

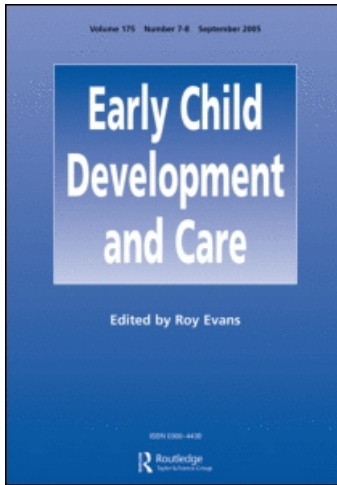
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Publisher Routledge

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Early Child Development and Care

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title-content=t713640830>

A Safe Place: ways in which nature, play and creativity can help children cope with stress and crisis - establishing the kindergarten as a safe haven where children can develop resiliency

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First Published on: 09 January 2009

To cite this Article Berger, Ronen and Lahad, Mooli(2009)'A Safe Place: ways in which nature, play and creativity can help children cope with stress and crisis - establishing the kindergarten as a safe haven where children can develop resiliency',*Early Child Development and Care*,99999:1,

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/03004430802525013

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03004430802525013>

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A Safe Place: ways in which nature, play and creativity can help children cope with stress and crisis – establishing the kindergarten as a safe haven where children can develop resiliency

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(Received 28 August 2008; final version received 30 September 2008)

This article presents a way in which the innovative Nature Therapy conceptual framework coupled with creative therapeutic methods can help children develop resilience and support their coping with uncertainty and stress. It refers to the Safe Place programme that took place in 110 Israeli kindergartens, helping over 6000 children after the Second Lebanese War. It is based Ayalon and Lahad's 2000 BASIC PH integrative model of 'resiliency' highlighting the importance of the kindergarten in such development and challenging the tendency to use the kindergarten as a deductive, preparatory course for school and schooling only. The article integrates theory with examples from practice which can help readers to incorporate them into their own work.

Keywords: Nature therapy; trauma; resilience; stress; creativity; Nature

Introduction

The Second Lebanese War, the shelling of rockets, terrorist attacks and other stress factors challenged the resilience of the children of Northern Israel, forcing them to cope with the effects of political uncertainty and the security situation in the area, as well as with the overall uncertainty and stress that life may involve.

There are several fundamental questions that should be asked before embarking on the subject of the role of kindergarten in the process of coping and recovery of children exposed to war:

- What role does the kindergarten play in providing tools for coping with such difficulties?
- How can the kindergarten teacher help children develop their resiliency and assist them to cope with uncertainty and crises?

This article offers a perspective that acknowledges the importance of the imagination, the body and the group as key components in developing a child's resiliency and the significance of the kindergarten and the kindergarten teacher's central roles in its development. It refers to the 'Safe Place' programme,¹ a Nature Therapy programme designed and used after the Second Lebanese War in dozens of kindergartens in northern Israel, with thousands of children. This article will present a Nature Therapy-oriented resiliency model as applied to kindergartens. The article includes a theoretical background, references to studies and

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examples of the application of the programme in the field. We believe that based on the 'Israeli example', the model, with some cultural adaptation, can be implemented in similar situations around the world.

Resiliency

Ozer, Best, Lipsey, and Weiss (2003) argue that almost 50% of Americans will suffer traumatic incidents in their lifetime; however, very few will develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This statement suggests that humans are resilient. Lahad (1993) suggests that everyone is born with mechanisms that help them to cope with complex situations, entailing pressure and uncertainty. Not everyone can handle their troubles and difficulties all the time, but the vast majority do.

