

Sandboxing: Qualitative Interviewing with Sand, Objects and Figures



Communication, Culture, and Languages
Department Seminar Series

Audencia Nantes

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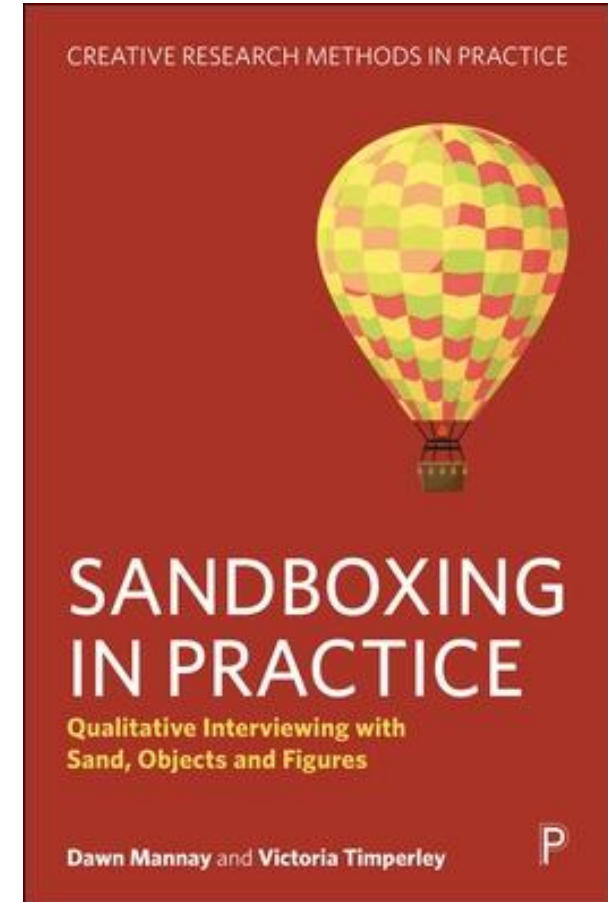
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Outline

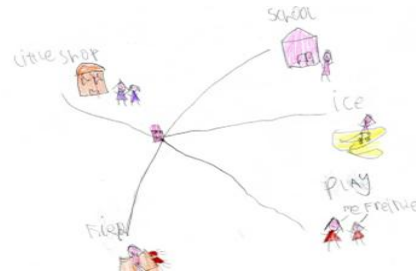
- Thank you
- Acknowledging origins
- The Coffee Club
- Adaptions and additions
- Analysis and sharing messages
- Feedback, reflections and Q&A



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Origins – Creative and Participatory Methods

- Research 'with' not 'on' participants - participant led
- Co-production in community work and building relationships
- Concerned with working side-by-side - handing back the camera
- Mapping, collages, drawings, plasticine, film making, Lego
- Engendering a space for empathy and understanding



Origins – Object Work

- Objects are containers of meanings
- Clare Winnicott (1996) positions the ‘third object’ or ‘third thing’ as an activity or object in which a child is interested, which can help establish a connection with them by offering a non-threatening reference point outside the worker–child dyad
- Constantino Dumangane Jr - Cufflinks
- Suzanne Spooner – buttons
- New mothers project – objects of the everyday



Origins - 'Sand Talk'

- 'Coloniality of design' silences the historical legacy of creativity outside of the geo-political North (Dahal and Gautam 2024, p. 25).
- Long history of sand and storytelling in Indigenous communities
- 'Sand Talk' as 'an Aboriginal custom of drawing images on the ground to convey knowledge' (Yunkaporta 2019, p. 17)
- Not claiming equivalence with Sand Talk and yarns but important to acknowledge Indigenous approaches – which we had not considered initially
- Caroline Lenette - Anti-Colonial Research Library - <https://www.anticolonialresearchlibrary.org/>

Origins - Psychoanalysis and therapeutic practice

- Margaret Lowenfeld (1950)
- The Word Technique
- Big metal tray, sand, water, small objects representing things commonly found in a world, for example, houses, trees, people, both ordinary, military and fantasy, animals, wild and tame, transport of all sorts, trees, fences, lamp posts, and street signs
- *‘No object therefore, and no arrangement of objects, should be taken at face value, but careful inquiry made of the child as to what exactly each object in the world is to be recorded as being. It is essential for the proper understanding of the nature and use of this technique that no interpretation be given by the therapist to the child’* (Lowenfeld 1950, p. 330).

