Fostering Personal Growth for Counsellors through Transformative Pedagogy and the Learning of an Experiential Play-Based Therapy

by

Madeleine De Little

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the Arts Education Program Faculty of Education

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Fall 2017

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or

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or has conducted the research

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Abstract

The impact of learning a new experiential play-based therapy on the personal growth of counselling students and qualified counsellors is explored in this study. Extensive research exists on personal growth opportunities for practicing counsellors within the context of group work, personal therapy, supervision and ongoing professional development. However, few studies focus on the integration of personal growth opportunities afforded through the learning of counselling strategies and approaches in counsellor education programs at the graduate level. Addressing this gap, the study draws on transformative pedagogy theory and practice as a way of understanding and fostering personal growth opportunities among both practicing and student counsellors. A qualitative action research methodology was used which draws upon the researcher's own experience as both counsellor and counsellor educator. Participants, aged 22 to over 65 years, included three students in a full-time master's counsellor education program, one in a full-time master's in art therapy program, three students in a part-time master's counsellor education program, and 10 qualified counsellors at master's or diploma level working with children and youth in the field. The workshop component of the research, which was based on the principles of transformative pedagogy, involved a training course in Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray (NSST). The interview component consisted of individual in-depth interviews with participants using NSST to elicit responses plus a follow-up questionnaire after the course was completed. The process and the emergent outcomes of the participants' experiences were examined using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Each interview was video-taped and photographs were taken to document the participants' process of engaging with NSST. IPA provided insights into how personal growth was experienced and how this in turn emerged as personal growth opportunities, which were both fostered and interpreted through a transformative pedagogical approach. There were two main findings. Most participants reported experiencing personal growth opportunities and these were manifested in a variety of ways. Further, the majority of participants reported experiencing one or more of the many aspects of the transformative pedagogy which foregrounded and afforded their personal growth. Implications for counsellor education are discussed.

Keywords: transformative pedagogy, transformative learning, transformational change; counsellor education; personal growth, experiential learning; play-based therapy, sand tray therapy; neuroscience; Satir
To all the children
who have been harmed at the hands of adults.
Acknowledgements

My Participants:
Without your willingness to be vulnerable and open to change, this research could not be possible. I am indebted to you.

Suzie O'Neil:
Thank you for trusting in me from the very beginning that I could complete this enormous undertaking. I appreciate every piece of advice, direction and commitment that you have shown me.

Jim Edmondson:
Thank you for the commitment you have shown me and willingness to read out loud the whole theses several times, to comb through the cross-references to ensure exactness, the endless cups of tea, the walks. I can't thank you enough. My life is even richer because of your love.

Susan Wood:
To my dear friend. I can't thank you enough for being behind the scenes helping me to clarify my thinking as I struggled to put pen to paper.

Molly, Chloe and Lucy:
To my three wonderful daughters. You three gave me inspiration and encouragement to work hard, to struggle, to be the best I can be.

Janine, Shannon, Sharon, Dylan, Beth, Tim, April:
We started this academic journey together and it has taken us to new places personally and professionally. I wish all of you the best in your new adventures.

Jim Sparks:
Thank you for giving me the courage and inspiration to start this journey and to continually to be able to refer to your masterpiece.

Joanie Wolfe:
Thank you for faithfully helping me to create a beautiful, clean, APA document.
Table of Contents

Approval .............................................................................................................................ii
Ethics Statement ............................................................................................................... iii
Abstract .............................................................................................................................iv
Dedication ......................................................................................................................... v
Acknowledgements ...........................................................................................................vi
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................. vii
List of Tables ................................................................................................................... xiv
List of Figures.................................................................................................................. xiv
List of Acronyms ............................................................................................................. xvii
Glossary ........................................................................................................................ xviii

Chapter 1. Introduction ..................................................................................................... 1
  1.1. Where Words Can't Reach: Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray:
      The Researcher’s Story ........................................................................................... 1
  1.2. What Does Personal Growth Look Like and
      How Is It Promoted and Integrated in Counsellor Education? ................................. 5
  1.3. Transformational Change, Transformative Pedagogy, and Learning ........................ 9
  1.4. Structure of the Thesis........................................................................................... 11

Chapter 2. Transformative Pedagogy and Transformative Learning in
the Context of this Study......................................................................................... 14
  2.1. Transformative Learning ........................................................................................ 14
  2.2. Mezirow: Critical Reflection and Reflective Discourse in
      Transformative Learning ........................................................................................ 15
  2.3. Freire: Personal and Social Empowerment through Conscientization in
      Transformative Learning ........................................................................................ 17
  2.4. Dirkx: Spirituality and Soul Work in Transformative Learning .............................. 19
  2.5. Taylor: Emotions and Implicit Memory in Transformative Learning ................. 19
  2.6. Hoshmand, Lawrence, Marks-Tarlow, Schön, Wong-Wylie:
      Reflection in Action and Intuition ........................................................................... 20
  2.7. Freiler: Transformative Learning within the Body ................................................... 22
  2.8. Clark, Cranton, Daloz, Taylor: The Relationship between
      Teacher and Student in Transformative Learning .................................................. 23
  2.9. McGilchrist: Neuroscience Ends the Rational versus the
      Emotional Debate in Transformative Learning ...................................................... 23
      2.9.1. Right brain versus left brain ...................................................................... 24
      2.9.2. Reason versus rationality ......................................................................... 25
  2.11. Key Issues in Transformative Learning for the Context of this Study .............. 26
  2.12. Transformative Pedagogy ...................................................................................... 28
Chapter 3. Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray (NSST), Play Therapy, Sand Tray Therapy, and the Importance of Play ....... 32

