisor] (c) "*She gained a new awareness about how she was feeling but has been avoiding.*" [supervisor]
	3. Offered space to freely process explore new perspectives, resulting in personal growth.	(a) "*I enjoyed being able to work in the sand today … it helped me gain a clearer picture of what was currently going on … Sand tray always help conceptualize things a little better.*" [supervisee]
2	1. Acceptance of struggle related to becoming a counselor.	(a) "*The anxiety I feel towards how uncomfortable I still feel in the counselor shoes, is ok … it will keep me from becoming complacent.*" [supervisee]
	2. Expression of hope and empowerment.	(a) "*She kept saying she knows the stress will pass …* " [supervisor]
	3. Initial discomfort with later relief resulting from sandtray creation process.	(a) "*She was resistant to the process, due to her stated lack of creativity … Despite her statements of difficulty doing sandtray, she appeared to gain some new insights and the activity seemed beneficial overall.*" [supervisor]
	4. Experience of clarity and relief in sandtray.	(a) "*I began to cry at the end (of the sand tray activity). That's when I knew how much stress I have been putting myself under … I felt relieved looking at the final scene after I made changes.*" [supervisee]
3	1. Decreased inhibition related to creative process and sandtray experience.	(a) "*The final sandtray was a great experience. My experience was overall wonderful and found myself wanting to keep talking about what I placed in the sand once time was up.*" [supervisee] (b) "*She smiled when looking at this sandtray … compared to her previous trays, this one brought her happiness …* " [supervisor]
	2. Feel enthusiasm, gratitude; sandtray is positive, enlightening, confidence building.	(a) "*The most meaningful part was when I was provided this new awareness and was able to reframe my thinking from negative to positive … I left feeling grateful!*" [supervisee]
	3. Increased sense of peace concerning phases of counselor development	(a) "*She knows it will be challenging … She also became aware that despite challenges ahead, she feels like she will do just fine, and everything will come together.*" [supervisor]

Discussion

The current qualitative study explored the lived experience of master's-level counseling interns who participated in three sandtray sessions over the course of a semester with their doctoral-level supervisors. The data from Sandtray 1 illustrated evidence of supervisees' initial anxiety followed by increased insight and self-awareness. These themes are consistent with the literature on counselor development as a Level 1 beginning master's counselor as described by the IDM model of supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). In Level 1, the supervisee needs more structure from the supervisor to help deal with their anxiety and feelings of insecurity.

Stoltenberg and Delworth (1987) along with Loganbill et al. (1982) suggest three stages of counselor development: the first stage is one of reliance, the second stage is one of trial and error, and the third stage is one of maturity. Sandtray 2 data suggested that supervisees experienced struggles as described by Stoltenberg and Delworth (1987) and Loganbill et al. (1982) as trial and error. Data also revealed that by mid-term, they began accepting these struggles as inherent in counselor development and gained better understanding of the sandtray process, expressing feelings of empowerment and hope for their futures as successful counselors.

Lastly, themes from Sandtray 3 data described supervisees' increased feelings of freedom and self-confidence within the supervisory process as well as an acknowledgment of their evolving identities as professional counselors. These findings depict the maturity described by Stoltenberg and Delworth (1987) and Loganbill et al. (1982) and indicates a Level 2 counselor according to IDM (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). These themes suggest that the sandtray supervision increased participants' self-efficacy, allowed external processing of internal struggles, and supported the development of self-awareness.

The findings of this study reinforce existing counseling literature that describes creative approaches as both effective and appropriate within counselor education and supervision (Degges-White & Davis, 2011). Storlie et al. (2018) stated that counselors' self-awareness advanced even further through pedagogical practices that underscore creativity, strengthening the argument for creative supervision. Garrett (2017) further noted that sandtray can provide an expressive, tactile experience for supervisees, expanding their ability to reflect, advance awareness and perception, and assist with the conceptualization of client experiences. Researchers concur that the use of the sandtray in counselor supervision sessions helps provide an improved comprehension of client processes and assists with the development of supervisee competence (Anekstein et al., 2014). Additionally, Homeyer and Sweeney (2011) described sandtray work as being therapeutically advantageous in instances where clients are at an impasse. Implementing a creative supervisory tool, such as sandtray, affords safety and flexibility in the supervisory process so students are further encouraged to explore new perspectives, gain insight of self and others, and continue to grow as counselors.

