Validation of A Holistic Coaching Model in Fostering Growth in Post-War Communities Through Creative Therapies

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Abstract

Individuals from post-war communities are challenged with many issues of varying severity in achieving normalcy in a new society. Whilst being sensitive to the past trauma individuals may have suffered, focusing on the present and the current available resources to build their personalities is crucial in equipping them to work towards new possibilities. This study conducted in two phases, aims to support a coaching framework for coaching war-affected individuals towards recovery and growth. The framework was supported by a series of therapeutic activities based on expressive and creative arts. Firstly, seven workshops (full day programs) employing adult participants and seven workshops (half-day programs) employing adolescent participants, were carried out in several post-war communities within a single region in Sri Lanka. The feedback from the participants was analysed in order to identify main themes so that they could be contextualized. Secondly, these themes from the initial findings were superimposed onto an existing holistic growth model consisting of successive growth steps, in developing a sustainable framework for growth in that specific region. Once supported and validated, it is hoped, that this framework would provide a basis for recovery and growth of individuals in rebuilding post war communities.

Keywords: Creative Therapy, Post-War Victims, Coaching

1. Introduction

War is an age-old human experience and the transition process after such major changes, appears to be a fundamental human survival mechanism (Williams, 1999). Trauma and change can disturb one’s identity and

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beliefs, whereby creating deep inner conflicts that have to be recognized and resolved in order to achieve a healthy balance of mind and body (Williams, 1999). To understand and discuss the different stages that are possible during and after trauma, Figure 1 features the Transition Cycle adapted from Hopson, Adams and Scally (1970) mentioned by Adams, Hayes and Hopson (1976) and will be presented in the light of transitions due to war. Williams (1999), discusses the several stages of this Transition Cycle in the events of the Balkans wars in the last decade of the 20th century. This study conducted in two phases, aims to support a coaching framework for coaching war affected individuals towards recovery and growth. Once supported and validated, it is hoped, that this framework would provide a basis for recovery and growth of individuals in rebuilding post war communities. During the initial shock or violence, anger or fear is triggered resulting in the fight or flight response (Goleman, 1997). If there is a possibility of winning, the fight reaction is triggered and adrenaline enables individuals to cope with immediate survival tasks. At extreme levels, this combined with group conformity, can promote individuals to commit torture, murder and other atrocities without guilt. If the flight reaction is triggered, and the individual or communities feel powerless to respond to danger, whole groups could abandon their homes and become refugees. After the initial shock, individuals make a provisional adjustment to the new circumstances. They cope with immediate tasks, often very resourcefully giving the illusion of having adjusted to the change but during this second stage of transition, the mind can suppress the deeper implications of the trauma for several months in optimism or denial, which in war, could reinforce group-identity and patriotism (Williams, 1999).

Due to deeply held beliefs or basic assumptions about oneself or the world being violated by the events, in the second three months of a transition, individuals begin to experience doubts and inner contradictions. These conflicts manifest in growing confusion, disillusionment, stress and loss of perspective. Eventually these inner conflicts are likely to surface in a personal transition crisis. This typically occurs 5-6 months after the trauma or change had begun. In this personal transition crisis, people may become deeply distressed, and may quit jobs, relationships or life itself, while others may become more aggressive. The natural transition process can move from crisis to recovery within a few weeks. Many political and religious organizations media may come up with radical re-assessment programs. For war-affected individuals this may provide new insights better suited to shape the new life phase (Williams, 1999). According to the transition cycle, most individuals work through transitions leading to recovery within 6 - 9 months. But this may take longer after major traumas, or for individuals coping with multiple transitions at the same time. People unable to recognize or resolve their inner conflicts, or who do not have sufficient resources to cope with their new situation may experience a greater hazard thereby leading to an extended crisis. Even though it is normal to experience a brief period of depression during a transition crisis, an extended crisis can last for months or years leading to serious mental health problems and social problems (Williams, 1999).
Unlike traditional forms of therapy, expressive, creative therapy is a form of therapy that is not bound by language, as it encourages expression of one’s inner thought and feelings through different forms of art. Art, movement and music therapy, and psychodrama are all different techniques of creative therapy (The Gale Encyclopaedia of Mental Disorders, 2003). There is a wealth of research to support the effectiveness of creative therapies in the managing of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in both children (Eaton, Doherty & Widrick, 2007) and adults affected by war (Collie, Backos, Malchiodi, & Spiegel, 2006). Furthermore, its effectiveness has been tested amongst soldiers with combat related PTSD (Bensimon, Amir, & Wolf, 2012) and refugees with xenophobic symptoms in Johannesburg (Atlas, 2009) and traumatised clients with non verbal somatic memories (Talwar, 2007).