3.1. What Does the Research Tell Us about the Efficacy of Play Therapy with Children? ................................................................. 32
3.2. Using the Sand Tray in the NSST Approach ......................................................................................................................... 34
3.3. The Importance of Play .............................................................................................................................................................. 35
3.4. The Play Circuitry in the Brain .................................................................................................................................................. 37
3.5. The Origins and Development of Sand Tray Therapy ........................................................................................................ 39
3.6. Non-verbal Communication through the Sand Tray ............................................................................................................... 43
3.7. Imagination, Creativity, and the Power of the Metaphor in the Sand Tray .............................................................. 44
3.8. Transformational Systemic Therapy (TST) ............................................................................................................................ 45
3.8.1. The 14 basic tenets of the Satir model .............................................................................................................................. 45
3.8.2. The five essential elements of the Satir model required to bring about transformational change ........................................ 46
3.8.3. The elements of the Satir iceberg metaphor as a model for being human ........................................................................ 47
3.9. Other Elements of the Training in NSST ............................................................................................................................... 54
3.9.1. Therapeutic attachment and attachment between children and caregiver in relation to mirror neurons ....................... 54
3.9.2. The fear response: The drive for safety and the underlying defence patterns of coping .................................................. 62
3.9.3. Awareness of shifts in body states ......................................................................................................................................... 64
3.9.4. Personal growth of the self .................................................................................................................................................... 65
3.9.5. The role of intuition in the NSST approach ......................................................................................................................... 66
3.9.6. Enactments ............................................................................................................................................................................. 67
3.9.7. Epigenetics ............................................................................................................................................................................. 68
3.10. Summary of the Chapter .......................................................................................................................................................... 68
Chapter 4. Literature Review of How Personal Growth is Facilitated during Counsellor Education

4.1. What does the literature tell us about counsellor education course planning that has an intentional personal growth component where counselling skills are learned incidentally? ................................................................. 70

4.2. What does the literature tell us about intentional skill training programming in counsellor education where personal growth is incidental? ...................... 72

4.3. What does the literature tell us about counsellor education programming that intentionally integrates personal growth promotion concurrently with teaching skill development? ................................................................. 73

4.4. What Does the Literature Say about Transformative Pedagogy in Counsellor Education? ........................................................................................... 79

4.5. What Does the Literature Tell Us about Play Therapy Training for Counsellors in Relation to Their Personal Growth? ............................................... 84

4.6. Research on How Using the Sand Tray Impacts the Personal Growth of Students in Counsellor Education .......................................................... 87

4.7. Summary .................................................................................................. 89

Chapter 5. Research Methodology ........................................................................ 91

5.1. Overview .................................................................................................. 91

5.2. The Workshop Component ....................................................................... 92

5.3. Recruitment of Research Participants ....................................................... 92

5.4. Location and Welcome ............................................................................. 93

5.5. Weekend Schedule ...................................................................................... 94

5.6. The Workshop Content ............................................................................ 95

5.6.1. Theoretical subject matter outline ....................................................... 95

5.6.2. The core focus of the weekend work .................................................... 96

5.6.3. Teaching modalities .......................................................................... 97

5.7. Participant Responses ............................................................................... 98

5.7.1. The interview component ..................................................................... 98

5.7.2. Post-training questionnaire ................................................................ 98

5.8. Ethical Issues: Confidentiality and Personal Safety .................................... 99

5.9. Description of the Analysis ........................................................................ 100

5.9.1. Phenomenology .................................................................................. 100

5.9.2. Hermeneutics ..................................................................................... 101

5.9.3. Idiography ........................................................................................ 102

5.9.4. Social constructivism ......................................................................... 102

5.10. Interpretation ........................................................................................... 102

5.11. Data Compilation and Analysis ................................................................ 103

5.11.1. Stage 1 ............................................................................................ 104

5.11.2. Stage 2 ............................................................................................ 104

5.11.3. Stage 3 ............................................................................................ 104

5.11.4. Stage 4 ............................................................................................ 105

5.11.5. Stage 5 ............................................................................................ 105
5.12. Researcher’s Reflections of the Messiness of Qualitative Research ........................................ 106
  5.12.1. Self as designer ........................................................................................................... 107
  5.12.2. Self as teacher ........................................................................................................... 107
          Relationship of care in the workshop component ...................................................... 107
          Modelling of a therapeutic relationship ..................................................................... 107
  5.12.3. Self as interviewer ................................................................................................... 109
  5.12.4. Self as researcher .................................................................................................... 109

Chapter 6. Findings ................................................................................................................. 113
6.1. Theme 1: Becoming Aware of Personal Issues ............................................................... 114
  6.1.1. Self-exploration, shame, acceptance ........................................................................ 115
  6.1.2. Personal growth leads to being a better counsellor .................................................. 116
  6.1.3. Family of origin ........................................................................................................ 116
  6.1.4. Professional growth goals ....................................................................................... 117
  6.1.5. Comment .................................................................................................................. 120
6.2. Theme 2: Deep Sense of Connection to and Freedom for Self ........................................ 120
  6.2.1. Intuition .................................................................................................................... 121
  6.2.2. Soul work ................................................................................................................ 123
  6.2.3. Self-love ................................................................................................................... 127
  6.2.4. Imagination and magic ............................................................................................ 129
  6.2.5. Peace and freedom .................................................................................................. 130
  6.2.6. Comment ................................................................................................................ 133
6.3. Theme 3: Richer Choice of Feelings, Perceptions, and Expectations for Self .................. 133
  6.3.1. Choice in feelings about self .................................................................................... 134
  6.3.2. Choice of perceptions of self and others ............................................................... 136
  6.3.3. Choice of expectations of self and others ............................................................... 138
  6.3.4. Comment ................................................................................................................ 140
6.4. Theme 4: Body Awareness and Freedom from Physical Pain .......................................... 140
  6.4.1. Positive physical changes ......................................................................................... 141
  6.4.2. Negative physical changes ....................................................................................... 144
  6.4.3. Comment ................................................................................................................ 144
6.5. Theme 5: Powerful New Insights about Past Self .......................................................... 145
  6.5.1. Clarity about negative feelings and perceptions ....................................................... 145
  6.5.2. Clarity of potential ................................................................................................... 148
  6.5.3. Clarity about unmet expectations ............................................................................ 152
  6.5.4. Comment ................................................................................................................ 154
6.6. Theme 6: Being Effective, Competent, and Confident
          Personally and Professionally .................................................................................... 154
  6.6.1. Personal confidence in their private lives ................................................................. 155
  6.6.2. Personal confidence in their professional lives ......................................................... 157
  6.6.3. Comment ................................................................................................................ 160
6.7. Theme 7: Feelings of Being Nurtured and Safe ............................................................... 161
6.8. Post-Training Questionnaire .......................................................................................... 163
  6.8.1. Post-Training Questionnaire returned after three months ..................................... 164
  6.8.2. Post-Training Questionnaire returned after 20 months ......................................... 167
  6.8.3. Summary ................................................................................................................ 168
Chapter 8. Summary and Conclusion