This explains why most people who have undergone traumatic experiences, such as war, abuse, loss, etc., are able to resume normal functioning and lead a relatively normal life. These abilities are called resiliency. They are the resources that help people regulate disturbing emotions and adjust their reactions to the new reality (Lahad, 2008). According to the BASIC PH resiliency model, developed by Lahad (1993) and Ayalon and Lahad (2000), there are six modalities/channels that constitute resiliency: Beliefs, Affect, Social Functioning, Imagination, Cognition and Physiology. The unique, individual combination of channels helps people cope effectively with stressful situations and lessens the chances of developing psychopathology as a result of exposure to traumatic incidents.² The primary use of the cognitive channel assumes that it may help the person understand his experience and find a suitable logical solution. However, this will not necessarily soothe his soul and/or alleviate the physical symptoms that might occur as a result of the traumatic experience, as the emotional memory of the traumatic experience is stored in the right hemisphere of the brain, responsible for emotions, sensations and imagination. In order for healing of trauma to take place, the treatment of symptoms will also require emotional and physical expression. Using the physiological and emotional-affect channels can help unload residual hard feelings left from the experience and extract new meanings from it (Lahad, 2006). For this, the individual's ability to use the social channel is very important because without it he will not be able to share his experience with others, which could result in his feeling lonely and helpless. Innovative studies such as the one carried out by Kaplansky (2008) emphasise the potential for coping and recovery in employing the language of imagination. This channel allows one to create an alternative-preferred reality, described by Lahad (2000) as the Fantastic Reality, which may contain the most effective strategies for coping with impossible situations such as loss and bereavement. Lahad's model and research (Shacham & Lahad, 2004) reveals that each person has a unique coping mechanism composed of a combination of the languages most accessible to him, the BASICPH. The more languages one is able to 'articulate', the greater the ability to cope with changes, and the ability to prevent the development of distress and traumatic symptoms (Lahad, 2002). According to the BASICPH prevention model, the task of developing resilience does not focus solely on the ability to acquire more languages. A person can benefit by expanding one's existing coping channels/languages. It is in fact the strengthening of existing forces and expanding flexibility that will contribute to coping with changes. It is important to emphasise that *the task of this project as a primary and secondary prevention is to help children develop resiliency*. It does not replace post-trauma-focused therapy such as EMDR, PE, SE, SEE FaR CBT or others. Moreover, there are suggestions that developing resiliency may prevent the evolution of PTSD (Lahad, 1993; Lahad, Shacham, & Niv, 2000).

Is it possible that modern life and educational systems diminish resiliency?

It seems that along with the immense developments that the modern world has to offer, its improvement of the quality of life and scientific-technological abilities, it also diminishes many important resiliency indexes, mainly the affect-emotional, physiological-physical, imaginal and social channels. When our children are six years old we send them to school, an institution whose main goal is to develop the cognitive channel, believing it will further the child over the course of his life, and make it possible for him to successfully fit into academia and the work force. Most schools ask children to sit quietly on chairs (restricting the physiological channel), in rows or by a computer (diminishing the social channel), and to give specific, 'correct' answers to logical questions (reducing the imaginal and affect-emotional channels). This can also be the reality at home. It is not uncommon to hear a parent tell his four-year-old child to stop crying because 'boys don't cry' or to tell his daughter to 'quit talking nonsense' when she asks about fairies and dragons (restricting the imagination). In addition, we must note the busy daily schedule of most parents and the dying essence of neighbourhood community, as well as the development of the virtual media. All of the above can create a situation in which the child spends his afternoons at the computer or watching television, avoids playing creatively and interacting socially (restricting the social, emotional-affective, physiological and imaginal channels). The results of an up-to-date study accompanying the Safe Place programme suggest that schools in Israel do not develop resiliency, but on the contrary, diminish it (Berger, in preparation). A critical view of what is occurring in the kindergarten system in Israel reveals that they, too, are influenced by technological progress. It seems that 'educational standards' trickle down into the kindergarten, which is required to amplify its didactic-scholastic demands. At the moment, it seems as if the kindergarten has become an elementary school preparatory course (Snapir, 2008) and not a space where the child can develop in accordance with their age, with spontaneous playing and creative research as its very centre (Levin, 1989, 1999; Winnicott, 1995).

