

Clay Therapy: An Alternative Approach to Emotional Reduce Therapy in Fostering Psychological Well-Being among School Students

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Abstract. Clay is a therapy tool which can assist an individual in achieving release from internal stress. This stress interrupts psychological well-being, particularly in school students either in relation to personal problems, family problems and studies to the extent that it affects the individual inwardly. The objective of the research is to study emotions after administering this experiment to each of the students involved as samples in this special study. This study represents a single Quasi-experiment predisposed to a qualitative 'art-based approach' by collecting samples from a school in Pahang which is involved in the Emotional Expressive Programmer. The selection of sample is purposive and a total of 38 form 6 students were selected by the School Counselor and Coordinator of Form 6 as the (special) experiment group of school students undergoing pressure or stress. The analysis in the study is qualitative, that is, specific coding of thematic content analysis which is the result of comments written on paper, and of direct comments from each participant of the experimental study while the programmer was running. As a result, all the participants of this experiment stated a feeling of relief at being able to articulate suppressed emotions all this time through clay therapy and an increased mental motivation to continue with studies even though it was held for a short period. The implication of this study is that clay therapy can be promoted as a major therapy for special programmers in exploring difficulties and releasing suppressed stress in school students, as well as used as a guideline for treatment in psychological well-being. Attention from the school, parents and Ministry of Education are fundamental to the development of psychological well-being of school students in achieving future success in their studies.

Keywords: Clay Therapy, Pressure, Experiment, School Students, Psychological Well-Being.

1. Introduction

Today a host of issues and problems have arisen among school students, either involve family, environment, studies, love and personal relationships to such an extent that these are interfering with their daily lives. In fact, these types of pressure influence depressive behaviour, and it is said that 17% to 25% of school students are constantly facing such situations (See & Tan, 2005). These situations are beginning to affect the psychological well-being of students especially the focus on study which is to the best of their capabilities.

Currently many regard the element of psychological well-being as an important part of their daily lives. Ryff (1989) stated that the psychological well-being of a person attempting to achieve fulfillment is based on the realization of an individual's own potential. The potential of human beings is in fact vastly dependent on constant physical and psychological health in order to be the best possible human capital. It is estimated that by 2020, mental illness will be the second highest in the world in all groups (Noradilah & Mansor, 2009). Thus youths such as students are among those who will be affected by this condition, representing the highest number of patients in the time frame mentioned.

Therefore school students who face problems whether studies, family issues, love and adjustment during adolescence, have to get appropriate attention from those responsible such as parents, teachers, School Counsellors, Parent Teacher Associations, and the Education Ministry of Malaysia. There is ample evidence of students' emotional disturbance such as bullying, beating to death by fellow students, emotional abuse and injuring other students associated with new desires in the course of physical and emotional transition in life.

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Therefore clay therapy represents a good art-based approach, as an alternative to explore student problems by shaping emotions through the use of clay. Sekar et al. (2007) argues that it is very therapeutic and appropriate for use with children and school students in overcoming anger, loss, and grief, and in facing one's problems. Thus the use of this therapy can convey the inner emotions of a child or student via their own creativity while playing with the clay, and corresponds with what they wish to express. This Quasi-experiment attempts to uncover emotions as a result of clay therapy by observing its effectiveness on students who have undergone this special experiment, and simultaneously to see what major problems currently faced by students are.

2. Objective of the Study

The main objective of this research is to study emotions uncovered as a result of this special experiment for each of the students involved as samples of the research.

3. Methodology of the Study

The methodology applied is Quasi-experimental study, that is, the investigator studies and observes the subject group only once to determine the effect of the independent variables mentioned (Mohd Majid, 2000). The methodology is discontinuity and applied in studies involving (special) experimental groups only without involving control groups (Department of Research and Innovation in Teaching Professionalism, 2008). Such studies, called experimental trials, act as new discoveries in specific fields to achieve an objective (Young & Nicol, 2011). The approach of the therapy used is more of an art based method and the data analysis is through a qualitative approach by thematic content analysis, based on written comments and direct comments of each sample at the end of the programmer.

The selection of 38 samples was done by the School Counselor and the Form 6 Coordinator based on past records on these students. It involved a special programmer, that is, the Emotional Expressive Programmer 2012 held in a secondary school in the state of Pahang. The name of the school remains confidential on the ethical grounds of the study and to safeguard the reputation of the school.

