

The SandTray Network Journal



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PLAYING TO LEARN: SANDPLAY IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Review by Jill Guice

A small but dedicated group attended the screening of Alison Van Dyk's video [Playing to Learn: Sandplay in Preschool Education](#). Previously, Alison had created the video titled [The Legacy of Margaret Lowenfeld](#).

The 36-minute video highlighted Alison's sandtray therapy and developmental education program in a parochial preschool in the South Bronx where she has been working two days a week for the last ten years, seeing twelve children a week. Included in the video are several clips of therapy sessions, interviews with teachers and testimonials from parents. These parents recalled their initial fears about the therapy and honestly described how they had felt judged, and had been certain that their child had been singled out. It was encouraging to see how positively they viewed the program after seeing the wonderful changes in their children resulting from the therapy.

The video also outlined the assessment program, which Alison used, including a draw-an-animal projective test (LADS), the Lowenfeld Mosaic Test and the Lowenfeld Kaleidoblocks. These tests were used to determine the child's developmental level and whether the child needed therapy. The video shows how sandplay can assist the milestones of early childhood, which are the foundation of cognitive development. The video clearly demonstrates the value of early intervention into a child's social-emotional problems. As one who has worked with older children who have not received any early help, it is clear to me that mental health and education programs need to focus on the early years and specifically on the prevention of problems which will inevitably require huge resources later when left untreated. It also demonstrates that early intervention prevents youth violence--a goal that is perhaps uppermost in our society's current consciousness.

One strength of the video is its accessibility. Parents, lay people, and professionals will find it compelling because of the poignancy of the families' stories and the heartfelt gratitude of the parents. The film models how parents, therapists and educators can work together for the good of children. As active promoters of sandtray, I believe that it is our task to implement similar programs in our own communities. We need more cooperative strategies to obtain funding by government or private donors.

Gisela DeDomenico and I both have copies of the video and are willing either to loan these out or schedule further screenings. Screening for a group is preferable because of the synergy that arises from a group watching together. Alison lives and works on the East Coast and is available to members who live in that region. Please email Alison (alison@sandplay.net) or visit her website www.sandplay.net or email me (jsguice@usa.net) to discuss further how you can spread the word.

BRIDGING THE WORK IN THE PLAY ROOM WITH LIFE AT HOME

By Julia Richardson

This month I attended Gisela's Dynamic Expressive and Sandtray-Worldplay Play Therapy Intensive in Oakland. I want to share my experience of bridging of the work in the sandtray with returning home.

This morning my husband Mark suggested we walk over to look at the new subdivision being built right next to our neighborhood. Walking out into the streets and the houses around me, I began to feel myself as moving through a sand tray world, named "My Neighborhood". I was seeing with the eyes of an observer looking into a tray and also experiencing being in the tray simultaneously.

Dirt had been pushed around by equipment, but not yet formed into the final product. Roads had been etched out of the dirt. Frames of the houses were in different states of completion, and three carpenters were hammering nails and applying siding to one of the houses. I looked up above to see the world from that view.

I imagined someone above me placing each structure into the earth. I could see how the mature trees of cypress and sycamores had been carefully placed in organized rows, following the street pattern. I could see how the new structures were being placed up against existing homes, whose facades had been painted by the people living in them. I then began to wonder about the requirement for and a result of intense intimacy. He defines **intimacy** as being the acute awareness of our fundamental loneliness and separateness from others, as a process of knowing oneself in the presence of one's partner and of recognizing the other's immutable

separateness. In practice, this means that a person is non-reactive to the other's reactivity, is not infected by the other's anxiety, has clear boundaries, and is able to maintain a non-anxious presence in the face of the other's anxiety. According to Schnarch, in order not to absorb a partner's anxiety, one needs to develop **self-validated intimacy** rather than **other-validated intimacy**; a person relies on her/his own knowing that people, both those who would be moving in and those who were already living there. How would their play be similar and different?

We walked passed an existing home, which had a new house being built right behind it. A man came out of the garage of the existing home. I began to wonder, "What was his experience walking outside of his home today and seeing the new structure that wasn't there just a week ago?"

I began to see everything in my view as a part of Gisela's shelves. I was thinking, "Yes, the trees came from that shelf and the houses come from the house shelf." I could feel myself in the play of my life as I looked and was curious about the play that would develop in the structures of each of these new homes.

Wow, I sure got a new perspective of this morning's tray. I will continue to play with it and see where the journey takes me.

BIBLIOGRAPHY CORNER

New Books Review

By Gisela Schubach De Domenico, PhD.

This year Norton Publications has published a very concise and stimulating new text about Sandtray Therapy. Written by Barbara Labovitz Boik and E. Anna Goodwin, it is entitled *Sandplay Therapy: A Step by Step Manual for Psychotherapists of Diverse Orientations*.

While incorporating many of the methods of Sandtray-Worldplay, it offers other innovative approaches to the use of the sandtray with various populations and in different settings. It is very practical. I suggest that you begin to dip into this text, which will enrich the repertoire of sandtray/sandplay therapists, regardless of their theoretical orientation.