If the above is taken into account, it would seem that very limited channels are 'officially opened and encouraged by the system' when a child or her caretakers, who were exposed to the war, need to process their experience. The 'standards in education' and the achievement indicators employed by the Ministry of Education in Israel, and most probably in almost all western states, dictate a fixed, highly cognitively oriented syllabus. Despite this 'top-down' policy, which I wish to dispute and warn against, it seems that most kindergartens in Israel still allow children to express emotions, to imagine, to be alone and with the group, and to play. Thus, the kindergarten teacher and the kindergarten contribute to the process of developing resiliency in children.

Nature therapy

As technology has developed, we have moved away from nature. We shifted from mystical, religious, tribal life in reciprocity with nature, to an individualistic, capitalist, urban one. We moved from traditional therapy methods, centred on the mutual beliefs expressed in group rituals through dance, drama and music, to scientific approaches to recovery, which focus on rational explanation, understanding and words. The Shaman was replaced by a doctor or a psychologist and the elderly tutor by a kindergarten teacher or school-teacher. A superficial glance reveals that in the race after progress and modernisation we have lost basic important knowledge (Berger & McLoed, 2006; Plotkin, 2005; Roszak, Rust, 2005; Totton, 2003). Furthermore, some of today's children do not know that the source of the chicken nugget was a chicken living in a field or chicken coop, and not a

plastic container taken out of the refrigerator in the supermarket. This psycho-social reality can explain the spreading of phenomena such as loneliness, alienation, depression (Berger, Berger, & Kellner, 1974; West, 2000), and the collective ‘search for meaning’, such as the widespread overseas trips taken by many Israelis after their military service. This process clarifies the attraction of the ‘New Age’ and its penetration into the establishment; from holistic approaches to therapy and teaching, to the development of health products carrying the slogan of being ‘in tune’ with nature. It seems that despite material abundance, we are discontent with our bodies; nevertheless something calls us to re-connect to body, to spirit, to our soul, to the earth... Nature invites us to make room for the child within, those parts of us that feel, imagine and are present in the experience of playing. Connecting to the cycles of nature can help us bond with parallel processes in our lives and to relate to them in a broad universal context. An encounter with a migrating bird, a dead lizard or a blooming plant can be a stimulus for expressing a similar story within us, of which we were previously ashamed. Sharing the story can normalise it and impart hope. The direct contact with natural elements, the wind, the earth, the plants, can connect us to our body and can awaken the world of images and emotions. Something in the encounter with nature and its powers has the potential to connect us to ourselves; to our strengths and to our coping resources (Hartig, Mang, & Evans, 1991; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Naor, 1999).

Nature Therapy is an innovative experiential therapeutic framework that takes place in nature. It seeks to broaden the static, constantly controlled natural environment of ‘therapy’ (Barkan, 2002; Bleger, 1967) to create a dynamic therapeutic environment (setting) that is a partner in shaping the process (Berger, 2007; Berger & McLeod, 2006). In this new field, concepts and methods are being developed to create a dynamic and open environment, using nature’s healing elements to support therapeutic processes, and discover additional dimensions (Berger & McLeod, 2006). Nature Therapy integrates elements from art and drama-therapy, gestalt, the narrative approach, eco-psychology, transpersonal psychology, adventure therapy, shamanism and body–mind practices. The approach is based on the author’s personal and professional experience, as well as research designed to conceptualise, analyse, and further develop it. It has been implemented with individuals, groups, and families in the private, educational and health sectors in Israel. In Berger’s definition of the basic concept ‘to touch nature’ claims that:

Through the direct contact and connection with nature people can also touch their own ‘inner’ nature. One can feel authenticity and develop components of personality and important ways of life that might have been hard to express amidst the intensity of modern life. (Berger, 2005b, p. 38)

This definition refers to the eco-psychology perspective of Nature Therapy and to the solutions it tries to give to the distresses caused by technology and modern living (McLeod, 1997), while deepening feelings of reciprocity with nature and concern for it.

The Lebanese War – a precedent that highlights the need for a systemic resiliency programme in kindergartens and beyond

The Second Lebanese War shattered the routine of children in northern Israel. Expanding the front into the depths of the country, evacuating homes and making them ‘unsafe’, the daily experience of rocket hits and burning forests resulted in fear, anxiety and uncertainty, which undermined basic needs for the sense of order, control and safety.