8.1. How Participants Experienced Personal Growth

8.1.1. Personal growth was experienced by participants becoming aware of their personal issues

8.1.2. Personal growth was experienced by participants gaining a deep sense of connection to and freedom for self

8.1.3. Personal growth was experienced by participants finding a richer choice of feelings, perceptions and expectations for self

8.1.4. Personal growth was experienced by participants becoming aware of their bodies and having freedom from physical pain

8.1.5. Personal growth was experienced by participants discovering powerful new insights about their past self

8.1.6. Personal growth was experienced by participants feeling more effective, competent, and confident personally and professionally

8.2. How Transformative Pedagogy Foregrounded Understanding

8.2.1. Participants said that they felt nurtured, safe, and free

8.3. Implications for Counsellor Education

8.3.1. Implication 1: Transformative pedagogy is an effective way to encourage personal growth in counsellor education students

8.3.2. Implication 2: Facilitating opportunities to develop the different aspects of personal growth in counsellor education

8.3.3. Implication 3: Right-brain to right-brain non-verbal strategies in counsellor education

8.3.4. Implication 4: A paradigm shift in counsellor education using full-day immersion sessions

8.3.5. Implication 5: Building upon current strategies in counsellor education for promoting personal growth

8.3.6. Implication 6: Existing strategies need to be adjuncts not alternatives

8.3.7. Implication 7: Modelling in counsellor education

8.3.8. Implication 8: A British Columbia and Canadian Counsellors Council

8.4. Limitations of The Research

8.5. Strengths of the Research

8.6. Directions for Future Research

8.7. Concluding Thoughts
References................................................................................................................... 234

Appendix A. Participant Recruitment Invitation.............................................................. 255
Appendix B. Pre-Screening Questionnaire ........................................................................ 256
Appendix C. Pre-Training Questionnaire .......................................................................... 258
Appendix D. Letter of Consent ......................................................................................... 259
Appendix E. Post-Training Questionnaire ......................................................................... 263
Appendix F. Table of Themes, Clusters, and Codes ............................................................. 265
Appendix G. Frequency of Endorsement of Themes ........................................................... 270
List of Tables

Table 1. Types of Attachment Disorders .............................................................. 56
Table 2. Continuum of Safety ........................................................................... 59
Table 3. Recruitment of Participants ................................................................. 92
Table 4. Job Description and Education-level of Participants .......................... 93

List of Figures

Figure 1. The iceberg as a metaphor for being human. Adapted from
The Satir Model: Family Therapy and Beyond by V. Satir, J. Banmen, J. Gerber, & M. Gomori, 1991. Copyright 1999 by J. Banmen; used with permission. ................................................................. 48
Figure 2. The Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray (NSST) iceberg. Based on The iceberg as a metaphor for being human by J. Banmen, 1999 (see Figure 1). Copyright 2017 by M. De Little. ......................... 49
Figure 3. Ally explained that being able to use her imagination gave her more possibilities. Photo by J. Edmondson. ............................................................... 124
Figure 4. Zara, “I wish to remain very connected to this light.”
Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission. ............................................ 126
Figure 5. Naomi, “The doll feels complete and stronger.”
Photo by J. Edmondson. ............................................................................. 135
Figure 6. Laura was comfortable in her vulnerability as a glass elephant.
Photo by J. Edmondson. ............................................................................. 137
Figure 7. Susie’s image of herself as responsible (mother pushing a pram) a rule follower (police officer). Photo by J. Edmondson. ........................................ 139
Figure 8. Ally placed the lion higher up as she herself felt taller.
Photo by J. Edmondson. ............................................................................. 142
Figure 9. Naomi, “The doll is spread out in many directions and has been for a while.” Photo by J. Edmondson. .................................................. 146
Figure 10. Ally, “Everything looks so big.” Photo by J. Edmondson.............. 147
Figure 11. For Martha, the red and white tent, the well, the racoon the princess are all symbols of her potential. Photo by J. Edmondson.............. 149
Figure 12. Zara, “The rabbit has potential but it's scary.”
Photo by J. Edmondson. .......................................................................... 150
Figure 13. Chris, here is her picture of potential with a fairy and a human figure. Photo by J. Edmondson.............................................................. 150
Figure 14. Chris, “The stones are the things to see, especially the trust and
gratitude for the learning opportunity of being at a university.”
Photo by J. Edmondson. ................................................................. 151

Figure 15. Chris, “My professors don’t let me know everything.”
Photo by J. Edmondson. ................................................................. 151

Figure 16. Kaila was overwhelmed during the demonstration in the workshop
component. Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission. .......... 153

Figure 17. Cheryl showed the researcher as the kangaroo-nurturing the joey.
Photo by J. Edmondson. ................................................................. 162

Figure 18. Cheryl showed rabbits making baby steps towards the richness.
Photo by J. Edmondson. ................................................................. 163

Figure 19. Frances working with the researcher during a demonstration.
Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission. .......................... 172

Figure 20. Frances placed a cabana to represent her personal space.
Photo by J. Edmondson. ................................................................. 173

Figure 21. Frances with all her parts separated. Photo by J. Edmondson... 173

Figure 22. Frances said that all the parts work together.
Photo by J. Edmondson. ................................................................. 175

