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Group Supervision Using Sandtray: A Protocol for Facilitation with Counselors-in-Training

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The use of sandtray in group supervision is a novel approach to supporting counseling supervisees' professional growth and development. We piloted a ten-week supervision group protocol utilizing sandtray for graduate-level counselors-in-training during their fieldwork experience in an in/outpatient behavioral health hospital. This article provides a brief overview of the use of sandtray in supervision, a detailed description of the ten-week protocol, and unique student perspectives by including excerpts from weekly journal reflections. Additionally, we offer implications for protocol implementation, considerations for clinical supervisors, and suggestions for future research.


Keywords: group supervision, sandtray therapy, counselor development

Sandtray therapy is most recognized as a creative therapeutic intervention used with a broad range of clients and presenting concerns (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2023). There is growing interest in the use of sandtray therapy as a supervision modality to increase supervisees' self-awareness (Lev-Wiesel, 2004), reduce burnout (Butler et al., 2017), and facilitate multicultural development (Paone et al., 2015). In this article, we describe the use of sandtray in supervision, outline a ten-week supervision group protocol utilizing sandtray and integrate student experiences and perspectives. Additionally, we discuss the implications and considerations for supervision. Throughout the article, we use the terms counselors-in-training and supervisees interchangeably; however, all participants in the supervision groups were masters counseling students enrolled in their clinical fieldwork experiences (Practicum or Internship).

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Supervision and Counselors-in-Training

Clinical supervision is foundational in the training and preparation of mental health professionals in the field of counseling. Supervision has two main purposes: to foster a supervisee's professional development and to ensure client welfare (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Borders & Brown, 2005). Specifically, supervision incorporates a range of foci, including but not limited to counselor identity, professional behaviors, counseling skills, theoretical grounding, case conceptualization, self-awareness, gatekeeping, understanding power dynamics, and cultural identity (ACA, 2014; ACES, 2011; Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Borders & Brown, 2005). Bernard and Goodyear (2019) highlighted that there are some common developmental needs that counselors-in-training experience.

When students begin their programs in the mental health field, they are often working to make sense of the new information, demonstrating mastery and competence of specific counseling skills, experiencing the emotional reactions from seeing their first client, and narrowing down their guiding counseling theory (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013). During this phase of counselor development, the influence of supervision is paramount (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Specifically, students are experiencing a dependence on supervision while also striving to become autonomous with clients. Many counselors-in-training in this stage start to see their professional role as more complex and move from general knowledge to working to see their clients within specific contexts and focusing on individual differences (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

A supervisor's role is layered and multi-faceted to ensure best practices within the foci of supervision while giving supervisees the support they need to confront clinical challenges (Perryman et al., 2021). Supervision models provide supervisors with a theoretical framework to meet the goals of supervising a new counselor. For the purposes of this pilot protocol, the sandtray group supervision facilitator practiced the Discrimination Model (DM; Bernard, 1979). The Discrimination Model is one of the most researched models of supervision that allows both flexibility and creativity when working with supervisees (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Luke et al., 2011). The DM was intentionally created to be pantheoretical due to Bernard's belief that supervisors cannot separate themselves from the influence of their theoretical orientation (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Thus, the facilitator used the DM through a humanistic lens.

Regardless of the supervision model, counselors-in-training are expected to effectively address a myriad of client issues and backgrounds (Neswald-McCalip et al., 2003), and supervisors can utilize creative or experiential techniques to support students in reaching this goal. The use of creativity in supervision has become more common, especially in considering the developmental needs of counselors-in-training (Bellinger & Capone, 2021). For example, creativity in supervision facilitates the development of insight and increases capacity for accurate client conceptualization (Wood & Pignatelli, 2019). Further, Casado-Kehoe and Ybañez-Llorente



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(2018) emphasized that utilizing expressive arts in clinical supervision could promote the supervisee's exploration of self, facilitate communication, and guide the development of therapeutic competence.