This war was a precedent case, hurting both thousands of northern residents of Israel and nature – the trees, panoramas and animals – all exposed to the same Katyusha rockets and to the same fire that burnt them to ashes.

After 33 days of war, the challenge for therapists as well as for educational staff was to help children and the educational system recover from both personal encounters with the devastation and the destruction to nature that symbolised the war and its long-term effects. We convened education and therapy professionals, and thought of ways to turn the collective injury, shared by people and nature, into a safe, recovery or healing process that could enhance the strengthening and establishment of a new sense of safety, thus further promoting resiliency. The result was the designation of the Safe Place programme for both staff and kids.

A Safe Place – a psycho-educational programme for developing resiliency and coping resources in kindergartens

Stemming from a view desiring to connect the story of the recovery of the forest damaged in the war, with work on developing resiliency, to advance flexibility, normalise bad experiences and give a sense of safety to the children, we created a programme that joins Nature Therapy with the BASIC PH model. With the goal of awakening the language of imagination, we focused on the search for a framework story and a healing metaphor that would help children connect with their inner sources of strength. This would replace the memory of the difficult experience, calm them and reduce anxiety; strengthen them and establish a sense of safety. Because the exterior surroundings (the forest) also suffered during the war, we made up a story connecting the destruction of the forest with natural and man-made attempts to recuperate and revive the forest. A very tangible, fascinating strengthening process in nature that helps to strengthen the children. This story also makes use of an analogy between the trees, which is a metaphor representing the individual, and the forest which is a metaphor for the entire community (Berger, 2007).

Once upon a time there was a forest...

All kinds of trees grew in the forest and a variety of animals lived in it.

In the forest, right between the trees, there was a house of very strong people; they were the forest rangers.

One day a big fire burst out in the forest – huge flames, noise and a big burning heat.

‘Careful!’ the forest rangers warned the animals. ‘Fire! Run, hide...’

Everyone waited for the fire to die out, but it was very big.

The burned trees wanted it to end and the animals in hiding wished to return to the forest – to their trees.

But the fire rangers said: ‘The dangerous fire isn’t over yet, it is still forbidden to return’.

The forest rangers were very brave. They poured lots of water on the fire and helped extinguish it.

The big noise stopped; only the smell of the fire remained.

‘The fire is over!’ called the forest rangers. ‘It is permitted to return to the forest! All is safe now!’

(Taken from the book *The Forest Rangers* which accompanies the Safe Place programme)

The book tells the story of a tribe of forest rangers who live near a beloved forest that was damaged by a huge fire that lasted a long time... The story emphasises the various ways the trees and the animals cope with the fire – those who moved to distant safe woods, those who hid underground and those who got hurt and even died. The story goes on to tell about the ways the forest rangers helped the woods recuperate and recover after the fire was put out. It also relates the exciting meeting with the animals who returned to their forest. This story, which was published as a book with beautiful pictures, serves as a framework for the entire programme. As the story is being read, the children play, act and draw the ways the animals coped and through them encounter their own stories of coping. A deer who escapes and does not want to return to the forest meets a buck who misses it. A porcupine looking for refuge finds himself sharing a hole with a skunk. It turns out that despite the differences all have similar feelings and ways of coping...

The metaphor adorns changing characters when, with the help of a dramatic ritual, makeup and props, the children become the forest rangers. They change from an animal or a plant exposed to fire into a strong, capable character, which guards, protects and is good to others. From this point on, every session will begin with the ritual of children becoming forest rangers, after which they go out of the kindergarten into nearby nature (the forest) in order to build the forest rangers camp. By having the children take actual responsibility to build the safe place, the metaphor and image become tangible and concrete. The weak become strong; victim becomes protector. Later on, the forest rangers build power symbols which help them in their tasks and challenges, whose successful completion enables them to plant young trees and to place nesting boxes and feeding stations for birds. The forest rangers work for the good of the forest and participate in guarding the renewal and continuity of life. At the end of the process, the forest rangers return to their village and receive the blessings and appreciation of their community (the parents and the settlement).