Based on the premise that the body and mind are inseparable, the goal of movement therapy is to attain good physical, mental and emotional health along with spiritual well being (Movement therapy, 2006). Art can be created in various ways: a collage, a painting, a sketch, a scribble. In art therapy, these depictions are believed to be symbols of one’s inner thoughts and feelings. The most important aspect of art therapy is that the therapist does not interpret the piece of art, instead, the client speaks about his or her work metaphorically, thereby allowing the client to distance his or herself from the problem and see it objectively (Riley, 2001). Music reduces the Cortisol (hormone that is released during stress) levels within a body (McKinney et al., 1997) and drumming has a therapeutic effect on soldiers suffering from PTSD, thereby increasing a sense of openness, togetherness, belonging, connectedness and intimacy and helping overcome rage (Bensimon, Amir and Wolf, 2008).

Similar to coaching, creative arts are client-driven. The role of a creative therapist, like in the case of a coach, is to create a conducive and non-judgemental space for transformation. The growing popularity of coaching in learning and development is due to its self-directed approach to taking action. The International Coach Federation (2013) defines coaching as partnering with clients that involves a thought-provoking and creative process, thereby inspiring them to maximize their personal and professional potential. Hence combining art therapy and an essential coaching approach to facilitating action, can be an effective way of building hope and restoring functionality through empowerment, in alignment with the person’s values, current available resources and the readiness to change.

Coaching can be applied for an individual, organization or an entire community. Since it is important to place the person in the context of the society in bringing about a sustainable improvement, a holistic model for growth and development is important. Silva (2012) mentions a holistic coaching model (Figure 2), P3-Growths, for human development that can be applied in higher education to measure the efficacy in PhD students (Silva & Yarlagadda, 2012) and undergraduate students in Engineering against a competency framework for success in the engineering profession (Silva & Yarlagadda, 2012). In the model, growth is seen to occur in 3 progressive stages: presence, purpose and partnerships, through an individual’s ability to be fully present (self-aware), with a clear purpose (self-decisive) engaged in a partnership (self-directed action) towards change. Holistic growth is seen as the extent to which a person can develop in these P3’s as it relates to three levels of relationships; I (with oneself), You (with another) and We (with a group or audience) and is captured in a 3x3 matrix consisting of 9 progressive steps, each step building on the success of the preceding step. The individual steps ranges from self-awareness to connect, from establishing life’s purpose to developing a personal brand, from mentoring to empowering, from leadership to leaving a legacy (Silva, 2012). This study conducted in two phases, aims to support this holistic coaching model for coaching war-affected individuals towards recovery and growth.
2. Methodology

All the activities were designed using many creative methods of art, drama, movement and music. The activities allowed the expression of different feelings, emotions, general ideologies, current struggles and future goals. These activities were included in seven expressive-arts workshops (full day programs) employing adult participants, and seven expressive-arts workshops (half day programs) employing adolescent participants and were carried out in several post war communities within a single region in Sri Lanka. The participants both male and female were individuals who have been directly affected by war and who lived in the war zones, during the war. Twenty seven adults, (Female (M=24.5, N=20), Male (M=31, N=7)) participated in the study. Twenty were employed as social workers or teachers in the community and 7 adults were unemployed and were widowed as a result of war. Forty participants of the adolescent sample (Female (M=15.3 N=20) Male (M=15.7N=20)) were adolescents from 3 different schools from the same area. Information was gathered through recording personal accounts of their art through painting, poetry and song. Several focus groups and interviews were also carried out to understand the stage of transition and any interventions they may have been exposed to, prior to these workshops that may have helped them to have achieved different stages in the Hopson et al., (1970) Transition Cycle. Participants worked in small groups high in familiarity to ensure that persons were comfortable thus, genuine in their expressions.