Figure 23. Naomi, “The doll is spread out in many, many pieces in many
directions and has been for a while.” Photo by J. Edmondson. ...... 177

Figure 24. Naomi, “The doll feels complete. The doll feels complete and
stronger. The doll has a lot of resources. There is clarity.”
Photo by J. Edmondson. ................................................................. 178

Figure 25. Martha with her sense of herself before the workshop component on
her right side of the sand tray. Photo by J. Edmondson. .......... 183

Figure 26. Martha, “My hope my tent, my home, my capacity for the work that
I do. I consider myself open as a therapist, I consider myself that this
might have been the way that I was before.” Photo by J. Edmondson. .. 185

Figure 27. The bridge for Martha symbolized her journey of the transformation
of her personal growth. Photo by J. Edmondson. ......................... 186

Figure 28. Martha, “The prince (with the red cape). I found that he was too,
too much or not humble enough or something, but I like him.”
Photo by J. Edmondson. ................................................................. 187

Figure 29. Martha, said that she had moved out of her head and into her heart.
Photo by J. Edmondson. ................................................................. 189

Figure 30. Martha placed the jewels to connect the image of before the
workshop component to after it. Photo by J. Edmondson............. 190

Figure 31. For Linda, the podium represents her stuckness.
Photo by J. Edmondson. ................................................................. 194

Figure 32. Linda illustrated how she felt with the sad-faced and the scared-
faces eggs and the rabbit (hopeless). Photo by J. Edmondson. ....... 195
Figure 33. Linda became aware of how the shell had kept her safe, but was now making her "disconnected." Photo by J. Edmondson. 195

Figure 34. The golfer represents Linda’s time as a top golfer and athlete. Photo by J. Edmondson. 196

Figure 35. Laura placed the tiger, panda and the tortoise at the base of the tree saying that they were all parts of the elephant. Photo by J. Edmondson. 200

Figure 36. Laura, “Maybe just by me being more honest about who I am . . . . Yeah—and just clarity and light, like there’s more energy.” Photo by J. Edmondson. 202

Figure 37. Laura, “Oh, I really feel it in my heart . . . a lot has changed for me this weekend just about the way I see myself too.” Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission. 203

Figure 38. Martin is looking at the backs of the figurines. Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission. 205

Figure 39. For Martin, the totem pole is the spiritual part of the “Master of the Dark Arts.” Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission. 206

Figure 40. Martin now saw a part of himself as the tree being grounded. Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission. 207

Figure 41. Martin moved the four figurines together and a tear came to his eyes. Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission. 207

Figure 42. Martin saw the jewels as the gift of working with clients. Photo by J. Edmondson. 208

Figure 43. In the first interview Martin saw himself as transparent. Photo by J. Edmondson. 209

Figure 44. We are looking at Martin’s depiction of himself in his newly-transformed way of being: seamless, open, no secrets of shame and nothing to hide. Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission. 210

Figure 45. Martin, said that the horse is going across the bridge, which stands out. “There is no hiding.” Photo by J. Edmondson. 211

Figure 46. Martin said that the griffin has a “special power”, referring to his unique abilities. Photo by J. Edmondson. 213

Figure 47. Martin, “So just going to towards that fire and heat and that power and with confidence and positive, positive movement.” Photo by J. Edmondson. 214
## List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APT</td>
<td>Association for Play Therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>Essential Embodiment Thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FASD</td>
<td>Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMSAD</td>
<td>Integrated Model of Self Awareness Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSST</td>
<td>Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFU</td>
<td>Simon Fraser University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLN</td>
<td>Transformative Learning Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TST</td>
<td>Transformational Systemic Therapy</td>
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### Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artifact analysis</td>
<td>Additional physical influences, values, and beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonoesis</td>
<td>The linkage of past, present and anticipated future which is essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to mental well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>Refers to a child or an adult in counselling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conatively</td>
<td>Intentionally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellor / therapist</td>
<td>Counsellor and therapist are used synonymously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellors in training</td>
<td>See student counsellors and trainee counsellors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural audit</td>
<td>The study of the culture of a system that reflects the complex set of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>values, traditions, assumptions, and patterns of behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogic</td>
<td>Two-way communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogical dialogue</td>
<td>Coming together to share opinions and beliefs in a trusting mutual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and respectful way that allows both parties to enter into and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>experience the symbolic world.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emergence model</td>
<td>Counselling students formulate interventions with their clients based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on their instincts and pre-existing knowledge. Providing the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>opportunity for critical self-reflection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generative dialogue</td>
<td>A conversation that creates something new.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermeneutics</td>
<td>The interpretation of text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epigenetics</td>
<td>Epigenetics is the study of how our DNA, in the genes, gets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>activated and expressed through the creation of protein structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot spot</td>
<td>A figurine or an image that is unusual and does not fit with the rest of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the picture in the sand tray.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceberg</td>
<td>A metaphor created by John Banmen (Satir, Banmen, Gerber, &amp; Gomori.,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1991) to describe the external and internal elements of being human.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphoric stories</td>
<td>Use of stories to assist student counsellors self-reflect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind</td>
<td>The subjective experience of energy and information flow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind/body</td>
<td>The flow of energy between the right brain and body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motile</td>
<td>Moving forward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numinous</td>
<td>Filled with a sense of awe and wonder at an experience beyond our reality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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xviii
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth</td>
<td>Personal growth is the human journey towards having an authentic, securely attached, integrated, regulated, mentally and physically healthy, socially engaged, confident and congruent sense of <em>self</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>People making meaning of their own subjective lived experience within their particular context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing counsellors</td>
<td>Counsellors who have had 2 years of graduate counsellor education at the master’s level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational Systemic</td>
<td>The model designed by Virginia Satir in the 1970s and 1980s that included all members of the family system. Use of this model was a significant departure from the traditional psychoanalytic approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>For the purpose of this study, the <em>self</em> is defined as a constantly changing, subjective biological mind and body state developed in relation to other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star</td>
<td>A participant in the research who assumes the authentic role of a client in the demonstration and triad work of the training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student counsellors</td>
<td>Students in a master’s program in counsellor education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainee counsellors</td>
<td>Is used the same as student counsellors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational change</td>
<td>Where the flow of energy is changed from a dysfunctional pattern to a more open, free and healthy pattern and new neural pathways are developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative learning</td>
<td>Transformative learning is a living theoretical discipline which seeks to discover and explain how learning engages individuals so that they grow, evolve and progress and in so doing engage human systems in new ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative pedagogy</td>
<td>The intentional authentic way the educator and students engage within a democratic and emancipatory safe and nurturing dialogic relationship as co-learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triad</td>
<td>A group of three people who take turns being the therapist, the star, and the observer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1.