Congratulations to Barbara and Anna!

Reviewing Texts from the Past Emphasis on the educational setting

Allan, J. and Berry, P. (1987). *Sandplay* (special issue: counseling with expressive arts). *Elementary School Guidance and School Counseling* 21 (4):300-6.

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Belzer, C.A. (1991). The Effects of Sandplay in a Classroom Setting with Children Identified as Learning Disabled. Unpublished Master's thesis, Pacific Oaks College, Pasadena, CA

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Noyes, M. (1981). *Sandplay Imagery: An aid to Teaching Reading*. Academic Therapy 17(2): 231-7.

Zimet, S. & Farley, G. (1991) Eds: Day Treatment for Children with Emotional Disorder Vol. I: A Model in Action. NY: Plenum Press.

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JOHN HOOD-WILLIAMS AND THE SANDTRAY

Selection and commentary

By Gisela Schubach De Domenico, PhD

In the 1920's Margaret Lowenfeld opened the doors of her clinic in London and developed the Lowenfeld World Technique. During the next few decades she trained child psychotherapists, lectured extensively and conducted clinical, observational research about children's sandplay and other play modalities. The book *Play in Childhood*, (available from the Association of Play Therapy in Fresno, California) is still one of the finest and candidly descriptive texts about sandplay and play therapy. During that time, a number of psychologists, psychotherapists, and educators came to study her techniques of child treatment. Each adopted the Lowenfeld World Technique to suit his/her ideology, and own style of research and clinical work.

John Hood-Williams, Lowenfeld's senior student, introduced Lowenfeld and her techniques in an unpublished manuscript that he shared with me in 1987. He had worked with me on my extensive sandplay research project in which I had validated some of Lowenfeld's theories and principles, while also discovering further complexities and differentiations in the nature and the evolution of human consciousness, the distinctly different realms of reality accessed during sandplay, and some new ways of effectively using the sandtray in clinical practice. John wrote:

"The toys are non-standard, being what can be bought in the shops, and a collection can be added to over the years. Ideally one tries to provide miniatures of everything that exists in the real world, but as a minimum there must be human figures, domestic and wild animals, transport, trees, bushes, fences, and these must be augmented by things like bricks, buckets, spades, tubing, funnels, and something like

plastecine which can be used to make images not provided....

"The child is introduced to the World material as a way of communicating about the 'pictures he has in his head to do with his thoughts and feelings', and he then has free choice about what he will select from the range of toys and how he will use them in the tray. When he has finished making a 'World,' the therapist needs then to explore sensitively the meaning for the child of what he has made in the sandtray, both as a whole and in its component parts - this is an integral part of the technique.

"In summary Lowenfeld came to believe that thinking and the need to make sense of experience were present from the beginning of life, but as words are not available yet as tools for thought, the infant thinks in images. This image-based thought is lawful, though its laws are not the same as those that govern verbal thinking. The most important characteristic of pre-verbal thought is the way it groups elements together...In pre-verbal thought, groupings are made on the basis of only one shared property, often in terms of sensation, feelings and perceptions as they are experienced subjectively ... the basis for the grouping may be: 'how do these things make me feel?' Margaret Lowenfeld called these agglutinations that result from this process 'clusters'...

"I have found that children welcome the World as a tool for communication, and seem to have a quite natural affinity for it. It is as if they instinctively recognize its possibilities for giving expression to their own imagery, and the images they produce when using it convey meaning in a way that is unique, vivid, immediate and personal, something hardly any child can do in language...

"Central was her concept of the nature of psychic energy...she used the term 'E'...The whole psychesoma is energized by 'E'... it flows in three channels. The first of these is the physical channel--at the start of life it activates growth and development, later it finds expression in the musculature. The second is the emotional channel--the whole affective life. Lastly there is the intellectual channel--the whole thinking life. 'E,' like electricity, is neutral in and of itself, and like electricity cannot be known directly but only implied by its manifestations.

"In one of the analogies Margaret Lowenfeld would liken 'E' to a river which divided into three channels. A blockage in one channel can either produce a swampy bog in that area, or a stronger flow in other channels. Releasing a blockage in a channel can result in a steadier flow in that channel, and can relieve pressure in the other channels. The physical, emotional and intellectual functioning of the child forms an interrelated whole, where blockages in one area can produce difficulties in other areas. Conversely, undoing blockages in one area can relieve symptoms appearing in another. Unexpended 'E' produces tension and discomfort and often is experienced subjectively as a dangerously explosive

pent-up feeling which is often symbolized by images of circular whirling and of resultant disasters.”

