

ASPECTS OF THE SANDTRAY/SAND PLAY SESSION

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However, I was the only author.)

Often in our presentation of case material we have been asked how we are able to elicit such rich and detailed information about the meaning of a sand world from its creator. First it is our ability to be authentically present with the creator in this process. Secondly, it is our extensive study, which has brought us a deep understanding of the different ways of using the sandtray/sandplay process. Thirdly, it is the cultivation of our own abilities to recognize these ways and to follow; guide and support the creator's own process that allow this.

During a sandtray/sandplay session it is important to keep in mind that this is a living, dynamic, multidimensional process, and not a linear one. The following outline is offered with the hope that it will assist sand tray practitioners in understanding this process in a cognitive framework, with the clear knowledge that this is not usually the way the journey will emerge in an actual session. It is critically important that the sandtray practitioner (witness) not manipulate, push, or force the creator of the world into this linear format. In describing the dynamic change that can occur through the use of her World Technique, Margaret Lowenfeld stated "...its power lies in the gradual revelation to the patient through his own work, accompanied by the understanding of it which is mediated to him by the therapist, of his inner experience." This mediation occurs when the witness can gently guide and support the creator's exploration of the sand world in front of them.

BRIEF REVIEW:

ASPECTS AND FUNCTIONS OF A SANDTRAY/SANDPLAY SESSION

As stated before, the various aspects of the sandtray/sandplay session do not necessarily occur in the linear format that is used for training and discussion purposes. Although some experiencing processes need to come before others, some are created simultaneously. If the *witness* (therapist) does not learn to recognize clearly what aspects are occurring, he/she is more likely to impede the sandtray/sandplay process rather than supporting it.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Description: Sandtray/Sandplay may be initiated by a *creator* (client) or a *witness* (therapist). A *creator*, in response to an invitation by the *witness* or at the *creator's* own initiative, may indicate a desire to make a world. This is a completely spontaneous type of world. During a directed world, the *witness* may want to encourage or suggest using the tray to depict a dream, life situation, internal process, or other issue that has been, or is being worked on. In this way, the *witness* provides a beginning focus or framework for the world. The experience of a directed versus spontaneous world is very different.

B. Function: To invite and encourage free and spontaneous use of the materials provided. Even if the *witness* provides the framework, the creator will proceed in an individual way and will address what is most important to the creator. The more suitable the sandtray/sandplay setup, the more inviting it will be to work in, regardless of a person's age.

C. Suggestions: The suggestion to use the sandtray needs to come naturally out of the content of the work and the immediate interaction between the *witness* and *creator*. This is not a technique to be imposed upon someone. If the *creator* does not initiate a sandplay, suggest:

1. "Would you like to work in the sand today?"
2. "Would you like to put that idea (dream, experience, situation, etc.) in the sand?"
3. "Do you feel like using the sandtray today?"

II. WORLD CREATION

A. Description: The witness takes a position across the tray from the creator. The *creator* may use dry sand, wet sand, or a combination of both, with or without miniatures, to create any form(s), scene(s), experience(s) or story (ies) desired. The *witness* facilitates this process by being fully present, attentive, and responsive, creating a harmonic resonance with the *creator* of the world.

B. Function: The sandtray/sandplay apparatus functions to evoke many modes of human experience. This includes the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual energies of experience. These modes may be present in the creation of every world, although this may not initially be apparent to the *creator* of the world. In sandtray/sandplay therapy a major function of creating a world is to project these modes of experiencing outward to be seen and worked with.

C. Suggestions for the *witness*

1. Begin with a quiet yet authentically present and interested stance. Focus primarily on the world being created, secondarily on the *creator* of the world.
2. Be responsive to verbal and nonverbal requests (to find an item, for more water).
3. Let the *creator* of the world lead.

III. SILENT OBSERVATION

Description: (Across) The witness remains across from the creator. The *witness* tells the creator to be with the world creation and to look at it silently, observing what is there and what is evoked for the *creator*. The *creator* may make revisions in the world during this time. The *witness* also observes the world silently, continuing to support the sense of harmonic resonance.