The programme was applied as a process of 12 two-hour sessions, led by an external group counsellor from the Nature Therapy Center and the kindergarten’s regular staff. In order to provide the kindergarten teacher with suitable tools in the field, to draw her closer to the programme’s methods and to broaden her view of the process, the programme provided supervision for the kindergarten staff participating in the programme. Safe Place is a protocol programme, anchored in a reader, which includes both theory and the layout of the sessions. This layout outlines the contents and proceedings of each session and offers ways to adjust them to institutions of children with special needs and/or learning difficulties.

Research accompanying the entire programme shows connecting to the metaphor of the forest rangers; the dramatic acting-out of its characters; going out to nature, encountering and observing changes in it; the process of building the ‘forest rangers camp’ planned jointly by the children and from materials they find in the field; ceremonies and non-verbal creative work that goes on throughout the programme. All these factors helped children develop resiliency, and especially social, emotional and imaginal channels. In addition, it helped children to share painful stories, thus normalising hard experiences and strengthening feelings of being capable and connecting to hope.

The qualitative part of this study shows that the components of the story and programme form a wider effect, which enables the children to project, express and investigate diverse stories and interactions, not necessarily only those related to the war. These stories can

involve coping with disease, moving to a new home, difficulties being a newcomer to Israel, violence and parental neglect, loss, divorce, social problems, etc. In addition to the personal benefit of individuals, it appears that the programme contributed immensely to the unification of the group, reduced anxiety levels and lessened the degree of violence in the kindergarten in general. It enhanced the children's self-confidence, their ability to express their emotions and their capacity to cope with changes and uncertainty. Furthermore, it drew them close to nature and enabled them to get acquainted with it.

Following are some remarks of kindergarten teachers concerning the programme, taken from the qualitative section of the research:

L. A kindergarten teacher from Kiryat Shmona: The main contribution of the programme to the children was social and emotional. Choosing a name for the tribe and a site to build the camp on, and later actually constructing it in nature from natural materials they found taught them to cope with disagreement and to cooperate. The socio-dramatic game of animals and forest rangers helped them tell their experiences from the war, to release tension and lessen anxieties.

A. A kindergarten teacher from Tiberias: The programme succeeded in magnetising all of the children, not an easy feat in our kindergarten ... the ritual of wearing the forest ranger's belt helped the children become actual forest rangers! This was evident in their body language; they stretched tall and proud. The mutual effort of collecting boards for the camp taught them to help each other without fighting or using swearwords. The programme had a calming and unifying effect on the group.

D. A kindergarten teacher from Tiberias: The programme was very good. Drawing the forest rangers and moving in space in nature; screaming and being physically active helped frightened children overcome their fears and express their feelings. There was one child who, before the programme, I scarcely heard. After he was given the role of forest ranger he began to talk and told me what had happened to him in his home and neighbourhood. It wasn't always easy to hear...

M. A kindergarten teacher from Metula: This is an amazing programme. Building the camp in nature, the group games and the rituals we held together taught the children how to cooperate and assume responsibility. Children who were scared to go out of the kindergarten building gained confidence and overcame their fears. It was a very unique experience.

The kindergarten teacher as a key player in the development of child resiliency

As stated previously, children cope with difficulties and hardships daily, at home, in the kindergarten and in their environment. Coping with this reality becomes more difficult when there is an external security threat, which may affect the child's sense of safety and emotional stability, hamper the process of resiliency-building and impair daily functioning. In today's reality, when most children spend more waking hours in the kindergarten than at home, the kindergarten teacher and the kindergarten should play an important role not only in the cognitive development of the child, and in teaching him scholastic material, but also in attending to his emotional-social-imaginative and physical needs.