He continues to talk about the communication between the child and the therapist in the play space: In any communication there are always three elements--the person making the communication, the message itself, and the recipient of the communication In regards to the child something from his inner world is what he needs to communicate--and as inner worlds are largely private, personal and idiosyncratic while the symbol-systems needed to communicate about them are public and general, there can never be a perfect fit between the inner world and the outer expression ... The message then has to be given form ... at best that will be a close approximation ... Finally, the message must be received and convey meaning to the other person, and this involves a creative act on the part of the recipient; he must create meaning for himself from the items of the message. He can only do this in as far as the items in the message chime with his own inner world, and the private meanings he attaches to these items...so that the sense he makes of it all will always be somewhat different from the sense the sender of the message intended--at best quite close, at worst a total misunderstanding. To illustrate this, let us imagine that a child in therapy makes a breastlike mound in the sandtray with the toy figure of a man on a bicycle on top of it, said by him to be energetically bumping up and down. Somewhere 'inside' him is an image, and this is as close as he can get to expressing it at this moment with the material available. The therapist must look at this image, must also be sensitive to the feelings that were expressed while it was being made, and must pay attention to what the child says about it. In this way he has received the message through as many channels as he can. He is then faced with trying to understand what it is that the child is trying to communicate. The sense that he makes of the event will depend on his whole personality, his training, his experience, preferred ways of conceptualizing and a host of similar factors. How he responds, whether it be silently within his own mind, or in terms of something he says or does, will depend on the totality of the factors that make up his approach.

John Hood-Williams, 1987

SANDPLAY/WORLDPLAY GIVES BIRTH TO AN ARTIST

By Oni Friedman

In 1994, after I had been studying with Gisela De Domenico for several years, I decided to take a workshop with Gail Danchig on creating sandtray figures in clay. I had a wonderful time with Gail. I enjoyed putting my hands in clay, and I was encouraged by what I was able to do. After I took some classes in Berkeley, my work evolved. I discovered a latent talent that was to bring me great satisfaction and joy.

Sometimes it's difficult for a sandplay practitioner to find certain figures in the market place. For example, I wanted to see images of average and large sized women

relaxing, being sexy, being joyful, so I made a series of women in chairs entitled "A Chair of Her Own." Other small pieces included a masturbating man which I titled "Thinking of You," a gay couple in bed, two women sitting closely in dialogue, and a dancing couple entitled "Hot Robust Heteros." Recently I have focused more on couples. I have been asked to do pieces that represent women with mastectomies and lesbian couples. These tiny images are playful, lighthearted and clinically useful.

Making these figures has improved my self-image and acceptance of my own body. For many years I have had a deep interest, both personally and professionally, in body image. Even though I feel quite comfortable in my own body, it's difficult not to internalize society's standards of beauty. I like my figures to look like they have appetite and strength and substance, and I have found it to be profoundly healing to experience a kind of loveliness in these zaftig creations that have come through me.

Over these years I have worked in clay, in wax/bronze and in polymer clay, and I now mostly use polymer clay in my sandtray figures. I have also gone on to create larger ceramic sculptures. Recently I have been inspired by Sandtray Worldplay to create story boxes that use my miniatures to depict my own experiences. I am not a very good entrepreneur, and as yet have not created a website or a product line. Frankly, I don't want to limit my creativity or spontaneity or to burn out on an activity that gives me so much juiciness. I sell my work privately at conferences, annual sales and at trainings. For those of you who have bought my pieces, I'd love to know how they are being used and especially how they are holding up.



The Story Box of My Own Experiences

By Oni Freeman

Return to the Journal Page:

Select Journal Vol 4 No 2 Summer 2000 Sandtray Network Journal to read the remaining articles indexed at the beginning of this documents.

Note that some of the vendor and author information may be outdated

This Journal has been posted on the Sandtray Network Website in 2006 in a continuing effort to make available information about the many different ways of using Sandplay – Sandtray – and Sandtray-Worldplay to improve the quality of life, to promote opportunity, education, growth, health, and interpersonal relationships.

The Sandtray Network Council of 2006:

Carol Azzarro; Gisela Schubach De Domenico; Auguste Elliott; Mary Herza; Julia Richardson; Elaine Whittman

Website conversion of Journal: Gisela De Domenico

ReVitalization of Website: Elaine Whittman

The current Sandtray Network Council has chosen to serve the Network until 2007.

We leave the web publications available for the general public and professionals who wish to learn more about the sandtray. Unless new leadership emerges we will close the organization. We hope you enjoy the site and share these writings with others.

When using these materials in whole or in part kindly always cite the authors, the Journal, and The Sandtray Network Website.

We appreciate your integrity.

Whenever you derive financial benefit from these writings we ask that you donate 5% or more to a non-profit organization, a community clinic or training program that offers sandtray/sandplay/or sandtray-worldplay in the spirit of the Sandtray Network's Mission and Objectives

The Sandtray Network Mission

- We actively promote learning, healing and creativity through the use of the sandtray.
- We share and witness authentic experiences of the human psyche in the sandplay journey:
- We offer substantive presentations and experiential explorations at our community meetings
- We inspire and develop the exchange of ideas and information in our journal, on-line, and at our conferences.



The Sandtray Network Objectives are:

- To support the many ways of using the sandtray
- To promote the use of the sandtray for the benefit of the local, national and global communities
- To compile a resources and reference library for the use of the community-at-large
- To disseminate information about sandtray methods to the greater community
- To implement the use of the sandtray in a wide variety of settings
- To explore the use of sandtray as a personal and interpersonal communication tool to bridge ethnic and cross-cultural barriers