Introduction

1.1. Where Words Can’t Reach: Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray: The Researcher’s Story

I have always known how important play is to children. I grew up in post-war England and my only toys were a teddy and a homemade doll’s house—we had no television in our home. This paucity of objects to play with ensured that my siblings and I had to entertain ourselves. We lived in our imaginations; and simple activities, such as taking a few old pots and a couple of spoons to the bottom of the garden, became hours of fascinating play. Since then, I have watched children in the poorest parts of Africa who have so little yet find a way to escape their external poverty by accessing infinite reservoirs of imagination and creativity. I have become seriously concerned about children in the Western world. Children are overly attached to, and are passive recipients of, modern toys that are not earned or created through their imagination and play. We do not know how this technological and material orientation will affect their brain development, their resilience, their creativity, their capacity to form relationships and their ability to work towards a common purpose.

When I first began to counsel children, I was a teacher with 10 years of classroom experience and a graduate with a degree in social policy/psychology; however, I had no counsellor education. During part of this time I was teaching emotionally disturbed teenage street kids in Vancouver. My colleagues pointed out to me my natural ability to connect with these difficult students. I really wanted to reach them. These students were literally on the far edge of a short life. I knew about their difficult lives and I could see their struggle. I could see their potential. They wanted to be different and I could help them. The teaching involved first and foremost safe
communication, strong non-verbal attachment, the use of imagination and encouraging creativity. The main teaching skill I developed was the modelling of all this, but also encouraging self-reflection, doing lots of experiential, hands on project based work and teaching by showing. In hindsight, this experience gave me motivation to pursue a model of a teaching that would foster relationship building, make curriculum content secondary but ultimately encourage profound learning and personal growth.

Following a maternity leave, I was assigned to the position of counsellor in Vancouver, British Columbia, which I happily accepted and began a diploma in counselling. From the outset, I struggled with the notion “the therapist knows best”—that somehow I could tell children what was going on for them. Later I realized my resistance to this idea stemmed from my training at the Froebel Institute in London, England in the early 1970s. There, I had been taught that play was not a luxury but a biologically purposeful activity through which children discover and create meaning from their experiences (Froebel’s Gifts, 2013). Over time I came to believe that, even as children, we know what we need, that we have the resources within us to fulfill our potential and that an understanding person can sometimes help us to gain trust in our own gifts. All of my work with children, in my capacities as teacher, school counsellor, and therapist, has been rooted in these same humanistic principles that underpin current beliefs in play therapy and particularly sand tray therapy.

Twenty years ago, working as a school counsellor, I started to design an approach to working with children using a sand tray. I made a handbook full of my ideas. When I immersed myself in Virginia Satir’s model of experiential family therapy work, I discovered a huge overlap with her ideas and mine.

The accumulation of experience with children plus further studying the neuroscience of personal growth, led eventually to the development of a theoretical and practical counselling approach and 2 years ago to the completion of my book: *Where Words Can't Reach: Neuroscience and the Satir Model in the Sand Tray*. Over the years as I worked successfully with many families and children I came to realise that I wanted to share this approach with other counsellors so that they too could have the skills and tools. I began holding workshops for established counsellors and what followed was more than I could imagine. The attendees were hungry for such training, both professionally and personally. Word got out. Invitations burgeoned to speak at
conferences and to train therapists around the world. As I taught the workshops, I was developing a transformative counsellor education program without knowing quite what I was doing. It was only later when I started writing the book and doing the research for this Ph.D. study that I fully began to understand the underlying theoretical principles of transformative pedagogy.

In addition, I started to learn directly from Allan Schore who is a neuroscience researcher at the University of California and a psychiatrist in private practice. Initially I read his book, *The Science of the Art of Psychotherapy* (2012) and then I joined his regular live webinar which brings to our attention the very latest in research on therapeutic attachment and right-brain to right-brain communication in infants, children and adults. Schore’s work has become formative for me over the last 5 years as I continue to study with him and apply it to my work in NSST.

My therapeutic work using NSST was consistently producing transformational change (Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori, 1991) in my clients, children and adults. Teaching NSST using what I now realise was a transformative pedagogy was also producing transformational change in practicing counsellors and student counsellors who I was training. It appeared logical to me that the training of counsellors so they could bring about lasting transformational change in their future clients would be achieved most effectively through the application of the principles of transformative pedagogy in the training program itself and through teaching of models like NSST where participants themselves could experience transformational change or what Mezirow and Taylor (2009) call “‘ah ha’ moment[s]” (p. 23). I was surprised to discover, however, that there is a lack of research in the use of transformative pedagogy in counsellor education. I was also surprised to find that there are few studies into the integration of the personal growth of student counsellors throughout the process of their learning counselling skills and approaches. This provided additional motivation for doing this Ph.D.