Function: To provide a nonverbal time for the *creator* to have a deeper experience with the world. It allows time for uninterrupted reflection, to observe what is there, and what thoughts,

feelings; physical sensations, etc. emerge from within. It functions to slow down the experiencing process of the *creator*. This aspect is crucial for later verbal exploration so every effort needs to be made to facilitate it.

Suggestions for the witness to encourage longer observation:

1. "Take another minute or so to be with this world."
2. "See if you can spend another minute or so in silence with this."
3. "Be with this world a little longer."
4. "Look at the world and be with it some more."

IV. REFLECTIVE/DIRECTIVE

A. Description: The witness maintains his/her position across the tray. Although the *witness* holds the entire process with a general stance of mirroring support, in this aspect the focus is even more specific. The *witness* encourages the *creator* to look at the world again, and this time to share verbally what is seen and/or what is evoked for the *creator* by the world. In keeping with continuing a sense of harmonic resonance, the *witness* reflects the body posture, tone, etc. of the *creator*. During this aspect, the *witness* verbally reflects the words or phrases of the *creator* inviting the *creator* to stay with the experience, allowing a more profound experience, and observing what associations emerge. This is done in a careful and specific way with gentle direction. It is not just parroting the words of the *creator*. A *witness's* questions during this aspect impede the flow of experience for the *creator* and disrupt the sense of harmonic resonance.

B. Function: To slow down the *creator's* process, making it less automatic or habitual. To allow the *creator* time to be more aware of what has been created and what the associations and personal meanings are.

C. Suggestions for the *witness* to initiate this aspect:

1. "Look at the world and tell me what pops into your head."
2. "Be with this world and tell me what comes up for you (comes into your mind)."
3. "Be with this world and tell me what is here and what it means for you."

Suggestions for the *witness* to continue this aspect:

1. First, reflect a word or phrase of the *creator*, using the *creator's* terminology for the world and what is in it. You may need to gently interrupt the *creator* to do this.

2. At the end of the reflection, direct the *creator* to go deeper into that experience: “Be with that (loneliness, tree, dog).” Restate the *creator*’s word for the item or experience. Then, for example, direct the *creator*: “Allow yourself to stay with that experience.”

V. ENTERING INTO THE WORLD

- A. Description: The *witness* requests permission to come and view the world with the *creator*, moving the chair to sit next to the *creator*, seeing for the first time the world from the position in which it was created. During the initial few minutes together, the world is viewed silently. The *witness* asks the *creator* to take her/him into the world to explore the experiences present from the perception of inside the world, as if the world were real. (The physical, mental, emotional and spiritual experiences, memories and associations created there are very real.)
- B. Function: The *witness* moves the focus of experiencing into the world as a means of exploring the experiences in a more profound manner. This also shifts the focus of the *creator* from “looking at the world” to “exploring from within.” This change in perspective encourages the *creator* to project as much as possible into the sandtray. The *witness* continues to hold the framework and encourage the *creator* to guide him/her.
- C. Suggestions for the *witness* to encourage the *creator* to enter the experiences inside the world:

1. “Let’s go into this world as if it were real. Where would you like to start?”
2. “Look at the world and pretend you and I can go inside and see it as if we were small.”
3. “Let’s use our imagination to become small and go inside this world to see what is there.”

VI. GUIDED EXPERIENCE FROM WITHIN THE WORLD

- A. Description: Seated side-by-side. The *witness* maintains a holding, reflective stance and may help to focus the attention of the *creator* on experiences inside the world as if the world were real. This may be facilitated by gentle and tactful questions. The *witness* helps the *creator* explore more of the *creator*’s own personal associations - physical, mental, emotional and/or spiritual. This often takes place as a dialogue about the experiences within the world with the *witness* inquiring and learning from the *creator* about the experiences present. Experiences inside the world are referred to with neutral and/or third person language, which encourage projection.
- B. Function: To broaden and deepen the awareness of the *creator* and the *creator*’s connection to the world. The *witness* also assists the *creator* to experience what is present in the world so clearly that the *creator* is able to teach the experience to the *witness*. The experience can then be understood experientially as well as verbally, and clearly mirrored back to the

creator. This connects the *creator* to the experiences that have emerged from the world in a very profound manner.

