



PLAY THERAPY: A PERFECT APPROACH FOR BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION IN MIDDLE SCHOOLCHILDREN

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Abstract

The present study centred on the growing need for management of discipline problems in educational settings. The researcher tried to investigate the effects of play therapy and behaviour modification techniques on disruptive behaviour of middle school children. The literature on play therapy suggests that it has a positive influence on the social skills and behavioural problems of children. This study offers two hypotheses; (a) Play therapy interventions and behaviour modification techniques of token economy and time out will help decrease the disruptive behaviour of the children. (b) Students involved in a counselling and play therapy group will show more progress in adapting a classroom friendly behaviour than those who are not involved in the counselling and play therapy group. The researcher collected data through multiple methods such as a checklist, video-recording, and observation. The findings from the research indicate the positive effect of the intervention program on the experimental group. The teachers concurred that there is a significant positive change in the display of behaviour in students who received the intervention. Study of the long-term effects of this intervention program in future can bring forth a deeper understanding of its future implications.

Keyword: - Play Therapy, video-recording, friendly behaviour and disruptive behaviour

Introduction

Apathy in the Classroom:

School violence has become almost a weekly headline and children are in trouble; thus the burden on teachers and the school system is even heavier. Schools report that “discipline problems” are still their major concern, but the problems have become more severe. As schools are microorganisms of society, misbehaviour acquired at home can be transmitted to school sites (Edwards, 2004). For example, gang activity and drug abuse, cyber-crime and peer pressure may be acquired from the macro-environment in which students form a part. Kulinna (2007) affirms that disruptive behaviours constitute a big threat to a good class management, thus encouraging to find appropriate ways to make the disruptive elements behave in an appropriate way in class in order to prepare them to live a future life as good citizens in society (Lewis, Romi, Qui, & Katz, 2005). Indiscipline shown by students is a part of general indiscipline existing in society. Tightening up of rules and restrictions would be a remedy worse than the disease because it will only produce a reaction and make matters worse. The right approach would consist of reoriented education, detection of maladaptive behaviour and intervention provided at early stages.

The Importance of Play Therapy:

For over 60 years, play therapy has been a well-established and popular mode of child treatment in clinical practices all over the world. One reason play therapy has proven to be a particularly useful approach with children is that they have not yet developed the abstract reasoning abilities and verbal skills needed to adequately articulate their feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. For children, toys are their words, play is their conversation.

Play therapy can be defined as an interpersonal process wherein a trained therapist systematically applies the curative powers of play (e.g., relationship enhancement, role-playing, abreaction, communication, mastery, catharsis, attachment formation, etc.) to help the clients resolve their current psychological difficulties and help prevent future ones. Play therapy techniques specify how to use the play materials so as to effectively implement the therapeutic powers of play (Schaefer, 1993).

The play is the natural world of a child. Children learn about themselves, other, and their world through play. Perry (2006) has discussed children's need for enrichment opportunities, provided in a sequential manner, to address neurological developmental issues. This includes play and play therapy to assist in treating children who experience severe trauma. Charles E. Schaefer has discussed the therapeutic powers of play in numerous published works (1993, 2003). He points out that play helps overcome resistance to therapy.

During play, children are self-motivated to satisfy an innate need to explore and master their environment. The play also assists in the development of creative thinking. Children use a variety of toys and materials to experience a cathartic release of tension and affect. Indian culture has always paid attention to the early developing years of the child and included play to ensure a wholesome development.

According to Schaefer, using pretend play during role-playing allows children to try on different roles and try out alternative behaviors. Fantasy play gives children a sense of power and mastery that is not possible in their real world, resulting in an increased ability to regulate affect, reduce aggression, and generate positive feelings. Developing themes and metaphors in play gives meaning to life by shaping the child's belief systems. Occupational therapists, child-life

specialists, speech therapists, physical therapists, and many other human service providers use therapeutic play with toys and games to facilitate treatment goals respective to their disciplines.

The Association for Play Therapy (2008) has defined play therapy as “the systematic use of a theoretical model to establish an interpersonal process wherein trained play therapists use the therapeutic powers of play to help clients prevent or resolve psychosocial difficulties and achieve optimal growth and development.”