Being excited about the use of imagination in teaching and therapy was how I arrived at the focus of this thesis. At this point, there were two parallel parts of my work-life that I was passionate about. One was my work as a therapist and teacher of NSST. The other was my interest, as a school counsellor at the Langley Fine Arts School, in using the arts to move beyond words in *restorative justice*. Both of these passions involved harnessing the power of non-verbal attachment. I started my Ph.D. course-
work with a plan to explore the use of non-verbal strategies through the arts in restorative justice. I remember being in my living room and not being inspired as I played with my thesis question. Meanwhile, I had been filling up with stickies Maxine Greene’s (1995) book, Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, Arts and Social Change (a part of my Ph.D. course-work) each time I had an ah-ha moment. I realised that releasing the imagination was at the core of the NSST approach and, along with that, I felt both relief and excitement. What I was doing with clients in therapy and with participants in my NSST workshops was releasing their imaginations through the use of the metaphor. I realised that this other part of my work-life had a stronger pull and I changed my Ph.D. focus.

I wanted to do this research because my NSST therapy work was producing consistently positive results for children and adult clients. Also, I was witnessing participants in my workshops becoming emotionally moved by the training. Their comments and evaluations suggested that this was a powerful experience for them and many characterized it as the best counselling training that they had ever done.

In my NSST work the figurines in the sand tray are chosen by the client from a non-conscious place and connect with their internal energy patterns. For the client, it's as if they're seeing themselves for the first time. This is the power of the metaphor. What becomes transformational is, with gentle guidance, the client being able to use their imaginations and change those energies in the sand tray and finally take the new learnings out of the sand tray and integrate them into their life. I wanted to research this in some way.

The specific Ph.D. topic soon became clear to me. Over the past 14 years, I have trained counsellors in the NSST approach all around the world. I have been concerned, however, that participants often revealed trauma that was hidden and unresolved in their lives and that had not been addressed, either during their counsellor education. My concern was that these therapists were completely unaware of the impact of their past traumas until they had done the work during one of my training workshops. I was concerned that they were not in a securely attached healthy place to be able to help others and yet they were working with clients in a therapeutic context. Research suggests that therapists’ past relationships have a strong influence on the work they do with their clients, because they are more likely to engage in negative interpersonal
therapeutic processes that actually creates further disruption in the client’s self-
development (Henry & Strupp, 1994). There appeared to be an urgent need for
counsellor education to engage more deliberately and specifically in skills training that
promoted personal growth. My experience of NSST workshops led me to want to
research how well my teaching of the NSST approach could do that.

A further motivation for the specific focus of this thesis was around the issue of
teaching style. I had experienced being taught by counsellor education teachers who were
not walking the talk. They talked about creating safety in the therapeutic relationship. But
their teaching style created insecurity, discouragement and inhibition. Again, there
appeared to be a need for counsellor education to adopt a transformative pedagogy that
could best facilitate the learning and integration of skills as well as understand and foster
the personal growth of counsellors.

It is my hope now that this research will contribute to this development.

1.2. What Does Personal Growth Look Like and
How Is It Promoted and Integrated in Counsellor
Education?

No other profession requires the delicate use of self like counselling, where every
breath and conveyed meaning to the client can be translated by the client in multiple
ways (Schore, 2017). So how are counsellors prepared personally for this daunting
responsibility? The counsellor has to be fully aware of their own personal triggers by
reflecting on their own perceptions, biases, and beliefs. Yet Wong-Wylie (2007) says that
there is a “dearth of research on the experiences, processes, practices, and prevalence
of reflective practice in counsellor education” (p. 60). She describes how counselling
education programs are focused more on what Kramer (2000) describes as the “outer
world of therapy” (cited in Wong-Wylie, 2007, p. 60). In referring to the outer world of
therapy, she means the many theories, methods, and techniques of therapy and
diagnosis, the treatment outcomes, organization, standards, and credentials.

Personal growth during counsellor education is required in countries such as the
United Kingdom by counselling regulatory bodies (Irving & Williams, 1996). This includes
the use of reflective practice where the applicant is required to demonstrate how their own “values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours impact the therapeutic process” as well as their reflection on and evaluation of practice (British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy, 2012, p. 5). However, despite some recognition of the value of personal growth opportunities in counsellor education, the British Columbia Association of Clinical Counsellors (http://bc-counsellors.org) and the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (https://www.ccpa-accp.ca) currently have no such requirement.

There is much research on the prevalence of personal growth opportunities for practicing qualified counsellors within the context of group work (Lennie, 2007; Payne, 1999), personal therapy, (Grimmer & Tribe, 2001; Murphy, 2005; Norcross, Geller, & Kurzawa, 2000), supervision (Altucher, 1967; Glass, 1986; Johns, 1996; Leader, 1971; Pieterse, Lee, Ritmeester, & Collins, 2013; Pistole & Watkins, 1995; Sarnat, 2012; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967) and ongoing professional development (Orlinsky & Rønnestad, 2005), however, there is a lack of published literature on an integrated model of personal growth development in counsellor education (Pieterse et al., 2013). This study aims to address this gap in counsellor education research.

A premise of this study is that understanding, accepting and transforming self are all parts of the personal preparation necessary for the daunting responsibility of being a counsellor. Who we are as counsellors is considered a key component to the therapeutic change process (J. Banmen, personal communication, April 7, 2016; Johns, 1996; Satir et al., 1991). The professional identity of counsellors is unique amongst all other professions. No other profession requires as much use of self as a professional tool (Auxier, Hughes, & Kline, 2003; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). If we accept that the self of the counsellor is the primary tool in counselling, then opportunities for self-knowledge, understanding of self, acceptance and even forgiveness must be central to counsellor education (J. Banmen, personal communication, April 7, 2016; Wilkins, 1997). By knowing and accepting the self, the counsellor is then able to take risks, trust the process (Satir et al., 1991), trust their intuition (Marks-Tarlow, 2012), be authentic (Rogers, 1961) and be confident (Johns, 1996) that they will be able to handle all that the human condition presents within the therapeutic environment.
There needs to be a paradigm shift in counsellor education to include the creation of explicit and integrated opportunities for personal growth work to address the “rather amorphous manner of current approaches to the development of self-awareness in counselling and psychotherapy training” (Pieterse et al., 2013, p. 196).