Moreover, supervisors have reported that using creative techniques in supervision has enabled the most salient supervision issues to emerge with increased clarity, even when supervisees consciously or unconsciously conceal them (Harris et al., 2023). While there are numerous approaches to incorporating creativity into the supervisory process, using sandtray in supervision has emerged as a developmentally-aligned way to promote personal and professional growth for counselors-in-training (Perryman et al., 2021). The following sections provide an overview of sandtray therapy as an expressive modality for counseling, counselor education, and counselor supervision.

Sandtray Therapy

Sandtray therapy was first developed by Margaret Lowenfeld (1979) when she began using sand and miniatures as a therapeutic intervention to work with children. Since then, clinicians and supervisors in the counseling field have used sandtray therapy as a cross-theoretical and creative intervention that allows individuals to process their experiences through the use of miniature figures in the sand (Homeyer & Sweeny, 2023; Perryman et al., 2021). Since sandtray therapy requires great clinical competence, researchers have developed the *Sand Therapy Competencies* that provide best practices and centralize the importance of knowledge, skill, attitudes, and professional engagement (Hartwig et al., 2023). Homeyer and Sweeney (2023) define sandtray therapy as:

An expressive and projective mode of psychotherapy involving the unfolding and processing of intra- and inter-personal issues through the use of specific sandtray materials as a nonverbal medium of communication, led by the client or therapist and facilitated by a trained therapist (p. 6).

Using sandtray therapy, individuals can process their experiences by allowing the necessary therapeutic distance for emotional safety (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2023; McCormick et al., 2021). Homeyer and Sweeney (2023) outline the materials needed for sandtray therapy, including specific categories of miniatures (e.g., people, animals, fantasy, natural items) to represent words, symbols, and metaphors that a client may use to communicate their experience. In addition to a variety of miniatures, sand is used as the medium for the treatment modality (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2023). Counselors provide clients with a nondirective (e.g., "Build your world in the sand") or directive prompt (e.g., "Make a scene that expresses how you feel in your family") that relates to the therapeutic issue of the client. Clients are asked to choose



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miniature figures to place in the sand to create a metaphor to represent their inner world (McCormick et al., 2021). These metaphors can help clients understand their environment, feelings, conflicts, and barriers that may be difficult to express in words (Perryman et al., 2021).

Homeyer and Sweeney's (2023) sandtray protocol noted that sandtray therapy can be used with various theoretical orientations and client demographics, such as groups, couples and families, children, adolescents, within school settings, and clients who experienced trauma. Sandtray therapy is also facilitated with clients across the lifespan, populations, and mental health concerns (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2023; McCormick et al., 2021; Popejoy, et al., 2021). Within supervision, supervisees could gain awareness or insight as they create, process, and/or change their scenes in the sand (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2023; Perryman et al., 2020).

Sandtray Within Supervision

When sandtray is used in supervision, supervisees can experience catharsis and validation (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2023; Perryman et al., 2021), increased self-awareness and insight (Lev-Wiesel, 2004), and reflect on their internal struggles through verbal and nonverbal means (Chong, 2015). Stark et al. (2015) examined the experiences of counseling practicum students after completing a solution-focused, brief sandtray supervision experience. After participating in three sandtray experiences during their supervised clinical work, participants reported themes of group cohesiveness and emotionality, where the participants processed their emotions regarding stressful events. Additionally, sandtray therapy has been utilized to facilitate students' multicultural development (Paone et al., 2015) through online supervision to foster connection and enhance therapist competence (Villarreal-Davis et al., 2021) and is suggested as an effective way to facilitate therapist self-awareness within play therapy supervision (Bratton et al., 2008; Hartwig & Bennett, 2017).