Despite the attempt to restrict the boundaries of the role of kindergarten teacher to education and leave the therapeutic aspects to professionals, it seems that a large part of this important function nevertheless falls upon the kindergarten teacher. This is so because she is the one who interacting with the child; she sees him, creates and maintains the space in which he is active day by day. It is her duty to help him part from his mother in the morning, help him cope with social difficulties in the kindergarten and bandage his wounds, if he falls in the yard. Even though teacher-training programmes in Israel include relatively few

lessons in the field, and despite the fact that the emotional-imaginative-physical topics are not part of the core curriculum instructed by the Israeli Ministry of Education, it seems that the kindergarten teacher is sensitive to these issues and feels responsible for the child as a whole. It is important to emphasise that the above statement does not imply turning the kindergarten teacher into a psychotherapist or counsellor. There are professionals trained in those fields. Nevertheless, the child's uninterrupted and continuous relationship with a significant caretaker implies an important emotional role that the kindergarten teacher has in the emotional development of the child, in general, and at times when the child copes with personal crises and hardships, in particular (Winnicott, 1995). This position does not wish to separate this role from her other ones, but rather to help her develop skills of observation and the emotional ability to pay attention to the language of resiliency in every interaction in the kindergarten. This approach seeks to enable the kindergarten teacher and the child to resume playing in the sand box, make statues out of mud, and build a camp and a tree house.

Elements of the programme that the kindergarten teacher can apply in the kindergarten

Previous sections presented the concept of resiliency and various aspects of the BASIC PH model and the Nature Therapy framework, in the context of the Safe Place programme. This section will demonstrate selected methods from the programme in a manner that invites kindergarten teachers to incorporate them in their routine kindergarten curriculum. A brief description of the method will be followed by a quote from the kindergarten teacher or the group counsellor, showing how it was applied and its impact on the children.

The healing metaphor

Lahad (2006) maintains that the use of a metaphor can change our inner reality and our conception of the outer reality. Through the metaphor people can experience their world in a new way and thereby undergo recovery processes and the creation of a new and preferable reality. The Safe Place programme and the framework story that accompanies it use numerous healing metaphors, chosen specially to help children recover from hard and traumatic experiences and develop resiliency. These are broad metaphors, which invite children to connect to and through them indirectly; tell their stories and compose their means of coping. The dramatic game of being the animals, the trees and the forest rangers facilitates this process, while building the camp in nature connects fantastic reality (in the story) to the concrete reality in life.

Building the forest rangers camp – the Building a Home in Nature Model

The Building a Home in Nature Model (Berger, 2007; Berger & McLoed, 2006) is based on the person's need to find and/or create a space for himself, where he can feel safe and protected from uncertainty and/or dangers 'outside', in nature. The premises of the model claim that the creative, active and concrete process enables therapeutic work on basic issues, as well as on one's relationship with the environment. Defining the place makes it possible for the individual to examine and define his relationship with others, his place in the group, while the interaction with nature can allow him to examine his relation to the non-human environment. His sojourn in the house, and his concern for it, elicit a feeling of belonging to the place and to the rest of the group, who took part in its construction. The process of building the home from materials found in the area teaches the participant that he is capable

of creating the reality of his life in the 'here and now'. This process gives hope and a feeling of control over reality.

S. A kindergarten teacher in Tiberias: It was amazing to see Omer (pseudonym) who was irritable and lonely, change throughout the programme and improve her social status in the kindergarten. After we became forest rangers, the group counsellor gave her a responsible function of being the ranger whose duty is to bring love and tolerance to the camp and to be in charge of all of the friends in the forest. She said that the forest rangers always looked out for each other and then the children also protected Omer. They helped her avoid a fight, and clean and decorate the camp. Omer learned how to talk to them and became part of the group. The process of building 'homes in nature' was very important, especially, because the majority of the children in the kindergarten come from broken homes. Here they had a chance to build a safe place. It helped the personal trauma of each and every child and helped them feel trusting and safe. Building the camp together drew the children closer to each other and lessened violence.

Ch. A kindergarten teacher in a special education kindergarten in Kiryat Shmona: The children waited to become forest rangers, to wear the belts and carry out the movements that would turn them into forest rangers. Testimony of the healing power of the programme was evident last week, when a sick child asked to rest in the home the children had built. The programme was assimilated into the milieu of the kindergarten. This is expressed in the children's request to have their morning snack in the camp, a space that has also become the 'book corner'. They sat calmly in this setting, they didn't call each other names and they listened attentively. I also enjoyed being a forest ranger.