This thesis adopts the term personal growth with the acknowledgement that this term has been poorly defined in counsellor education. According to Irving and Williams (1996), the term personal growth is “like water through a swamp: it touches all parts” (p. 2) and there are widely differing views on what personal growth is referring to within counsellor education (Donati & Watts, 2005; Irving & Williams, 1996; Johns, 1996; Mearns, 1997; Rowan, 1976). Some terms that are used are personal development (Irving & Williams, 1999), self-awareness (Mearns, 1997), self-awareness development (Pieterse et al., 2013), awareness of self (Johns, 2012) and personal knowledge (Schore, 2012). This thesis primarily uses the terms personal growth and awareness of self.

In the literature there has been less of an emphasis on the what of the person and more of an emphasis on the how of the growth and personal growth has been used synonymously with personal therapy (Clark, 1986; Dryden & Feltham, 1994; Kumari, 2011; Norcross, 2005; Norcross & Connor, 2005; Norcross, Dryden, & DeMichele, 1992; Norcross & Guy, 2005; Norcross, Strausser-Kirtland, & Missar, 1988; Orlinsky, Norcross, Rønnestad, & Wiseman, 2005; Rake & Paley, 2009; Rizq & Target, 2008; Von Haenisch, 2010; Wigg, Cushway, & Neal, 2011). This has created a significant level of confusion in the literature.

The methods used to promote personal growth in counsellor education generally involve mandatory personal therapy (Grimmer & Tribe, 2001; Murphy, 2005; Norcross et al., 2000), group work (Lennie, 2007; Payne, 1999). However according to Pieterse et al. (2013), it is not clear which of these approaches is more or less effective. Self-awareness is given greater focus in supervision (Altucher, 1967; Glass, 1986; Johns, 1996; Leader, 1971; Pieterse et al., 2013; Pistole & Watkins, 1995; Sarnat, 2012; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967). Self-awareness also occurs incidentally through reflection on skill development (Hayes & Paisley, 2002; Johns, 1996; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2000; Neufeldt, 1997).
This study places personal growth at the heart of counsellor education to deepen the participants’ sense of self in order to become more effective counsellors. In this way, personal growth encompasses all stages of personal transformation. In this study, the focus is on the participants’ experiences of personal growth as they engage in learning and practicing a new experiential play-based therapy approach called Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray (NSST). The aim is to further our understanding of how to foster and explicitly integrate personal growth experiences in counsellor education using transformative pedagogy to increase students’ awareness of the process through which they can become the best they can be (Kane, 2016). Through this integrated process the participants experience a deeper understanding of their inner selves by doing what clients do in therapy—using introspection, contemplation (Varela & Scharmer, 2000), by looking at their defences, how they have kept themselves safe, by exploring their feelings, how they judge their feelings, by looking at their perceptions of themselves and others, by examining their expectations of themselves and others, by exploring what others expect of them and finally uncovering their yearnings (Satir et al., 1991).

For the purposes of this study, personal growth is defined using terms that are congruent with neuroscience, with the Satir model, with the researchers’ sand tray approach and with transformative pedagogy as follows: Personal growth is the human journey towards having an authentic, securely attached, integrated, regulated, mentally and physically healthy, socially engaged, confident and congruent sense of self. These attributes are revisited in Chapter 8 in relation to the findings from the present study. Both NSST and transformative pedagogy help us understand what personal growth is and how to foster it.

The study aims to address two key questions:

- How is personal growth experienced by counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray (NSST)—a new experiential play-based therapy?
- How might transformative pedagogy foreground understanding in ways that foster personal growth opportunities among counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning NSST?
1.3. Transformational Change, Transformative Pedagogy, and Learning

The theoretical context for this research draws on the concepts of transformational change, which is used in the NSST approach and transformative pedagogy and learning theory and practice which is used in adult education. The theory and practice of transformative pedagogy helps us understand personal growth and how to best foster it in counsellor education. Both transformational change in the therapeutic context and transformative pedagogy and learning in the adult classroom have roots in humanistic principles (Clark 2005; Satir et al., 1991). Together, these concepts provide a vision of people as capable of change and free to act on the world; being, "human is central, important, valuable, crucial, pivotal, wonderful, powerful—even miraculous" (Barton, 2000, p. 242). As such, both of these concepts underpin the workshop component and interview component from which this study draws its data.

A key component of how transformational change is conceptualized in this thesis is rooted in the work of John Banmen, an expert and trainer in Satir’s Transformational Systemic Therapy (TST) and my supervisor and mentor in using this approach. He was originally a student of Virginia Satir, who is credited with developing this family systems approach. Banmen references Satir as saying that each person is worthy and deserving of respect. They are a piece of the divine and called to be their own good selves (J. Banmen, personal communication, April 7, 2016). Even when faced with clients who exhibited the most destructive and negative forms of behavior, Satir’s characteristic question was, "What good intentions is this behavior trying to fulfill for self or for others?" (J. Banmen, personal communication, April 7, 2016). Satir praised her clients for their ingenious solutions to their problems, even if those solutions were considered maladaptive. The behaviours of all family members were also seen as fundamentally well intentioned. Satir’s humanistic perspective included this non-blaming approach together with the affirmation of the positive intentions of her clients’ behaviours. She used this approach systemically, explicitly and implicitly (J. Banmen, personal communication, April 7, 2016). Satir’s humanistic perspective on people is at the centre of NSST.
Both transformational change in therapy and transformative pedagogy and learning in the adult classroom assume a democratic vision of society in which individuals are responsible for their collective futures (Clark, 2005; Satir et al., 1991). They also have the same goal to help people reflect on their feelings, perceptions and beliefs about themselves and the world and to make new decisions for themselves. There is a shared belief that knowledge is a construction that human beings make rather than an objective truth that they discover. Transformative pedagogy and learning and transformational change both produce far-reaching changes in the recipients and these changes have a significant impact on people's subsequent experiences. In short, both transformational change and transformative pedagogy and learning shape people, providing experiences after which they become different in ways that they themselves as well as others can recognize (Clark, 2005).