Taking psychoanalysis outside of the clinical situation of the consulting room?

- Piaget's méthode clinique was developed from techniques in psychoanalytic clinical conversation (Packer 2017)
- Psychoanalytically informed rather than psychoanalytical or therapeutic (Hollway and Jefferson 2012)
- Sandboxing as a methodological tool is an adaption of Lowenfeld's World Technique, but we are not using this apparatus for therapeutic practice.
- Yet like other creative data-gathering techniques sandboxing can be a 'sharp tool' (Burnard 2018)
- Can engender more emotive and emotional engagements because of its mnemonic qualities and the time and space it affords for reflection and reflexivity (Kara et al. 2021)
- Participants select the objects to build their worlds and lead the conversation
 - interviews may move beyond the intended topic and take both participants and researchers on unintended and unexpected journeys.

Getting the equipment

Animals	People	Landscape	Transport	Miscellaneous
Pig x 3	Gate keeper soldier	Wooden fencing x 5	Ambulance	Marble
Large dinosaur	LEGO® men x 2	Grey boulders x 3	Motorbike	Green felt
Small dinosaur	Man - menacing look	Beige rocks x 5	Red bus	Fabric bowl
Spiky dinosaur	Androgynous PLAYMOBIL®	Greenhouse	Campervan	Wooden block
Tropical bird	'First people' warrior	Traffic cones x 4	Orange car	Orange pegs x 2
Wooden frog	Postman	Toadstools	Yellow car	Pebble
Turtle	Woman figure	'Do not enter' sign	Green jeep	Lolly sticks x 17
Fluffy chicks x 4	Woman farmer	Small building	Helicopter	
Dragon	Girl dressed as a witch	Assorted trees x 9	Taxi	
Dragonfly	Witch	Rope ladder	Train	
Ceramic snail	Wizard	Stairs	F1 Racing car	
Ladybird	Tinkerbell figure	Row of plants	Dumper truck	
Tiger	Pirate	Clock tower	Aeroplane	
Dog x 3	Father Christmas			
Goat x 3	Fighting soldiers x 3			
Horse x 5	Spaceman			
Bull x 5	Tae-kwon-do action figure			
Cat x 5	Woman builder			
Sheep x 2	Scarecrow			
Rabbits x 3	Man-figure - shirt and trousers			
Cow x 8				
Chimp				
Lizard				
Goose				
Elephant				
Lion				
Chicken x 2				

Frog eraser	Homme Dior sample	Five pence	Conker	Flower brooch
Mole ornament	J'adore Dior sample	Two pence	Coal	Flower ring
White sheep	New Zealand pin badge	One penny	Fossil	Flower jewel
Brown horse	Manchester United pin	Large grey button	Shells x 4	Daffodil badge
White horse	London Olympics badge	Small black button	Safety pin	Pewter heart
Miniature masks x 2	Cardiff University badge	Small tartan button	Plectrum	Silver heart
Candle	Cancer research badge	Small glass button	Screw	Purple heart
Battery	Welsh rugby pin badge	Arabic bead	Golf tee	Blue heart
SIM card	Star pin badge x 2	Paper clip	Key	Marble heart
Drawing pin	Smiley face ball	Giant paper clip	Football	

University Challenge



The Coffee Club

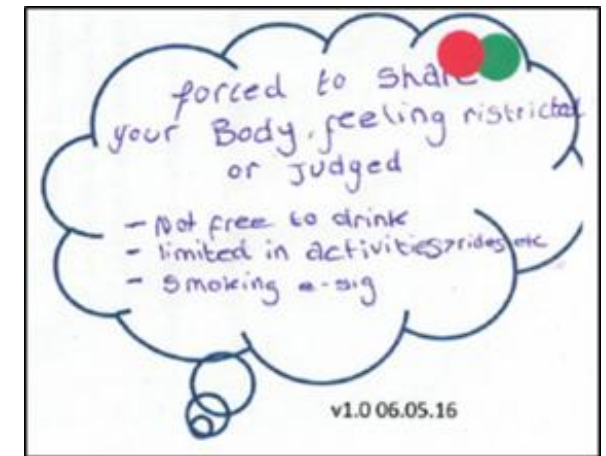
- ‘Researcher as a vampire’ (Ward, 2015 p. 170)
- ‘once they have filled their bags, they escape with the loot, never to be seen again’ (Gobo 2008, p. 306).
- Produced data that was used to generate strategies to better support students, engendering some ongoing positive changes in practice in the sector (Mannay and Edwards 2015; Mannay and Ward 2020)