C. Suggestions for the *witness* to assist in expanding the experiences from within the world:

1. “What kind of a (use the *creator’s* name for the item) is it?”
2. “What does it see, feel, know, think will happen in the future (about some aspect of the world.)?”
3. “What is its function in the world?”

VII. LEAVING THE WORLD

A. Description: Still side-by-side. The *witness* begins to guide and support the *creator* in a shift from inside the world to an increased awareness of the *creator* looking at the world. The *witness* moves the focus of discussion to the experiences of the *creator* in looking at the world and away from the experience from within the world.

B. Function: To create a shift of focus and awareness of the *creator* toward bringing the *creator* more into present time and current reality. In this process, the *creator* begins to take what has been previously projected back into himself/herself. Here the *creator* begins to integrate the material revealed in the tray.

C. Suggestions for the *witness* to facilitate the shift away from the inside of the world.

1. “We’ll need to end (the session) soon; is there any other part of the world you want to visit?”
2. “How is this experience inside you or in your relationship to another person?”
3. “What is your experience as your look at this world?”

VIII. SUMMARY

A. Description: Still next to the *creator*. The *witness* guides the *creator* in linking experiences from within what has been created in the world to what is being created within the *creator’s* daily life. The *witness* also assists the *creator* in exploring what has been received from the *creator’s* inner wisdom (psyche) as provided by the world in front of them.

B. Function: To pull together and summarize the experiences of the world and help the *creator* focus on the connection between the experiences in the sand world and experiences in the real world.

C. Suggestions for the *witness* to facilitate the summary aspect:

1. The *witness* may briefly summarize the process of the session or the viewing of the world together. “Let’s put together what has happened here...”
2. The *witness* and the *creator* can summarize the experience together.
3. “What do you think the deeper part of you (your psyche) is saying to you right now?”

IX. FORMING A PLAN

- A. Description: Weaving the entire process together, the *creator* and *witness* verbally explore what the deeper self (psyche) indicates is needed. How to attend to this is discussed so the *creator* has a plan of action; i.e., to become increasingly attentive and aware of the patterns brought forth in the world or a specific and concrete task that has been suggested from the experiences with the world.
- B. Function: To increase active consciousness in the daily life of the *creator*. To continue to emphasize that the *creator* is creating everywhere, all the time, and may have many other choices than the habitual ones which he/she has learned.
- C. Suggestions for the *witness* to guide the forming of a plan:
1. “Look for these experiences in your daily life, notice when they come and what you do with them, both internally and externally.”
 2. “How can you create this experience (that you need more of) for yourself on a regular basis?”
 3. “How can you support this newly developing part of yourself in your daily life activities?”

X. PHOTOGRAPHING

- A. Description: Taking pictures of a world. Both Polaroid and 35mm are recommended. The *creator* is offered a camera for this purpose.
- B. Function: The *creator* is provided an opportunity to look at the world in a different way and to make a concrete representation of the world. The *creator* is encouraged to take the photo home. Photographing also assists in tracking the *creator’s* journey over time.
- C. Suggestions
1. “Would you like to photograph your world?”
 2. “It’s time to take a photograph now.”

XI. CLEARING THE WORLD

A. Description: Removing items from a world, cleaning them and replacing them on the shelves is usually done by the *witness* after the *creator* has left the room. Sometimes the *creator* will ask to take a world apart. If possible, the *creator* should be allowed to do so, or at least to remove the first several objects. In group situations, this is done by the *creator* for practical reasons.

B. Function: To clear a sandtray in preparation for the next world. When the *witness* dismantles the tray, he/she may notice items that were not seen before. These can then be recorded.

We wish to remind readers that this is a brief review of a complex and multi-dimensional process. We hope you will use it as a study guide to further your exploration and training in this field. This review is based on the work of many pioneers in this field, including Margaret Lowenfeld, Dora Kalff and Gisela De Domenico.

Selected Papers of Margaret Lowenfeld. Edited by Cathy Urwind and John Hood-Williams (p.366), Free Association Books, London 1988

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