



WORLD JOURNAL FOR SAND THERAPY PRACTICE

PROMOTING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SAND THERAPY

Finding Your Theoretical Home in Sand Therapy

Daniel Sweeney

NW Center for Play Therapy Studies
George Fox University
Newberg Campus, OR, USA

Conference Description: It is the presenter's perspective that all sand therapists- indeed, all therapists- should be theory based. This does not call for being theory bound, but rather recognizes that effective theory stems from a theoretical foundation, upon which therapeutic techniques can then be employed. This experiential workshop will explore both theory and practice in the implementation of sand therapy, with focus on workshop attendees moving closer to, or more established in, a "theoretical home." Theory provides sand therapists a needed conceptual framework for describing client needs, and subsequently determining what intervention would be most appropriate and helpful in the treatment process. Just as phenomenology acknowledges client perspectives, it also applies to counselor perspective, and thus establishes the technical toolbox for working with each client.

This honors the application of theories and techniques to the client's soul and also reflects Jung's (1928) encouragement: "Learn your theories as well as you can, but put them aside, when you touch the miracle of the living soul." (P. 361) Exploration of sand counseling theory will include both presented material and experiential sand therapy exercises. Attendees should plan to have 25-30 sand miniature figures available.

The workshop was based on the presenter's perspective that all sand therapists – indeed, all therapists – should be theory-based. This does not call for being theory-bound but rather recognizes that effective therapy stems from a theoretical foundation upon which therapeutic techniques can be employed. Theory provides sand therapists with a conceptual framework for describing client needs and subsequently determining the most appropriate and helpful interventions in the treatment process. Just as phenomenology acknowledges client perspectives, it also applies to the counselor perspective and thus establishes the technical toolbox for working with each client.

Most sand therapists are familiar with Jung's (1928) encouragement: "Learn your theories as well as you can, but put them aside when you touch the miracle of the living soul" (p. 361). While this is a fine quote, often referred to both sand therapists and psychotherapists in general, it was pointed out that the first

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Daniel Sweeney at: dsweeney@georgefox.edu

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phrase in this sentence has not been appropriately prioritized – thus *learning your theories as well as you can*. In fact, this can create a mindset that eschews theory altogether. It was further asserted that being theoretically eclectic is inappropriate, and theoretical consistency creates a platform for therapists to be technically eclectic based on a consistent theoretical platform.

Sweeney's (2011) comments were initially discussed – that theory is indeed important, but that theory without technique is basically philosophy. Additionally, while techniques may be quite valuable, but techniques without theory are reckless and have the potential to be damaging. In the practice of sand therapy, questions proposed by Sweeney (2011) can be helpful:

All therapists are encouraged to ponder some questions regarding employing techniques: (a) Is the technique developmentally appropriate? [which presupposes that developmental capabilities are a key therapeutic consideration]; (b) What theory underlies the technique? [which presupposes that techniques should be theory- based]; and (c) What is the therapeutic intent in employing a given technique? [which presupposes that having specific therapeutic intent is clinically and ethically important]. (p. 236)

The workshop then moved to discussing Watts (1993) suggestions for developing a personal theory of counseling. These include:

- Step one: exploring personal values and convictions about human beings and life in general.
- Step two: exploring major theories of counseling in relationship with one's own personal values and beliefs.
- Step three: examining the selected counseling theory extensively, looking to understand what one agrees/disagrees with.
- Step four: examining the use of the theory, considering the extent in which the theory works in helping clients.
- Step five: integrating selected (and consistent) aspects of other theories into the chosen theory
- Step six: transforming into one's own unique and personal theory of counseling

We also had a brief conversation about applying some principles of the Association for Play Therapy (APT, 2022) to sand therapy. Replacing the word "play" with "sand", the following principles were emphasized: 1) Members have a unique and distinctive dedication to and preparation in the theories and techniques of (*sand*) therapy; 2) (*Sand*) therapists are encouraged to respect theoretical orientations to (*sand*) therapy that diverge from their own; and 3) (*Sand*) therapists should strive to be aware of and always acknowledge the traditions



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and practices of other professional disciplines. This underscores the importance of not only operating from a theoretical base, but also honoring other theoretical perspectives.

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