Still, a new and evolving form of therapy applied in India, play therapy faces numerous issues in its applicability. Among the most important is the critical need for an increase in the number of mental health professionals trained in play therapy. As play therapy’s popularity increases, the lack of literature written specifically on play therapy supervision has become apparent. In 2004 and 2006, Ray differentiated between basic and more advanced play therapy skills and provided information about how supervisors can work more effectively with supervisees.

Given the nonverbal nature of play therapy, supervisees may benefit from exploring supervision issues through nonverbal means. Perhaps supervision experiences that use symbolism, metaphoric play, and art would be appropriate, if not the standard.

Behaviour Modification Techniques

The primary goal of a **token economy** is to increase desirable behavior and decrease undesirable behavior. The larger goal of token economies is to teach appropriate behavior and social skills that can be used in one's natural environment.

Time-out is a complicated and intricate intervention, involving far more than simply withdrawing an individual from ongoing activities and then returning him or her after a

predetermined period of time. To make contingent observation time-out most effective, the teacher must reinforce appropriate behaviours and the resulting reinforcement (Turner & Watson, 1999).

Rationale

With such a growing population of students, education systems fail to provide equal opportunity to every learner, hence the classrooms tend to be overpopulated and teachers and educationists cannot attend to every student due to lack of facilities and resources. Teachers are constantly overburdened with over populous classes and challenged to find ways to intervene with students with discipline problems.

Use of play therapy in the school can help students as they strive to overcome many challenges that may impede social and academic growth and success. As Plato said, “you can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation”.

Method

Types of play therapy involved were expressive arts therapy which involves drawing, dance/movement, sketching, and colouring, along with Imaginary play, etc. The type of quasi-experimental design used in this research is non-equivalent control group pre-test-post-test design. The type of quasi-experimental design used in this research is non-equivalent control group pretest-posttest design. The type of quasi-experimental design used in this research is non-equivalent control group pretest-posttest design. Participant observation methods helped gather information about the deviant behaviour displayed by the students in a classroom setting. Semi-structured interview enabled the researcher to obtain crucial information about the child. Indirect

assessment relied heavily upon the use of structured and unstructured interviews with students and teachers. Video cameras were used to observe behaviour patterns of the students before selecting a sample from the class and to record the participant's behaviour during some of the sessions of play therapy. Students exhibiting disruptive and undisciplined behaviour in a class were selected after a discussion with the teachers regarding students who need most immediate attention and intervention. The checklists were used to assess problem behaviour of the participants and to measure the impact of the intervention of the participants. The checklist also helps point out the difference of intervention in experimental and control group.

Participants:

The participants were a total of 14 students from ages 12-14 years from the target population of grade 7th and 8th along with a subject teacher.

Sessions:

The participants enjoyed the magic carpet ride and discussed with the leader what they learned at each stop with spirited enthusiasm. Awarding points for appropriate social interaction reinforced their positive behaviour. During play sessions, participants learned to develop friendships and social skills and how to negotiate with others in social circumstances.

The termination intervention activity "How I Felt the First Day" helped the participants to see the improvement as well as gave the researcher and the participant time and pace to bid farewell. The data collected through checklist, video-recording, and observation is indicative of the positive effect of the intervention program on the experimental group. Upon through discussion with the teacher, it was found that the students who received intervention displayed more classroom friendly behaviour. Their disruptive behaviour has been reduced clearly. The 5

participants of the control group, however, showed no such considerable effect in their behaviour. The participants in the experimental group themselves felt well about their change in behaviour.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Figures 1, 2 and 3 are the drawing made by the participants in one of the sessions. In this session the participants were encouraged to learn the skill of sharing and use limited resources together and make posters or draw.

Conclusion

The success of play therapy in the treatment of various disorders for children is quite noted. Through the use of well-known play therapy techniques and behaviour modification through token economy and time out procedures, intervention along with counselling was provided to the decrease the disruptive behaviour in middle school children. The results signify that the intervention program was successful in decreasing the undesirable behaviour substituting it with behaviour that was appropriate in the classroom. The results of this study were the significant but short-term. In order to study the long-term effects of this intervention on students, further research should be conducted for over a few months.

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