

BOOK REVIEW

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SANDPLAY THERAPY IN VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES: A JUNGIAN APPROACH

BY EVA PATTIS ZOJA
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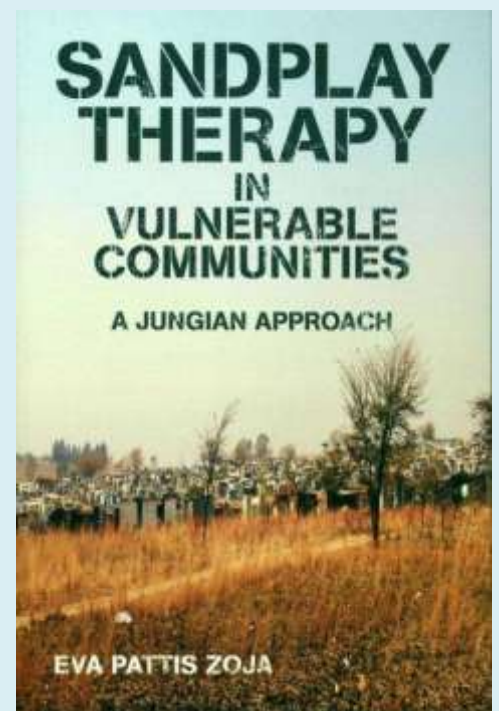
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In her new book, *Sandplay Therapy in Vulnerable Communities: A Jungian Approach*, Eva Pattis Zoja has provided a broad, and at the same time, an in-depth look at a method of therapeutic work with children in acute crisis situations. Dubbing this modality, “Expressive Sandwork,” Pattis Zoja explains it as an adaptation of Margaret Lowenfeld’s World Technique and of Dora Kalff’s Sandplay Therapy. It was designed to be used in situations where individual psychotherapy is not possible because of the acute crisis nature of the situation (natural disasters or war) or because of situations of extreme poverty where few resources are available.

While the work takes place in groups, each child has his or her own sandtray and accompanying adult who serves as witness and recorder of the process. These adults are not psychotherapists, but teachers, students of psychology, social workers and volunteers, all of whom have received a short training. The method is effective despite the lack of professional therapists because the materials allow the child’s own self-regulating energies to be activated. The adults who sit with each child are taught how to create what Dora Kalff spoke of as the “free and protected space.” Once established, this space is the basis within which the child’s natural affinity for play takes over.



Like sandplay, Expressive Sandwork is a practical application of the theories of Carl Jung. The archetypes of the collective unconscious are given a concrete avenue of expression. Inner conflicts that cause emotional turmoil and overt symptoms can be resolved through the placing of miniatures in the sand. These symbolic images bring together the opposites and overcome blockages, leading to the ultimate goal of a surrender of the ego to the Self.

Pattis Zoja devotes a whole chapter to explaining the nature of Expressive Sandwork and how it differs from traditional Kalfian sandplay while at the same time sharing some of its essential features. "Sandplay makes use of an innate behaviour, common to all cultures, with which children react spontaneously to difficulty, insecurity or fear, but also to new impressions and exciting experiences: play" (Pattis Zoja, 2011, p.49). Pattis Zoja describes how this spontaneous and natural activity of childhood is also the way in which children who have experienced adversity in one form or another can heal themselves. One of the subsections of this chapter is called, "Expressing psychological content already means changing it." The author's great wisdom and deep experience with children and with sandplay is evident in the way in which she describes and gives examples of its power in effecting healing.

As with sandplay therapy, so with Expressive Sandwork: the provision of a box of sand of prescribed dimensions and a variety of miniatures that correspond to the child's milieu as well as some that are unfamiliar. Of paramount importance in both modalities is the presence of the silent witness. In line with Dora Kalff's teaching, the author emphasizes the value of being acutely attuned to the child's process and refraining from any analysis or judgment.

The major difference between Kalfian sandplay and Expressive Sandwork is that the latter takes place in a group setting. But while they are sharing the same space, the children are encouraged to have their own individual experience: they do not interact with each other but at the same time they may feel supported by the others' presence and the sense that they have all embarked on a similar journey of self-discovery.



Since there is such emphasis on the relationship between the child and the witness, the reader might properly be curious about how the proper sensibility can be fostered in the adult helpers, most of whom are not professional therapists. Pattis Zoja lays out the training program she has developed: after an entrance interview with two therapists, each volunteer participates in a minimum of four sandplay sessions in the role of the patient. They are then given forty hours of instruction in theory and participate in one sandplay project as an observer. When finally assigned a child to work with they are supervised by a therapist and then required to write a case report on the child's work in the sand.

Once Pattis Zoja has laid the theoretical groundwork, she begins a series of chapters on the various locales where she has taught and practiced her new modality. The first geographic location that the author presents is in an elementary school in Munsieville, South Africa. She first described her work there in her presentation at the 20th Congress of ISST, Kyoto, 2009, and later in her article entitled, *The Good and the Beautiful: Kalos Kai Agathos in Sandplay Therapy* (Pattis Zoja, 2010). Pattis Zoja worked with Imme Thom, the first member of ISST in South Africa. For another description of conducting sandplay with Imme Thom and her team in this shanty town near Johannesburg, see the Sachiko Taki-Reece's article entitled, *Ah, Hakoniwa! Sand, Pebbles and Bottle Caps Shine Brightly under the Southern Cross* (Taki-Reece, 2010). Taki-Reece was the keynote speaker at the same ISST Congress in Kyoto. That two such experienced sandplay therapists were drawn to South Africa to work with Imme Thom is a testament to Thom's gifts as a therapist and to the infrastructure she has created within which the work could take place.

The population in this school suffers from a variety of issues, any one of which would bring a child into therapy in Europe or America. "Every one of these children really requires individual attention, the majority have behavioural disorders, and many have untreated physical illnesses. The main problems, from which these children suffer, are neglect, hunger, sexual abuse, family or neighbourhood violence, as well as having to cope with alcohol and drug addiction in adults. Many of the



children who live in Munsieville do not even have a family any more” (Pattis Zoja, 2011, p.80). The author bravely asks the question whether psychotherapy can be of use in situations of such dire social destitution—and answers it with a resounding Yes! She observed time and again how seriously the children took to the work when exposed to the sand and miniatures and how even children who had acted out in other settings worked quietly and steadily. The volunteers reported immediate changes in facial expressions and body language as the children were able to give form to the “unspeakable” psychological injuries they had suffered. After a few weeks, changes in behavior followed. These changes occurred even though the children’s family and social surroundings remained the same.

In this chapter on South Africa and in subsequent chapters on China and Latin America, Pattis Zoja provides eloquent descriptions of various children’s processes in the sand. These case descriptions are profound, not only because of the extreme nature of the psychological damage inflicted on these children but because of the wisdom and expertise that the author brings to her analysis of their processes.

This book would be an invaluable asset to anyone who feels called to be of service in areas that suffer from social destitution or in locales that are reeling from the after effects of a natural disaster. The book is equally valuable for the clinician in private practice. Both novices to sandplay as well as experienced therapists could gain from the knowledge in this unique volume.

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