3. Results

The feedback from the participants from the workshops was analysed in order to identify the main themes, so that they could be contextualized. These themes were then superimposed on to the P3 model with 9 steps (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme from phase 1</th>
<th>Steps from the 3P, 9 step model</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loss and grieving</td>
<td>Steps 1,2,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience and coping</td>
<td>Steps 1,2,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living the transition</td>
<td>Steps 1,2,3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social awareness</td>
<td>Steps 1,2,3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding a new purpose</td>
<td>Step 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drive and motivation</td>
<td>Step 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personality building</td>
<td>Step 1,4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship building</td>
<td>Steps 2,3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>Step 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing others</td>
<td>Steps 2,5,8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influencing the wider society/country</td>
<td>Steps 6,7,9</td>
</tr>
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4. Discussion

The growths model can be seen as a measure of a person’s recovery as they step through the different stages of the model. The role of expressive-therapy coaching is to create self-awareness in the person of a given area and move them towards self-directed action in relation to themselves (I), another person (you) and a group (We) to help facilitate the growth based on them, taking personal ownership of the process that is critical for sustainable recovery of the person. Self-awareness of a particular aspect of life is always the essential first step towards ensuring the start of the growth process. When a person feels comfortable to talk about the event with another person (other than the therapist or coach), from a place of awareness of their own response to the trauma with a view to understand the other person, they have progressed to the stage 2 (Communicate) in the model. Progress to connect stage 3 (Connect) is seen when the person is able to bring that awareness of their trauma/grief to a group of 3 or more people and engage them in a positive dialogue with an intention to add value to the group dynamic, no longer feeling like a victim but seeing their contribution to the group in a positive light.

Given the themes that surfaced in the analysis of the workshops, it is evident that the expressive creative workshops have added some value in the alleviation of repressed grief through collective discussions and expressions, and sharing of personal experiences of resilience and coping and adapting to transitions. It is evident through the themes that the creative therapies have aided in pushing the individuals to acquire a new mindset to focus on being more self-aware and socially aware to find a new purpose. Thus, according to the P3 model, establishing a purpose on top of presence. It can also be argued that a new found purpose could accelerate the speed in which an individual may navigate the Hopson et al. Transition Cycle or even skip certain stages or phases of the cycle. It is also supported that the individuals through self expression, reiterated their drive and motivation to surmount the obstacles to build relationships, solve problems and realize the need to develop others to influence the wider society or country. The latter requires building partnerships on top of presence and purpose as per the P3 model. In the P3 coaching model, the steps beyond step 5 are less represented by the findings. This is because the development beyond step 5, requires the participants be involved in hands-on practical activities geared towards community building which are impossible to address through creative therapies alone. Such work may be carried out in conjunction with Non-Governmental Organizations. In applying this model to help post war victims, it is important to know the starting point in relation to the Hopson et al. Transition Cycle. This awareness can be brought out by their responses to expressive therapy activities that are designed to draw out their inner cognitive process and the current state of mind. It can be argued that if a person can be helped during the inner contradictions in the Hopson et al. Cycle, where they begin to feel uncertainty and doubt, it may be possible to help them reach a recovery stage faster through self awareness and leading to self directed positive action, thereby avoiding them spiralling towards confusion, depression and a personal crisis or a meltdown. Hence it is important to ascertain in a given group where each individual may be at, in relation to loss, by the design of the nature of activities to obtain individual feedback. The coaching activities can then focus on differentiating people and helping them based on their stage in the recovery process. While full awareness is essential for complete recovery, it may be possible that a person may show signs of recovery based on partial awareness and progress to stage 3 and beyond, only to relapse, which may be indicative of a greater need to be fully aware of other contributing factors along-side what the participant may be aware of. Hence stages 1-3 can be seen to be iterative and expected to some degree (given the complexity of loss/grief, and the limitation of the intervention methods) to draw out the whole set of factors at one given time. However, this can be improved as the model is tested against a larger cohort of people and the coaching activities modified to draw a greater sense of awareness from the participants.

In conclusion, P3 Growths model once validated, using bigger samples from different cultures and geographical areas in the aftermath of war, can be used as a template to foster growth in individuals in post-war communities.

References


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