

ABSTRACT - Cast Conference

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**TSUNAMI REPRESENTATION WITHIN CREATIVE EXPRESSION
WORKSHOPS FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE PRESCHOOLERS AND
THE USE OF SANDPLAY**

Play and artistic expression are commonly used in therapeutic and educational settings. Improved self esteem, expression of emotions and problem solving are the most frequently mentioned benefits of therapy methods based on creative expression. The Department of Creative Arts Therapies at Concordia University and the Transcultural Psychiatry team at the Montreal Children's Hospital implemented creative expression workshops for children, in partnership with preschools. The workshops were meant as a preventive intervention within a multiethnic neighborhood with a predominance of South Asian persons, with the aim of helping the children bridge the gap between past and present, culture of origin and host society. In kindergarten, a sandplay workshop aimed to facilitate the first entry of preschoolers in the school and to prevent psychological distress. This intervention took place coincidentally weeks after the tsunami tragedy in Asia, and although it had not been planned the sandplay activities became a place of spontaneous expression of this natural disaster. This presentation will discuss both quantitative and qualitative results of this evaluation. It will also look at the tsunami representations in the sand tray of the children, with the aim of understanding how children reacted to this event and to their family's worries being transmitted to them and how they responded to adversity through different coping strategies. The sandplay provided a space for non verbal expression. Symbolic and mythic referents, chiefly from the home culture, the host country, and the various cultures of their classmates, were used to represent their experiences, and made it easier for them to disclose loss, separation, and trauma.