Rituals

Rituals play a central role in bestowing a sense of order and safety, and cultivating a feeling of belonging, satisfaction and control over the uncontrollable (Evans, 1997; Hazan, 1992; Meged, 1998). The application of rituals can greatly help children cope with changes and internalise new behaviour codes (Berger, 2007; Berger & McLoed, 2006). The Safe Place programme incorporates various rituals: initiation rituals where, with the help of makeup, props, movements and sound, the children evolve into forest rangers; rituals that help the children make a distinction between the activities of the programme that take place outside the kindergarten building and are run by an external group counsellor, and the activities in the kindergarten headed by the kindergarten teacher. Another form of ritual can develop skills to cope with change or expand listening abilities. In the 'speaking stick' ritual, only the person holding it can speak, while the rest listen. This form of play expands communication channels, teaches one how to be tolerant and lessens violence. Everyone will hear as long as there is order and they pay attention.

Yael Paran, a group counsellor in one of the kindergartens which participated in the programme in Tiberias said:

During the 'speaking stick' ritual, the children expressed things that frighten them: 'Mother won't want me any more, there will be another war, I will get lost in the supermarket...'. I invited them to all stand up and yell their fears into the centre of the circle. They all stamped their feet and made dismissive movements with their hands. Yair yelled: 'Shoo, get lost fear', and all joined him as his cry turned into a big funny song. I walked among them and called on fear to come out. Slowly, slowly the circle calmed down, and so did the fears...

Discussion and summary

This article has introduced one way of using Nature Therapy to help children cope with difficulties, and to establish the kindergarten as a space which develops resiliency. Relating

to the Safe Place programme, it presented an integrated manner to implement elements from the BASIC PH model and the concept of ‘resiliency’ in kindergartens, while highlighting the importance of imagination, emotion, the body and social play for improving children’s ability to cope with uncertainty, stress and crisis. The article also stressed the importance of the kindergarten teacher in cultivating the children’s emotional, imaginative, physical and social abilities and psychological health, and not merely those abilities related to deductive learning and cognitive links.

To accomplish this, it is necessary to establish the kindergarten as not only ‘a preparation course for first grade’ but also, and perhaps mainly, a space which develops all of the children’s resiliency channels, allowing them to express themselves and develop and just ‘be’. Nature’s role in the process is crucial; as a space enabling play and relating to the environment, it transmits a message extending beyond time; as an entity that is larger than us, it represents the eternal and the universal. Another element this article touched upon is the attempt to use this process to empower the kindergarten teacher; the person who has direct contact with the children and has a significant influence on their development and maturing. This topic, as well as the findings of the research which accompanied the Safe Place programme, will be addressed in a separate article.

This programme has addressed issues that are quite important, though not yet treated satisfactorily, in light of the state of security in which Israel currently finds itself. It can also be relevant to other countries dealing with health, stress and the uncertainty resulting from natural or man-made disasters.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank and express my gratitude to Viviana Melman and Sarah Horodov for their comments on this article and on the Safe Place programme described in it; to all the group counsellors and kindergarten teachers who participated in the Safe Place programme; and to the Israeli Trauma Coalition – for without its subsidy this programme could not have been carried out.

Notes

1. Safe Place is a joint programme of the Nature Therapy Center and the Community Stress Prevention Center (CSPC), certified by the Educational-Psychological Services and the Ministry of Education, and subsidised by the Israel Trauma Coalition (ITC).
2. In this article, we distinguish between PTSD and a traumatic experience. The former is an anxiety disorder consisting of psychological-physical-social clinical symptoms. A person continues to experience a crisis even long after it is over, as if it is going on in the present. PTSD symptoms harm one’s functioning and the quality of his life in general. The latter, the traumatic experience, is a normal reaction phenomenon that one experiences after a crisis event. The symptoms are supposed to disappear within two to three months. If they do not, one might suspect post-trauma (Lahad & Doron, 2007; Noy, 2000).

Notes on contributors

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