Anekstein et al. (2014) outlined a seven-step implementation of sandtray supervision within Bernard's (1979) DM for counselors-in-training. One student participant reported feeling empowered and more confident in conceptualizing his clients after the sandtray experience (Anekstein et al., 2014). However, the article only provided one student anecdote for a singular sandtray experience. The authors encouraged future literature to incorporate more diverse experiences with sandtray supervision over a longer period of time to document the effectiveness of sandtray within supervision.

Research and application of sandtray within supervision for in/outpatient settings is scarce (Bryne & Sias, 2010). Counselors-in-training are exposed to traumatic experiences during their work in an in/outpatient setting through hearing traumatic narratives from their clients, to possibly witnessing intense emotions and behaviors expressed by clients. Given the intensity of emotional reactions from in/outpatient clients, sandtray supervision can allow supervisees a safe way to explore these traumatic experiences (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2023), which could help



supervisees avoid burnout, secondary traumatic stress and vicarious victimization (Butler et al., 2017). The following section includes a group sandtray protocol facilitated by master student counselors-in-training at an inpatient facility. Along with the detailed protocol, we include student journal reflections to provide an understanding of their experience.

Sandtray Supervision Protocol

Discrimination Model Integration

The DM centers on three separate supervisory roles with three different supervision foci, creating nine approaches that a supervisor must navigate at any moment during supervision (Bernard, 1979; Carnes-Holt et al., 2014). Within the DM (Bernard, 1979), supervisors attend to three separate foci related to supervisees' skills: intervention, conceptualization, and personalization. Based on the foci the supervisor is attending to, they will choose between the three roles of counselor, teacher, and consultant to accomplish the supervision goals (Bernard, 1979; Luke & Bernard, 2006).

During the supervision sessions, the facilitator attuned to what each supervisee in the group needed and adjusted her role accordingly. For example, the facilitator chose to engage in the teacher role when supervisees needed more instruction or direction. In the counselor role, the facilitator discussed the supervisees' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that facilitated insight or awareness of the supervisee and their work with clients. For instance, while processing one of the sandtrays, the facilitator noticed one supervisee becoming tearful when talking about her client's current situation and focused on helping the supervisee to process her emotions and reactions. Finally, in the consultant role, the facilitator shared the decision-making process between herself and the supervisee to help develop the supervisees' critical thinking. The consultant role was utilized to encourage supervisees to work together to make decisions while creating group trays.

To integrate the discrimination model into the sandtray protocol, the weekly prompts reflected the foci of supervision. For example, the prompts "Think of a particular client that you are struggling with or need to process and choose figures that represent all aspects of client's situation" and "How are you and your clients' intersecting identities impacting the therapeutic relationship?" during weeks 3 and 4 reflected the foci on conceptualization skills. Similarly, the prompts "Build a tray that represents your counseling identity - who are you as a counselor? What does it mean to be a counselor", "Create a tray that represents how you are integrating self-care," and "Build a strengths tray" during sessions 5, 7 and 9 integrated personalization skills. Additionally, for week 8, the prompt "Build a scene of your client's systemic barriers and obstacles" helped students begin implementing intervention skills when considering advocacy and ways to support their clients.



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Sandtray Groups

The facilitator of the sandtray supervision groups identifies as a White cisgender, non-disabled female and holds supervising credentials as a licensed professional counselor board-approved supervisor. She is a certified sandtray therapist. The facilitator has seven years of experience supervising and using sandtray as an intervention with clients and counselors-in-training at the specific site.

The facilitator led two groups of five members in each. The groups met weekly for 10 weeks over the course of a school semester, and all students were completing fieldwork experience at the same intensive in/outpatient facility. The students were masters-level students, and all students identified as female. Additionally, two students identified as White, five as Hispanic/Latino, two as Asian or Asian American, and one identified as Black or African American. The ages of the students ranged from 24 years to 54 years of age. Two students were practicum level, three were in their first semester of internship, and five were in their last semester of internship. All supervisees reported limited exposure to sandtray therapy, with some reporting that they had never heard about sandtray therapy before the groups, and some reported having done sandtray once before in their graduate programs. None of the supervisees reported receiving training or coursework in sandtray therapy.

