

Dr. Seuss Meets Dr. DeDomenico - Reflections
on the Sandtray/Worldplay Experience
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Oh, the places you'll go! If you missed Gisela DeDomenico's Sandtray/Worldplay workshop July 21-23, don't even think about NOT going the next time she comes to Atlanta!

This was truly the most intensive, awe-inspiring, comprehensive workshop on the process of sandtray therapy that I have ever had the privilege of attending. Play therapy and the work involved in the child or adult accessing all the planes of consciousness in order to get in touch with both the mundane as well as esoteric parts of their "being" is most perfectly realized through the sandtray experience. According to DeDomenico, working with the sandtray "always involves a daily descent down beyond everyday life things and then an ascent into the light." She feels that "the tray is the most perfect place to pour your transference into. You get to be with yourself...you pour your own projections into it." When individuals work with the sandtray, they commonly generate alpha and delta waves which "produces a hypnotic stage where all consciousness is open....there is a river of energy that can flow during this time."

DeDomenico gently explained that we as therapists need to develop "beginner mind" and just "be" with the child or adult who is playing. This allows us to be open to what the child has to teach us. When the therapist is being judgmental, the client will sense it and will stop the work they need to do in the sand tray. The sand tray therapist helps the child best when he takes the time to experience the process of working with the sand alone in a variety of ways. One may decide to choose items and place them in the sand "as the spirit moves"; decide to deliberately act out themes such as burying, destruction, cooperation, etc.; or explore the experience of using different colors and textures of sand. Taking the time to recreate the sand world a client has just made or using a round sandtray instead of a traditional rectangular one

also is helpful to therapists in developing an inner understanding of what our clients' internal experience is when he or she uses the sand to express him/herself.

Coming to this workshop was liberating to those of us with a decade or more of psychotherapy experience. Here we learned that it would be best to be less concerned about all the things we've been taught we should do or ought to know about the process of helping clients "get better." In sandtray work, even toddlers are intuitively aware of the work they need to do in the sandtray, and if I don't know what it means as the child is playing, that really is NOT the most important thing! What does matter is that I fully join the child in the process of the child's play without letting part of my mind wander off to planning my grocery list or developing my work schedule for the week. When therapists get away from looking for interpretations of what is going on in the play, we have the time to let our psyche just flow with that of the child's. When the therapist fully believes the child's psyche can do its work, then the therapist can support the work. In order to do this, the therapist must be aware of the realm of possibilities for what the child is experiencing, thinking, and feeling when his/her hands are in the sand. The child has sensations and cognitions during their play, whether they choose to verbalize it or not. "If I act as though the child is telling me, respond within my own being with this, and respond to the child, he will be able to do his work three times faster."

Sandtray work is phenomenal for clients who don't know what to work on in therapy. Once the client begins to play, "It's very hard to keep the psyche from doing what it needs to do. The psyche will try again and again." In sandplay "the emotional body of feeling is exercised," however, "the full sandtray experience is always very cognitive."

The gift of the sandtray in helping clients with challenging problems is truly amazing. Things happen in the sandtray that cause changes in people's lives. The full range of human experience gets expressed with this medium. A popular book by Dr. Seuss ("Oh, the

places you'll go!") simplifies the possibilities as explained by Dr. DeDomenico. In this rather adult book masquerading as a children's rhyme, the reader is advised that "when things start to happen, don't worry. Don't stew. Just go right along. You'll start happening too....On and on you will hike. And I know you'll hike far and face up to your problems whatever they are....And will you succeed? Yes! You will, indeed! (98 and 3/4 percent guaranteed.)...So...You're off to Great Places! Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting. So...get on your way!"

The potential impact of using sandtray therapy in my personal life as well as that of my clients is unequivocally the most exciting therapeutic technique I have discovered in the eleven years since I completed my dissertation. Perhaps those of us with an interest in learning how to do this work better can learn together, and "oh! the places we'll go!" Let's get on our way and be off and away!