



Sand Tray as a Mode of Professional Engagement

April Duncan

Tulane University/BMH Connect
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA


Sand therapy is often seen as an intervention only used in clinical settings. However, clinicians can benefit from using sand tray as a mode of professional engagement and growth beyond the clinical setting. Professionals can use sand therapy for professional engagement and growth, engaging with other professionals in mentorship, support, and networking, as well as processing interactions with colleagues with differing values and beliefs. The application of Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) can serve as a foundation for professional mentorship and engagement.

RCT is a counseling theory that emphasizes relational connections and sociocultural influences (Cormier et. al, 2023). The guiding principles of connections and disconnections in RCT can be applied to sand therapy for professional growth and development. From the perspective of RCT, humans are relational beings who grow toward and through connection throughout their lives (Cormier et. al, 2023). Sand therapy can be instrumental in building professional connections and exploring disconnections. Specific miniatures (Appendix A) may provide additional value in the development of symbolism and metaphor within the sand.

Mentoring relationships focus on psychological support and professional development (Johnson et. al, 2000). Advanced sand therapists can use sand therapy to mentor novice practitioners in navigating career decisions and growth. Sand therapy can facilitate career clarity, awareness, and decision-making (Sangganjanavanich & Magnuson, 2011). Mentors can use sand therapy prompts (Appendix B) to assist burgeoning sand practitioners in identifying career goals and plans. The same support can be given in larger settings within peer consultation groups. Providing a network of peers can be particularly beneficial for sand practitioners in international and/or rural areas (Paulson et. al, 2015). This can be achieved through virtual consultation groups that assist in supporting and elevating sand practitioners around the world.

On the contrary, acute disconnections naturally occur in every authentic relationship

where individuals experience empathic failures when they feel disrespected, misunderstood and/or disappointed (Cormier et. al, 2023). In sand, both individuals within the harmed relationship can explore how

April Duncan  ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2114-6335
Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to
April Duncan at: generalinfo@bmhconnect.com
There are no known conflicts of interest to disclose.



WORLD JOURNAL FOR SAND THERAPY PRACTICE

PROMOTING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SAND THERAPY

their values and beliefs may have contributed to the interaction. Exploring sociocultural influences and applying cultural humility in sand can allow sand professionals to self-reflect on contentious interactions. Sociocultural influences play a role in how we present to and exist within an evolving multicultural world that privileges certain identities while marginalizing another (Cormier et al., 2023). Sand professionals can use sand to identify their own cultural values and beliefs while also using empathy to understand how conflicting values within problematic interactions as the first step to repair in the relationship.

Cultural humility includes respect and lack of superiority toward an individual's cultural experiences and background (Jones & Branco, 2020). Engaging with professionals with differing values and beliefs may lead to conflict. It is important for all parties to exhibit cultural humility when managing conflictual professional relationships. Sand therapy prompts (Appendix C) can be used to promote self-exploration after difficult interactions with colleagues that may have resulted in disruptions within the professional relationship. The healing power of sand, symbolism, and metaphor can facilitate an important first step to mending ruptured relationships.

Sand practitioners of all levels of expertise can find value in using sand to explore professional growth, connections, disconnections, and mentorship. This unique use of sand can help sand professionals deepen their understanding of themselves and their values. It can also serve as a key tool in making powerful discoveries that can assist them in their professional relationships and interactions beyond the sand tray. The sand professionals' own experiences within the sand can strengthen their sand therapy skills and, in turn, advance the field of sand therapy with more competent and connected professionals.

References

- Cormier, S. R., Manson, J. L., & Overley, L. C. (2023). Relational-cultural play therapy supervision: Integrating RCT into the supervision of play therapists. *International Journal of Play Therapy, 32*(3), 135–145. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000194>
- Jones, C. T., & Branco, S. F. (2020). The interconnectedness between cultural humility and broaching in clinical supervision: Working from the multicultural orientation framework. *The Clinical Supervisor, 39*(2), 178–189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07325223.2020.1830327>
- Paulson, L. R., Casile, W. J., & Jones, D. (2015). Tech it out: Implementing an online peer consultation network for rural mental health professionals. *Journal of Rural Mental Health, 39*(3–4), 125–136. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rmh0000034>



WORLD JOURNAL FOR SAND THERAPY PRACTICE

PROMOTING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SAND THERAPY

Sangganjanavanich, V. F., & Magnuson, S. (2011). Using sand trays and miniature figures to facilitate career decision making. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 59(3), 264–273.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2011.tb00068.x>

Appendix A

Sand Miniatures for Professional Growth

Spiritual/mystical/fantasy:	Chimera (3-headed dragon), centaur, Cerberus (3-headed dog), forest elder, Venus fly trap, Grim reaper, evil queen, phoenix, zombie, devil, angel, aliens and superheroes
Weather related:	Tornado, storms, lightning, rainbow, sun, volcano, wave, explosion
Transportation:	Traffic signs, school bus, Titanic, traffic cones, life preserver, road, fire truck, ambulance, raft, rowboat, anchor, helicopter, and tank
Animals/insects:	Butterfly, caterpillar, ants, rat, black sheep, vultures, snake, caged bird, peacock, sloth, hummingbird, owl, chameleon, bear, tortoise, mouse, shark, elephant, bull, and killer whale
Landscape:	Cave, fire, bridge, fences, cactus, grass, transitioning tree, lotus flower, wise old tree, stone paths, walls, and stone bench
People/occupation:	Ringmaster, circus people, cavemen, king, queen, judge, firefighter, doctor, police officer, graduate, army men & women, construction worker, pirate and babies
Miscellaneous:	Social media icons, tablet, cell phone, laptop, hearts, grenade, bomb, peace sign, rubber brain, plastic eyeball, globe, telescope, cage, handcuffs and coffin

Appendix B

Sand Therapy Prompts for Mentorship & Peer Consultation Groups

- (1) If you could wake up and have the career you'd like, what would that world look like?
- (2) Create a world showing your 2-year plan. Now create a sand tray with your 5-year plan.
- (3) Create a world with your dream career
- (4) Create a world showing your way of connecting with others
- (5) Create a world showing your ideal mentoring relationship
- (6) Create a world showing your plan to connect with others



WORLD JOURNAL FOR SAND THERAPY PRACTICE

PROMOTING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SAND THERAPY

Appendix C

Sand Therapy Prompts to Navigate Professional Conflicts

- (1) Create a world that reflects your cultural values and beliefs
- (2) Create a world showing a time your cultural values & beliefs clashed with a professional
- (3) Think of a time you had a conflict with another professional. Create a world showing the story from their point of view
- (4) Create a world showing your areas of needed growth, mistakes, and limitations
- (5) Create a world that reflects a time you handled conflict appropriately
- (6) Create a world showing your plan for repair within a professional relationship

Original content from this work may be used under the terms of the <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>
Any further distributions of this work (noncommercial only) must maintain attribution to the author(s), the title of the work,
journal citation, and DOI.