

**SANDPLAY – Interview with Rosalind Heiko, Ph.D., ISST, CST-T  
Interviewed by Dr. Eliana Gil**

Hi Roz: Thanks so much for agreeing to do this interview. I appreciate the opportunity to clarify some questions I've had for a while, regarding sandplay and other forms of sand therapy.

***1. First of all, would you give us a brief definition of sandplay?***

**Dr. Roz:** When a client - boy or girl, man or woman - works in sand, water and miniatures, I believe that they undertake a hero or heroine's journey. They go into the sand, dry or wet or flooded, to find the unique wisdom and resources within themselves to meet challenges and face the pain in their life. They do this through creating sand forms themselves, and with the miniature figures, choosing from hundreds of them. The miniatures in my office on the walls and floor form the "cave of my psyche" which I present to the client for their use. I offer clients a safe and sheltered space, as Sandplay's founder Dora Kalff named it, and a mindful relationship of trust and respect. Sandplay is creative, symbolic play, using symbols in the service of the imagination to aid in the process of individuation, of a path to a more mature perspective and understanding.

The Sandplay process involves inviting the client to choose from amongst the miniatures to make a picture in the sand, representing their world, their issues, their feelings, or possibly a dream. The therapist provides a "safe and protected space", sitting quietly nearby but without directing the clients' efforts or offering an interpretation of the tray contents. According to Kalff, the clinician provides this space by nonverbally holding and containing the client's emotional states and conflicts. The sandtray is left intact when the client leaves the session. The therapist then takes slides of the sandtray in order to assist in diagnosis, treatment planning, and general tracking of the therapeutic progress of the client. Supervision and continued training in Sandplay interpretation is vital to this process of understanding the client's use, placement and personal meaning regarding the symbolic miniatures in the sandtray.

***2. Could you say a little bit about what differentiates sandplay from other forms of sand therapy? What makes it unique?***

**Dr. Roz:** Developed by Dora M. Kalff of Switzerland, Sandplay® is a trademarked method of therapy in the United States since Kalff began presenting lectures in California in the '60's. Sandplay evolved through Kalff's combining and refining C. G. Jung's work, the sand tray World Technique developed by Margaret Lowenfeld at her Institute of Child Psychology in Britain, and Tibetan Buddhist principles through Kalff's friendship and support of the Dalai Lama and his monks. Sandplay is typically used in conjunction with other therapies,

including talk therapy, art therapy, consultation and traditional play therapy. Only Kallfian work in the sand is referred to as Sandplay; other therapies using sand are referred to as sand tray work (see Gisela De Domenico's Sand Tray World Play or Lowenfeld's World Technique, etc.). Sandplay is also distinguished by a strong emphasis on the personal process of the therapist in the sand (i.e., Sandplay therapy experienced first by the clinician, and then used by that clinician in therapy with clients). Sandplay is a more nondirective, as opposed to directive, therapeutic method of allowing the client to work through unconscious processes and difficulties and find the "treasure within" themselves in their life journey.

**3. Please describe the "process" that sand play therapists complete as part of their training to become a sandplay therapist?**

**Dr. Roz:** There are several levels of membership: Sandplay Practitioner, Certified Member and Certified Teaching Member. There are also four areas of training: 1) Personal Process, where therapists must complete their own work in the sand, now mandated to be 30 trays in 40 sessions. Some therapists are going to finish their "process", their own work, in 15 trays, some in 45. In my opinion, that is a controversial number of trays, since it is impossible to mandate authenticity of a process with a specific number of trays. (Before the guidelines were changed, therapists worked with their process therapist and both decided when that process was complete.) 2) Training hours in Jungian theory and practice, and specific topics in Sandplay practice. 3) Group and Individual Consultation; and 4) Writing two symbol papers (of about ten pages each) and one case write-up of about 50 pages, which is read by trained case readers (two US and one international reader). The certification journey takes a number of years, dedication, and both willingness and curiosity to spend time with deep thoughts and new terminology. I received my certification as a Teaching Member in 2000, before the "new" guidelines took effect. It's probably the equivalent in cost and time to getting a master's degree.

**4. One of the curiosities about sandplay therapy is whether or not Jungian principles are always a part of how sandplay is conducted? I have always thought that when someone called themselves a sandplay therapist, they were suggesting their Jungian orientation. Is that correct?**

**Dr. Roz:** I believe so. Many Sandplay therapists are Jungian analysts. Not me. I am first a school psychologist, from a hybrid program at Syracuse U that combined clinical and school psychology back in the Dark Ages. So my background is in developmental child psych, with a large helping of play therapy. Becoming a Sandplay therapist requires a lifelong fascination with myth, legends, fairy tales, storytelling, symbols and a hefty portion of Jungian-oriented belief in the wholeness and unity of the Self in human development.

In Jungian terms, when the Self is allowed to emerge (i.e., in trays which symbolically represent the “constellation of the Self”, where self-symbols and the numinous quality of self-expression are present), more peaceful and centered representations emerge. During this process the client confronts and integrates her or his shadow material (that part of ourselves we are not yet ready to acknowledge or integrate) and the tension of opposite needs, emotions and experiences within what Joseph Campbell referred to in story and myth as the hero's journey. The process of creating the sandtray enables the client to nonverbally express both conscious and unconscious material. Emotions and difficulties can be worked through and various aspects of these conflicts or personality issues can be integrated. The result can help bring clients to a state of “wholeness”. Always, of course, with the proviso that continued processing and awareness of emotional material can bring deeper and more meaningful spiritual understanding of ourselves and our world at the different stages and challenges of our lives.