Orientation Session

Before the start of the groups, the group facilitator led an orientation session with each student to review an introduction to sandtray, aspects of the intervention, and a detailed informed consent process. We are aware that a single sandtray room would not be able to represent every culture or tradition. Therefore, the facilitator encouraged students to bring in miniatures that could represent their individual identities or experiences if desired. We also recommend purchasing any suggested cultural figures that students suggest to relieve a financial or social burden from students.

Cultural Context

Supervisors must practice from a culturally humble stance to facilitate effective clinical supervision and develop a working alliance with supervisees (Jones & Branco, 2020). Within the cultural humility framework, discussions regarding race, power, discrimination, and the socio-political context are crucial for self-awareness and are considered broaching dialogues (Jones & Branco, 2020). Broaching dialogues within multicultural supervision facilitates open communication, intercultural understanding, and cultural respect (Jones et al., 2019). Supervisors must broach cultural topics when facilitating a supervision group where the



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supervisor has no previous experience with the members and especially if the group is culturally diverse since supervisees of color are less likely to bring up topics of race with their supervisor (White-Davis et al., 2016).

A supervisor can support supervisees' professional development by broaching culture within the sandtray experience. These conversations can also reveal the need to include additional cultural figures and miniatures. The supervisor added a tray prompt on cultural identities in this supervision group. Supervisees had space to explore how their social location, identities, and cultural expression created unique experiences that impacted their professional role. For example, one student stated, "I made sure to include a flag that represented my Hispanic heritage, and I placed it right next to me. This represents my closeness to my culture and the benefit I have in this site and future career being fluent in Spanish, as well."

Materials

Students were asked to complete individual or group trays. The facilitator included sand in different colors and textures for students to choose when creating their trays. Miniature categories followed Homeyer and Sweeney's (2023) recommendations. They included people, animals, vegetation, buildings, vehicles, fences and signs, natural items (including rocks, shells, and crystals), fantasy, spiritual, and household miniatures. In addition to these miniatures, the facilitator included miniatures that represented the specific site and student experience, including wheelchairs, first-aid kits, a hospital, and figures in graduation regalia. Because the site was located in a predominately Latine community, the facilitator included miniatures to represent cultural identities (with consideration of the particular Latine identities in the group) and invited students to bring in their own miniatures to represent their cultural experiences.

Sandtray Process

The sandtray process was modified by both Anekstien et al. (2014) and Homeyer and Sweeney (2023). In the orientation session, supervisees were introduced to the room, the trays, miniatures, and sand. The facilitator would lead the supervisees through a mindfulness exercise at the start of every supervision session. As part of the supervision group structure, the group facilitator would ask supervisees to reflect on a specific prompt and build a tray in the sand based on the prompt. Each prompt supported the supervisees' conceptualization, intervention, or personalization skills.

The facilitator would attune to supervisees and observe the creation of their individual or group trays. The facilitator asked the supervisees to name their trays. Students would then process their trays with the group. The facilitator would reflect using the three roles of the DM as a guide. Toward the end of the session, the facilitator would ask the supervisees if they



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would like to change anything in their trays or rename their tray. Students were also invited to take photographs of their tray to reflect on during the week. Each week after the sandtray supervision groups, students were asked to reflect on their group experience through journal exercises. These journal reflections and student anecdotes are incorporated in the following protocol outline to highlight the students' experiences.

Session 1

During the first session, the facilitator provided the prompt: "Build your world in the sand and include how you're feeling about starting your experience here at this site." One student reflected on the change process with herself and others, "These ripples represented the reverberating effects of our personal experiences and the potential impact it can have on others. Our lives can be the potential catalyst for change within ourselves and others." Another student spoke about the difference between entering this new semester and their previous fieldwork experience: "I built a tray... representing my new stability when compared to last semester. I added sinkholes representing my anxiety and fear of the unknown while I practice my counseling skills and taking risks." Whether the students were starting the first semester of their fieldwork experience or continuing at the site, each group member reflected on their upcoming work with clients.