The aim of this phenomenological research was to gain an understanding of the core essence of the lived experience of master's-level counseling interns who participated in three Gestalt sandtray sessions over the course of a 15-week semester. The essence of the lived experience of supervisee's was the development self-awareness regarding their counselor identity, exploration of new perspectives, and facilitation of acceptance of their struggles combined with feelings of empowerment. They also gained comfort with the sandtray process through the course of the semester and gained specific knowledge related to the sandtray process, such as seeing a different perspective when the tray was

turned. Students also described the process over-time in a manner that highlighted their moving from feelings of distress and uncertainty in their role to comfort and relief as they gained insight into their growth, which is correlated with developmental models of counseling supervision. Thus, the sandtray experience was congruent with counselor developmental stages and enabled catharsis and self-reflection.

Limitations

While this research derived important data and themes for counseling supervisors to consider, there also existed limitations to the study. First, the study lacked cultural diversity, as all participants involved were Caucasians. Sandtray work has been utilized across cultures since its development (Ramsey, 2014). In some cultures, it is used as a non-verbal technique to avoid or sometimes supplement verbal approaches (Ramsey, 2014). Mitchell and Friedman (2002) denoted that the lack of reliance on language use or skills for therapeutic results makes the technique distinctly suited for use with multi-cultural populations. Completing this study with a more diverse pool of participants might yield different findings. A more diverse sample could not only influence the way supervisees participate in the sandtray experience but also the way diverse supervisors might facilitate the sandtray supervision process.

Secondly, there were a small number of participants, making the results difficult to generalize to a larger population. The study's utilization of a phenomenological approach also impacted generalization as the subjective nature of qualitative research does not primarily seek to generalize. Polit and Beck (2010) support this notion through claiming, "The goal of most qualitative studies is not to generalize but rather to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of some aspect of human experience through the intensive study of particular cases" (p. 1452).

Another limitation was attrition (Gustavson et al., 2012). The study relied heavily on data collected from supervisors' case notes and supervisees' journals. However, as the study progressed, the consistency of the submitted supervisee journals dwindled. For the final sandtray session, there were only three journals submitted. Even though attrition is expected in research studies, it nevertheless impacted the findings of this study. In this instance it seemed to be attributed to the stress associated with completing assignments and finals and graduation and searching for jobs at the end of the semester.

Implications and recommendations for future research

A growing body of researchers continue to highlight the efficacy of sandtray supervision and the positive changes it promotes (Anekstein et al., 2014; Carlson & Lambie, 2012). The creative arts technique of sandtray therapy has provided a necessary addition to traditional talk therapy (Carlson & Lambie, 2012; Garrett, 2017). Sandtray supervision assists supervisees with empathic skills, case conceptualizations, self-reflection, and general therapeutic adroitness (Anekstein et al., 2014). Research indicates that sandtray encourages students' increased awareness and insight (Paone et al., 2015; Swank & Jahn, 2018). Moreover, Gordon (2015) found that counseling students indicated increased emotional security about their professional identity and in reference to their relationship with clients.

Furthermore, sandtray supervision plays an important role in promoting multicultural competence in supervisors as they can utilize this tool to learn more about their supervisees in both verbal and non-verbal ways. Sandtray has been evidenced in aiding supervisees in

increasing their personal racial identities and multicultural competence (Paone et al., 2015). After all, multicultural competence in supervision is an unremitting pursuit that demands tenacious effort and continuous attention (Tohidian & Quek, 2017). Chief of the many supervisor roles is assisting supervisees with providing the best therapeutic outcomes for their clients (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Koltz, 2008). The diverse application and facilitation of sandtray supervision assists greatly in this endeavor. Therefore, it is imperative for counselor supervisors to augment their skill set with creative ways of executing supervision duties and, in turn, set the precedence for supervisees to creatively meet the needs of their diverse clients.