***5. Sandplay therapy has often been thought of as difficult to access. In other words, I often hear colleagues talking about sandplay therapy as a "closed system," with rather rigorous entry criteria. How do you think of this issue? I know there are relatively few certified sandplay therapists in the world, and again, what I hear when I travel the country, is how difficult it is to find supervisors and get the required training.***

**Dr. Roz:** I agree. When I complained (softly) early on in my program to a Sandplay teacher about having to travel so far to get my training and process done, I was told that every important journey has a sacrifice. I was lucky to work with Creative Goddess Yvonne Pennington in Georgia as my process teacher. But it was a big deal to travel overnight, pay for a hotel and work with Yvonne for two hours on a Friday afternoon, then get up early Saturday morning to work two more hours of tray and dream work, then go back home that afternoon to my husband and two (often irritable) young children. By the way, my husband also gave me the incredible gift of three weeks studying in Switzerland in Frau Kalff's home with her son, Buddhist and Sandplay Teacher Martin Kalff. One of the most amazing experiences of my life. But that's another story...Now, I suggest to my therapist colleagues interested in Sandplay that they think of the cost, not sacrifice. Today, Voice over IP services have revolutionized online Sandplay training. I can work with colleagues interested in certification/case consultation in Japan, Thailand, South Africa, France, Romania...even as far as the West Coast (just joking, they have the most Sandplay therapists of any of those 100 certified members!). The certification process is more akin now to analytic training. Is it worth it? Not for everyone. But I wouldn't trade my journey for anything. I worked to get my teaching membership for myself, for the rewards of deep work and an understanding of what being the heroine of my own life means. I believe that the bravest people work in sand. Therapists and clients alike.

There's no hiding there...you just can't get away from yourself. It's a humbling experience, to do your own work in the sand, with a compassionate therapist accompanying you. For me, it was totally worth the tears, and the laughter.

***6. In the art therapy community there is active dialogue about art as therapy or art as adjunctive to therapy. How do you think of sandplay vis a vis that question.***

**Dr. Roz:** Some of my colleagues actually refer their clients to me in this way. It is really hard for a client to negotiate working with two therapists in a deep way. Possible, but not easy. Everything comes back to the temenos, the container. How this is framed with the client, and how and if the two therapists can work together. Sandplay emphasizes the co-transference, the relational field between the therapist and client. I'd be interested to learn more about this dialogue from my art therapist colleagues.

***7. You have recently created a wonderful new DVD about sandplay therapy. Can you tell people what prompted you to make this tape and what plans do you have for more?***

**Dr. Roz:** I wanted to make a DVD that explained what working in sand was about, and showcased two adult and two child/teen clients, so therapists could see what a session looked like (sped up). Two students at NC State University worked to film the clients with all the enthusiasm and passion of which they were capable. The clients were changed in the full 50 minute sessions by having the lens focus on them, as well as working with the figures and sand and water. It was a marvelous experience. But what I'm most proud of...and humbled by - was the brief interview with a parent of a child client. I started the interview by startling both the mother and myself in saying, "I really messed up." She agreed (quite heartily, I might add), stating, "I don't give second chances, ever". Why then, when I messed up an appointment time, did she bring her child back to work with me? "Because it wasn't a direct talk therapy...(it was) getting to the heart of the problem...she could be observed and understood...because I see the answers in her, I have my daughter back, front and center." That makes my heart soar.

I plan on making a series of DVD's about the therapeutic relationship, about using symbolic play. One at least, hopefully, with you, in showcasing our styles with training therapists in consultation, and also talking about how hard we work to maintain the therapeutic container and relationship. I want to acknowledge that my mistakes allow me to be a better human being, a better friend, a better teacher in these DVD's. And how working mindfully can bridge those mistakes and turn them into therapeutic gold.

**8. Thank you Roz, for your candor in talking with us today.**

**Dr. Roz:** Your support and generosity, Eliana, means so much to me. I am grateful for our friendship and colleague-ship. You embody the compassion and heart for the work we all strive to do with our disenfranchised and traumatized clients.

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**Rosalind Heiko, Ph.D., ISST, CST-T** is a psychologist and Sandplay teacher who has been invited to train internationally and nationally. Her forthcoming chapter on “Self-Care and Preventing Clinical Burnout” will be published in 2015 in “Integrative Family Play Therapy: A New Paradigm” (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers). Dr. Heiko’s chapter on “Spontaneous Storytelling and the Sandplay Journey of an Emotionally Despairing Girl” was published in 2010 in Dr. Eliana Gil’s book: Healing interpersonal trauma: honoring children’s natural reparative capacities (Guilford Press). Dr. Roz is also published in the Journal of Sandplay Therapy. Dr. Heiko is Director of NC Sandplay Training and a past Board Member of the Sandplay Therapists of America. She is the Director of Pediatric & Family Psychology, P.A., in Cary, NC. She has worked with children, adolescents and families professionally since 1983. She is an Approved Teaching Consultant in Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH) and is Level II certified in EMDR, also holding national certification in School Psychology (NCSP). She believes wholeheartedly in the power of laughter and the delight that Sandplay brings to her clients and trainees. You can reach her through her website: [www.drheiko.com](http://www.drheiko.com) or email at [info@drheiko.com](mailto:info@drheiko.com).