Some students commented on the process of building their trays and feeling a sense of relaxation or release: "It was a relaxing experience. I was rushing all day today, and building the tray was a chance to slow down and unwind. I valued the experience and felt very mindful and in the present moment." Another student echoed this perception: "This was very fun and exciting. I also noticed a lot of things/meanings of things I never thought of. This was liberating." The students shared positive reactions to the first sandtray supervision group and expressed excitement at continuing through the semester.

Session 2

The second week's prompt was: "What are you needing from this experience - what are you hoping to get from it?". One student reflected, "It was very calming building this tray, and I made some realizations within myself and how sometimes life will push me in different directions on the wheelbarrow, but I can always push the wheelbarrow in the direction that I chose." When reflecting on the specific figures she chose for this tray, another student said, "I added a fireman because as an inpatient intern we metaphorically fight fires, have no idea what we're walking into, and sometimes even save lives." Several of the students connected the use of miniatures to their needs and hopes for the group.

As the students began to be introduced to the sandtray process, they observed their



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peers. One student shared, "I noticed that although the builds were different related to placements and figurines, we all seemed to have the same hopes and needs, such as support, knowledge, growth, and comfort." Relatedly, another student noticed the "similarities of trying to find balance and awareness of the growth we are all facing in the counseling program" within her supervision group. The students acknowledged their shared themes of growth, moving into something unknown, and finding their identity throughout each tray.

Session 3

The sandtray prompt for the third week: "Think of a particular client that you are struggling with or need to process and choose figures that represent all aspects of client's situation," was from Perryman et al. (2016). In their journal reflections, all the students commented on how this tray was emotional and meaningful for them. One student stated:

When processing the tray, I was overcome with emotion. I began to cry because I felt a strong sense of empathy for the client. In that moment, I realized that his trauma is real; it's not numbers on a paper - it's a reality for him and his family, and it made me feel very sad for him.

Another student echoed the emotionality of the session, saying, "I noticed a lot of tension and nerves in my body because my client is going through so much that I wish there was more I could do. Just knowing how much adversity she is facing makes me anxious." In contrast, one student shared that this prompt helped her to feel a sense of release: "I felt relieved. It was as though I transferred my feelings and thoughts towards my experience to the sand."

In processing her tray, one student reflected, "I noticed that a piece of us as people and counselors were left in everybody's tray. It was a reminder of how we have to be very aware of what we give to our clients." This student continued, "Without even realizing it, we have a lot of parallels with our clients that often go unnoticed without processing it." One insight shared by a student was, "My top takeaway from this week's process is to always remember that my presence is enough." Through this week's sandtray prompt, the students could process their connection with their clients.

Session 4

The fourth session started with the prompt: "How are you and your client's intersecting identities impacting the therapeutic relationship?" One student commented on how this prompt allowed her to build awareness of her identity: "This one was very powerful because there were some things that I had not noticed or did not think of. I have had a hard time



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separating my personal identity with my professional identity." Another student reflected that building the tray helped her recognize how different identities were easier to process in counseling: "I noticed that I put two items in front of my figurines, and it made the realization that I'm more open to hearing about getting married, education, and success as opposed to religion and an authoritarian mother." Another student reflected on how shared identities impacted her countertransference in counseling with a specific client. She noted:

The tray that I built this week depicted transference/countertransference that could occur with a client I currently have. We both have very similar backgrounds growing up. It is sometimes difficult having these sessions with her because it brings up memories from my childhood. The tray shows how I am trying to be cautious and careful with how our sessions go.