Recommendations for future studies include a more diverse sample, both of supervisors and supervisees. This would allow for a broader and more inclusive understanding of the perspectives of counseling interns and supervisors. This would also increase the generalizability of the findings. Further, it would be beneficial to collect qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with supervisors and supervisees, as this could allow for a greater understanding of the lived experiences of participants. Lastly, there is a need for quantitative analysis of the sandtray process to better understand the impact on the supervisory process. Studies evaluating the application of specific models of supervision would also be helpful. Utilizing a single case design would offer deeper quantitative insight into this technique in supervision.

Conclusion

Utilizing sandtray in the supervision process benefits both the supervisees and the supervisory relationship, allowing for increased personal growth as well as growth in their counseling skills (Stark & Frels, 2014; Timm & Garza, 2017). Sandtray can be effective in that it allows for the processing of the supervisee's unconscious experience, thoughts, and feelings, and facilitates a safe and creative work environment between supervisor and supervisee (Timm & Garza, 2017). This study indicates sandtray was helpful in increasing supervisee's self-awareness regarding their counselor identity, exploration of new perspectives, and facilitation of acceptance of their struggles and feelings of empowerment. Students also described the process over-time in a manner that highlighted their moving from feelings of distress and uncertainty in their role, to comfort and relief as they gained insight into their growth. These findings are powerful because they mirror the counseling process as a whole and elucidate how sandtray can help supervisees gain the interpersonal and intrapersonal awareness necessary for effective counseling.

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Appendix A.

Guidelines for Conducting Sandtray Supervision (Perryman & Anderson, 2011)

The supervisee is invited to choose figures and place them in the sand to represent a situation with a client that they may be struggling with. The steps for facilitating and processing the supervisee's sandtray are as follows:

(1) The supervisor remains quiet but attentive and present as items are placed in the sand.
(2) Processing begins once the supervisee creates the tray, leading to the working phase.
(3) The supervisor asks the supervisee to describe the tray by actually becoming each item in it. The supervisee is asked, which figure needs to speak first.
(4) The supervisor reflects what the supervisee says about each figure, as well as what is observed non-verbally. They resist the urge to ask any questions, maintaining the safe space. They may point out incongruences and themes as they emerge through the process.
(5) Once each item has been described or processed, the supervisor asks how the supervisee feels when they look at the tray, keeping them in the here-and-now.
(6) The supervisor requests to slowly turn the tray and asks the supervisee to let them know if they want it stopped at any point, watching carefully for body language or changes in the energy The supervisor should stop the tray on their own if they note any changes and process by reflecting words and body language. This technique is typically a very powerful point in the process and requires presence and reflection to maintain the safety of the space.
(7) The culminating phase begins once the tray has been completely turned and processed. The supervisee is prompted to make any desired changes to the tray (with existing figures or any others they may want instead) in order to rewrite the story.
(8) Once changes have been made, the process of turning the tray is repeated.
(9) The supervisor asks again how they feel when they look at the tray. The supervisee may use this opportunity to take a photo of the tray to continue processing post-session via journaling.
(10) The supervisor dismantles the tray only after the supervisee has left the space.

Appendix B.

Supervisee Guided Journal
　　1) How would you describe your experience of working in the sand today?
　　2) What new awareness did you leave the session with?
　　3) What part of the process was most meaningful and why?

Appendix C.

Sandtray Case Note (Perryman, 2015), p. 1) Length of time to complete tray:
　　2) Type and order of miniatures used by participant:3) Location of miniatures used in tray (written or drawn):
　　4) Major themes:
　　5) Areas of new awareness for participant:
　　6) Behavioral/emotional observations during session:
　　7) Significant participant comments while completing tray:
　　8) How supervisee approached sandtray exercise and the selection of items: