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The use of Ububele persona dolls in an emotional literacy programme with pre-school children

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ABSTRACT

Ububele is a resource and training centre located in the greater Alexandra Township of Johannesburg. One of Ububele's projects, the Ububele Persona Doll project, is a programme that is aimed at developing emotional literacy in pre-school children using a life-size handmade doll in a group setting. This research has sought to explore the use of the Ububele Persona Dolls. The sample consisted of eighteen Grade R children at the Ububele Therapeutic Nursery School and their teacher. They were video recorded during six regular Ububele Persona Doll sessions.

The use of the dolls in developing emotional literacy in pre-school children, as well as their potential for use in group therapy was assessed in three different stages. Firstly, the presence of emotional material in the form of emotional adjectives was assessed. The teacher's response patterns and level of empathy, as well as the effectiveness of the responses in terms of the goals of emotional literacy development were analysed. Lastly, the transcripts were examined for the presence of material, with regard to thematic content that could be used in group therapy.

The presence of emotional adjectives suggested that there was useful emotional material present, although the material was mainly brought up by the teacher and the range of the material was limited. The teacher's responses were most frequently informative, didactive or directive responses and questioning responses. However, she did make use of paraphrases and restatements, reflections and verbal encouragers to a lesser degree. With regards to the empathic levels of the responses, most of the responses involved exact replications of what was said by the child and no empathic responses requiring an understanding of human behaviour were given. The goals of emotional literacy training were all being achieved within the sessions. A number of themes, including physical discipline, abuse and neglect, broken or non-nuclear families, and death and dying, emerged. These themes could be concentrated on by a group facilitator.

Key words: persona dolls, emotional literacy, emotional intelligence, group therapy, pre-school children

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