Some students' identities were seen as ever present in the counseling space: "No matter what we take into a counseling session, we take a part of us as well. That part of us could be implicit, subtle, or a huge impact on the session." Another student recognized that clients were present in the different trays: "I noticed we all had differences within our trays representing our different clients. However, we were all able to add some of our own values, personalities, and identities within our tray." During this week's sandtray, the students were able to build awareness of their own and the client's identities and begin processing how this was present through the counseling relationship.

Session 5

The prompt for session five was: "Build a tray that represents your counseling identity - who are you as a counselor? What does it mean to be a counselor?". This week, the students were asked to create a group tray and work together to add miniatures to one sandtray to represent the prompt. One student shared, "We named the tray 'Growth, Guidance and Goals' due to our centerpiece. The area we are always working towards." Another student reflected, "I think the strong message was that we are all still growing as counselors-in-training and that we strive to provide a sense of hope to your clients in the community."

With this being the first group collective tray, several students commented on the different reactions to building a group tray, with some students feeling more comfortable having their own area of the tray to place miniatures. "There was discussion, and originally people expressed the idea of having different corners. I had mentioned to the person I wanted to build close to theirs, and she said that was fine but was shocked I built so close." Another student reflected on the boundaries of creating a group tray with peers:



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I realized that boundaries were coming into play and my lack of boundaries. I said at the end that I was uncomfortable because I wouldn't want to step on anyone's toes or their own ideas but I didn't mind my peers building on my sand tray. This stimulated the question of boundaries and how I may be more willing to be flexible even when maybe I don't want to. This gave me something to think about for the week.

Through building this tray as a group, the students had to communicate and work together to represent the prompt.

Session 6

Students were again asked to complete a group tray following the prompt: "As a group, build a scene of your experience as a counselor at this site." Several students commented on the group tray format and how it was more comfortable or uncomfortable than the previous week. One student reflected:

Group trays feel like such a mixed bag. It's had me try to be more aware of what others are placing and also awareness of the space I take. I don't like to take up a lot of space, so after the first tray, I feel like I made myself smaller.

Another student had a different experience: "This tray felt much more balanced than all of the trays we've built so far. I love how everyone placed their figures throughout. I also appreciate the messages displayed through some of my peers' figures." A third student reported feeling regret at not opening up during the group tray, saying: "I wish I said more about my spirituality and how it has helped me through some difficult times at [the hospital]." The group tray allowed the students to be able to reflect on the 'here and now.' Students could process, whether internally (journals) or externally (tray), their discomfort or ease of building the tray. Additionally, students could reflect on how interpersonal dynamics and personal identities impacted their experience.

Session 7

For week seven, the sandtray prompt was: "Create a tray that represents how you are integrating self-care," and students were asked to work together to create a group tray. One student commented on the importance of self-care as a means to better serve her clients, "I pride myself in my self-care routine. Self-care is an active way to provide for myself and allow myself to serve my therapeutic community better." Another student noticed how the process of finding miniatures for this tray inspired her. She stated:



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Coming into this supervision, I was feeling a little overwhelmed thinking about everything coming up (Internship 2, COMPS exam, NCE, etc.). As I was flipping through the affirmation cards for the tray, the first card I landed on was 'don't worry about how, trust'. I was instantly inspired.

Other students highlighted that this tray brought awareness of the need for additional self-care. For example, one student mentioned, "Building this tray made me realize that I need to do more self-care, especially when I have had a rough day at work or school, including at home." Each student mentioned how self-care or the lack of self-care can influence their attunement or connection with others.

Session 8

For session eight, the students were asked to build an individual tray following the prompt: "Build a scene of your client's systemic barriers and obstacles." After building an individual tray, students were asked to build a group tray and "add how you as a counselor can help your clients/what action and advocacy steps can you take." One student mentioned:

Building this tray was thought-provoking because I had to really think about what obstacles and barriers do clients bring into their session and how can I help them with those barriers. I noticed I was able to name several barriers based on the population I work with. I noticed all the barriers I put down I could not personally relate to.