Adaptions and additions



Sandboxing with other methods

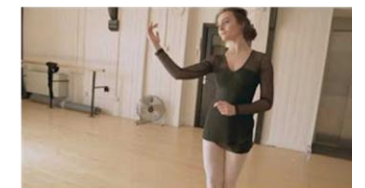
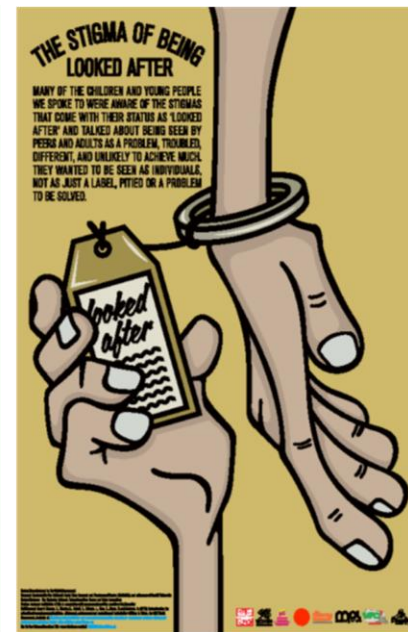


Sandboxing and Analysis

- There are no ‘data analysis fairies’ we can call on to organise our data into ‘a coherent new structure’ that will explain everything (Thorne 2000, p 69)
- No specific forms of analysis that are particular to sandboxing
- Auteur theory – elicitation interview beginning of the process
- Handbook Creative Data Analysis (Kara et al 2024)
- Collaborative creative analysis with sandboxing (Jess Mannion and the R&S (Relationships and Sexuality) Research Team 2024)

Informing Policy and Practice

- ‘our reporting, if we are sufficiently skilled and persuasive, may influence others’ (Kara et al 2021, p 122)



Impacts on the researcher?

- *‘Emotion is not an intrusion into the research process, but a constitutive element of it’* (Loughran and Mannay 2018, p. 2)
- Take participants and researchers on unexpected and unintended journeys
- Psychotherapists and social workers - clinical supervisions
- Researchers and doctoral students *‘let down’* (Bloor et al 2010)
- *‘With a little help from my colleagues’ – ‘emotionality of social-science research and the wider emotional labour of academic work’* (Lisiak and Krzyżowski 2018 p. 33)

Knowing why we want to use sandboxing

- Fighting familiarity and defamiliarization (Mannay 2010)
- Quietening the researcher voice (Mannay and Turney 2020)
- Avoiding '*prepackaged questions have little or no meaning to the person being interviewed*' (Harper 2023, p. 97)
- Understanding subjective perspectives
- Methods that match methodology and underlying philosophy
- Not creativity for the sake of creativity
- Karijin Kakebeeke warns about 'in and out' research and its 'colonial' resonances, warning that it is important not to be 'too idealistic' (in Harper 2020, p. 130)

Sandboxing before sandboxing

- ‘what academics tend to expect of participants, or assume they will find “meaningful,” yet may be less prepared to do themselves’ (Pottinger et al 2022, p 16)
- Exploration enables an opportunity to develop an affinity with sandboxing, providing a secure base from which to facilitate this technique with participants (Harro 2022)
- Important to try out and adapt for your own work and those you work with...



A note on therapeutic practice...

- Ellie Finch - <https://www.elliefinch.co.uk/sandtray-world>
- Minecraft as a digital sandtray
- As a therapeutic tool
- Could also have future potential as a research method



Diolch i chi - Thank you



Q&A

- Questions?
- Comments?
- Chat?



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