The procedures were that each participant was given the same opportunity to shape their emotions through the use of clay based on the objective of the study. The imagery technique was implemented to observe the problems encountered, and subsequently each sample was required to shape the image physically through the use of clay. Each formation had a specific meaning and only the sample knew what it was. All the samples were given the opportunity to express themselves about what they had formed as an image and explain what they could about its formation. Questions could be put by one sample to another while expressing themselves during the presentation session till the end of the session on self-expression.

The limitation of the study is that in this Quasi-experimental study there is only a short period to express stress or emotions and also that it utilizes comments on direct assessments and writings during the programmer. There is no long term study to assess its efficacy on each student and also pre- and post-tests were not carried out more thoroughly for more specific assessment. The element of comparison by gender was not implemented, because the early stage is only intended to observe efficacy in terms of overall feelings of the study samples. Therefore, this short-term therapy is in fact sufficient to assist in the relief of stress present in school students. The validity and authenticity of this study is based on previous studies which implemented this therapy and is believed to be not sufficiently comprehensive and it has not received the attention it deserves from researchers.

4. Results and Discussion

The outputs from the results were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and several example extracts are presented as evidence of the results mentioned. Themes touching on the objective of the study are as follows:

4.1. Intense Relief

On this theme, a majority, that is, 38 students or 100% stated that they felt intense relief through the process of clay therapy. Emotions suppressed all this while could be expressed directly through the process

of forming and shaping the clay. The images of emotions through clay were explained individually based on reasons for creating such forms. These students were stressed by problems relating to family, personal, love and studies and shapes such as family, steps, falling into a river and several other images represented symbols of their internal stress. Therefore, such expression enabled them to share with friends and achieve an inward relief from what had been endured all this time. Some of the quotations are:

The therapy lightened the internal burden and provided me relief since I have had many serious problems inside that needed expression (Respondent 6, Malay, Female).

A feeling of great self-esteem and relief because I came to know what was lodged in my heart all this while (Respondent 36, Malay, Male).

This study confirms the observation of Sekar et al. (2007) who used this therapy on children who had lost family members during the Tsunami incident. This type of clay therapy is considered as an element in releasing all the tensions suppressed all along and a mediating medium of (expressive) articulation. Various creations of children became images of expression of their inward selves that were necessary to be expressed as well as material for respite from stress resulting from psychological pain endured all along (Kishan, 2007).

4.2. Mental Motivation to Continue with Studies or Life

Under this theme, 14 students or 37% stated that the therapy motivated them mentally in continuing studies and daily life. Before this they were confused and filled with de-motivation for continuing studies, but after undergoing clay therapy they felt they felt the need for an inward shift. The shift involved studies which would help them succeed in life in the future which they would face ahead. Greater challenges in the future would arise as a result of modernization and the will to be constantly motivated influenced them to continue life was enhanced.

The therapy was able to give me new strength to proceed and succeed in life (Respondent 13, Malay, Female).

I like the ways of the therapy because it is very motivational and spurs me on to face the coming exams (Respondent 13, Malay, Female).

Made me more confident to achieve higher levels in studies and sports (Respondent 38, Malay, Male).

This study is consistent with Tratnik (2008) who explains that the therapy enables an opening up of the mind, particularly in traumatized children. A majority of such children are not aware that they are at the level of perception of a certain incident, and through therapy their awareness can motivate them mentally to continue living as best as possible. This tool touches more on identification, exploration and a phase in counseling treatment if it can help the condition of such children (Tratnik 2008).

5. Conclusion

This study on clay therapy has opened a lot of opportunities for school students to express the emotions, which can be applied as a special and healthy programmer. Emphasis on student emotions can assist in obtaining excellent achievements in studies since there is good psychological treatment through the therapy. Results of the study explain that the therapy engenders a feeling of inward relief as well as mental motivation to continue with studies and life as best possible for the future. This proves that clay therapy clearly provides psychological well-being in students. Thus, the implication of the study is that it can be proposed as a major therapy for special programmers to explore problems and relieve suppressed stress in school students and can be used as a guide for treatment for psychological well-being. Attention from parents, schools and the Ministry of Education are stepping stones to developing psychological well-being in students so that they can achieve success.

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