A third student continued, saying, "I felt for the client when I was building this tray. I empathized with his grief and his pain." During this tray process, students were able to identify areas of privilege and oppression both within themselves and the clients that they serve. Additionally, some students stated that this tray helped them recognize their own empathy for the layered challenges of their client's experience.

Session 9

In session nine, the students were asked to "Build a strengths tray." Several students commented on the ease of choosing figures, with a student saying, "The tray I built this week represented my strengths. My strengths included self-care, humor, positivity, communication, and public speaking." Another student echoed this perception and stated:

As I was doing this tray, I realized that it was easy to create. I was able to go straight to



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the figures that I needed to build the tray. There was no hesitation as to what I wanted to express as my strengths, which are my family, the communication between us, the love that we have, and the care that I have in doing what I like doing.

Other students used this tray to work through upcoming challenges at school. For example, one student stated, "This tray was a much-needed tray as I'm preparing for my oral defense for my masters this week. The tray represented my strengths in intelligence, spiritually, my knowledge on my case study, and the people who strengthen me." During this tray process, students spoke about how they used this tray to process their own strengths or how their strengths helped them through challenges at school.

Session 10

For the final week of the sandtray group supervision, the prompt was: "Create a scene that represents your journey this semester." Students were then asked to take the individual trays they created and build a group tray with the prompt: "What parts of your tray would you like to add to a group tray?". One student talked about the different figures she chose to represent her experience, saying: "I utilized rocks of different colors and textures and different smoothness... to signify the challenges I have had to overcome during my internship. I wanted to reflect the growth and challenges ... as well as the diversity of experience." Another student spoke about her personal realizations and feelings that emerged through the tray. She noted:

Building this tray made me realize that I have enough strength to continue with my journey and meet my goal. I also realized that I am still sailing and keeping myself afloat even though there are some barriers. Building this tray, I was able to relieve my frustration and concern of some of those barriers.

Through this tray process, students highlighted their new awareness of their own areas of growth and inner strength. This tray process also allowed other students to find relief and release regarding their concerns and challenges.

Implications for Supervision

There are several implications for supervisors seeking to implement group supervision utilizing sandtray as described by the presented protocol. While the DM has been applied to sandtray supervision (Anekstein et al., 2014), the previous researchers suggested that implementation with a more diverse group of participants over a longer period of time would be useful in understanding the impact of such interventions. Thus, we aimed to explore the



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implementation of a 10-session group sandtray supervision protocol to expand understanding of student experiences and reactions through participating. Implementing the presented protocol generated insight and awareness regarding the unique benefits, challenges, and considerations that may impact the experience for supervisors and supervisees. The following section describes recommendations for future research to support and encourage ongoing development, implementation, and evaluation of group sandtray supervision protocols.

Several benefits emerged via the sandtray supervision group that aligns with previous research and support the application of these modalities in supervision. Through their journal responses, participating supervisees reported experiences of catharsis and validation, instances of self-awareness and insight, and the inherent tendency to engage in verbal and nonverbal reflective practice regarding their struggles. These responses align with previous research focused on the application of the sandtray in supervision (Anekstein et al., 2014; Chong, 2015; Homeyer & Sweeney, 2023; Lev-Wiesel, 2004) and lend positive endorsement for the utility of sandtray beyond its use as a therapeutic modality and as a valuable tool in facilitating supervision experiences.

Further, the implementation of group supervision provided an extended opportunity for participating supervisees in that they were able to engage in additional valuable supervision hours beyond their individual sessions. Moreover, the experience provided exposure to an often-underrepresented therapeutic modality. Typically, sandtray is not included in counseling graduate program course offerings and may only be introduced minimally as a set of techniques associated with play therapy. Participating supervisees' positive responses to their experiences in the supervision groups underscore the value of group supervision opportunities and the merit of creative modalities for supervision.

Along with the noted emergent benefits of the program, several challenges should be addressed as potential areas for modification or improvement in future implementation. For example, participating supervisees were asked to engage in weekly journal prompt exercises to promote reflection as an extended opportunity for growth and development. While this requirement did serve the intended purposes, some of the supervisees experienced the journal tasks as burdensome or inconvenient when added to their already busy lives as graduate students and interns. Supervisors seeking to facilitate similar supervision groups may choose to reduce the number of required journal responses, designate the journal exercise as optional, or incorporate time to engage in individual reflective practice as part of the weekly supervision sessions.

Further emergent challenges were related to timing. As noted, two sandtray supervision groups were facilitated weekly due to the number of students interested in participating. The facilitator noted that while each group had distinct needs and dynamics, a trend spanned both groups specific to timing. For example, the groups were scheduled for one hour but consistently extended past the one session based on the time needed to select



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miniatures, respond to prompts, and process their trays. Participating supervisees described the extra time as valuable and necessary. Still, they preferred a planned extended session versus feeling that they had run out of time or were running later than planned each week. Thus, supervisors implementing sandtray group supervision should consider an extended timeframe for weekly sessions and consider the number of students participating and the amount of time anticipated to process all prompts.

In addition to the benefits and challenges of facilitating the sandtray group supervision program, several considerations should be noted for future iterations of similar groups. In this program, the facilitator had existing supervisory relationships with many of the participating supervisees. Such connections have potential implications for rapport and working alliance. For example, the facilitator was already aware of many of the supervisees' salient cultural identities and was able to be intentional about centering or highlighting specific experiences and needs within the group context. Considering the potential impacts and challenges of implementing a similar group without such preexisting relationships is essential. For instance, it might be helpful to intentionally broach race, ethnicity, and culture issues during the initial orientation sessions to promote a trusting and growth-fostering supervision relationship with the facilitator (Jones et al., 2019). While several studies evidenced positive outcomes associated with sandtray in supervision related to the supervisory working alliance (Markos et al., 2008) and multicultural development (Paone et al., 2015), facilitators should not assume that cultural factors will naturally emerge simply because supervisees are engaging in the supervision experience, especially if the relationships between and among supervisees and facilitators are new (Jones et al., 2019).

According to the ACA ethical codes, to practice, clinicians would need some training and supervision before conducting any intervention with clients or supervisees (ACA C.2.b., 2014). Similarly, the *Sand Therapy Competencies* indicate that ongoing training, supervision, collaboration, and consultation are integral components of ethical sandtray therapy practice (Hartwig et al., 2023). There are several training and certification programs for sandtray therapy at the local, state, and national levels, and supervisors interested in facilitating sandtray therapy with supervisees could find several options for training to support their supervision practices.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research is needed about the aspects of sandtray group supervision that contribute to positive outcomes for supervisees. Researchers should consider a qualitative study to explore supervisees' experiences of participating in such groups and a quantitative intervention study to assess the effectiveness of specific aspects of the sandtray group supervision program in enhancing supervisee development, self-efficacy, and competence. Further, studies focused on exploring group differences or varying outcomes related to



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individual versus group trays and prompts will help to inform the development and implementation of future supervision opportunities utilizing sandtray and group formats. Finally, researchers can also consider investigating the outcomes of additional creative supervision interventions and modalities characteristically underrepresented in supervision research and literature.

Conclusion

Given that utilizing sandtray as a modality for facilitating group supervision is a novel and developing approach, the presented protocol and considerations offer a promising opportunity for clinical supervision in various contexts. The counselors-in-training who participated in the sandtray group supervision program universally noted the value of the experience via their weekly journal reflections. Moreover, the combined factors of a creative modality for supervision, connection with peers in a group context, and the opportunity to express responses to fieldwork experiences with increased vulnerability and depth promoted the students' personal and professional growth and development. Future research is warranted as supervisors and institutions continue to develop and examine the outcomes of expressive approaches to group supervision.

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