Other similarities between transformational change and transformative learning relate to the personal frames of reference that individuals use to make sense of their experiences. Satir used the term coping stances to describe default ways of reacting that people use when under stress (Satir et al., 1991). Coping stances are adopted to keep us safe and help us deal with our pain, but eventually they get in the way of leading a healthy life and are usually the presenting problem in therapy. Banmen (personal communication, April 7, 2016), for example, describes depression as a solution to some underlying pain. Satir’s coping stances bear a strong resemblance to what Mezirow (2000a) called habits of mind when describing transformative learning theory. For Mezirow, habits of mind refer to personal frames of reference that point to and stem from how we make meaning from our experiences with others. The goal of therapy, as with transformative learning, is to question curiously the assumptions and beliefs from which personal frames of reference arise.

Transformative pedagogy and learning theorists agree with Satir on the importance of embodied knowing (Clark, 2005; Maiese, 2011; Taylor, 2001). Based on the work of Heidegger, Satir made the connection of mind, body and soul, noting that even when the mind is not aware of what is happening, the body remembers and reacts (Satir et al., 1991). According to Satir, "the body is trying to say what the mouth can’t say" (as cited in Brothers, 2010, p. 5). The work with clients throughout a Satir session always involves them checking into their bodies to see what is changing and shifting,
helping the client to integrate their body responses with their thoughts, feelings and perceptions. Satir said, “remember that the body is the thermometer and it is the active manifestation of what is going on in the body-mind-soul-system” (p. 5). Taylor (2001) states that learning does not have to involve conscious awareness but can involve a "variety of extrarational and nonconscious ways of knowing" (p. 221) to include paying attention to the body and knowing through our bodies. Maiese (2011) maintains, “consciousness like ours requires a “conatively affective, motile, suitably neurobiologically complex, egocentrically centered and spatially oriented, forward-flowing living organism that actively engages with its environment” (p. 52). She refers to this proposition as the “Essential Embodiment Thesis” or EE (p. 51), arguing that consciousness should be understood as a “living activity and as a ‘something that we do’ with and through our living bodies and brains, rather than a ‘something’ that has a locus somewhere deep inside us, in the brain and central nervous system alone” (p. 67).

Despite the apparent strong relationship between change processes that occur through transformative pedagogy and learning and transformational change in therapy, particularly in terms of how they foreground opportunities for personal growth, there is currently little research on the role of transformative pedagogy and learning theory within counsellor education settings (Thiemann, 2013). This study hopes to address this gap in the literature and contribute new understandings about the role of transformative pedagogy and learning theory within the context of counsellor education.

1.4. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis contains eight chapters. Chapter 2 highlights the evolving tapestry of transformative pedagogy and learning theory since the 1970s beginning with the father of transformative learning Jack Mezirow (1978). It describes how transformative learning theory has evolved from critical thinking through to the holistic approach of adult learning that is used in the workshop component of this study and as a lens through which to examine the change processes of the participants.

The third chapter reviews the literature on the efficacy of play therapy. It outlines the history of sand tray therapy and the concepts and content associated with the sand tray approach used in NSST, which forms the basis for the workshop component of this
research. Neural circuitry, which underlies basic human behaviours that have long been considered instinctive, are presented (Panksepp, 2010) as well as attachment theory (Schore, 2009) and polyvagal theory that relates the role of the autonomic nervous system to emotional experience (Porges, 2011). Other neurological findings with application to the theoretical concepts of NSST are discussed (Schore & Schore, 2008). The Transformational Systemic Therapy model (TST) (Satir et al., 1991) is described.

Chapter 4 consists of a literature review of research into what is known about the intentional integration of personal growth promotion into the teaching of skills and approaches in counsellor education. The review narrows, looking at research into the intentional use of transformative pedagogy in counsellor education. It narrows further in examining what the research says about the intentional integration of personal growth and transformative pedagogy in counsellor training programs that teach play therapy and sand tray therapy.

Chapter 5 presents the methodology of this study. It includes a full description of the NSST workshop component, interview component, ethical considerations, the qualitative action research design, the interpretative phenomenology analysis used to generate the findings, a reflective assessment of the messiness of the process of the analysis and a discussion of the validity of the findings.

Chapter 6 presents the main findings through the lens of seven emergent themes that address the two main research questions.

Research Question 1. How is personal growth experienced by counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray (NSST)—a new experiential play-based therapy?

- Theme 1: Becoming aware of personal issues.
- Theme 2: Deep sense of connection to and freedom for self
- Theme 3: Richer choice of feelings, perceptions and expectations for self
- Theme 4: Body awareness and freedom from physical pain
- Theme 5: Powerful new insights about past self
- Theme 6: Being effective, competent, confident, personally and professionally.

Research Question 2. How might transformative pedagogy foreground understanding in ways that foster personal growth opportunities among
counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning NSST?

- Theme 7: Feelings of being nurtured and safe.

Chapter 7 provides a thick description (Denzin, 2001; Ponterotto, 2006) of six participants. This offers an in-depth analysis of the circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies and motivations of the six participants’ experience of personal growth.

The eighth and concluding chapter provides a summary of the main findings, implications of the findings for counsellor education, limitations of the research, opposing viewpoints and directions for future research.
Chapter 2.

Transformative Pedagogy and Transformative Learning in the Context of this Study

2.1. Transformative Learning

The Transformative Learning Network (TLN, 2016) describes transformative learning as an epistemological undertaking: “a deconstruction of how we learn as well as a deconstruction of what we know” (About Transformative Learning, Bullet 3). In the process of transformation, “new ways of knowing and learning” (Bullet 3) are created and “what we see, perceive, attend to and therefore know is transformed” (Bullet 3) as well. According to the network, “transformative learning is a living theoretical discipline which seeks to discover and explain how learning engages individuals so that they grow, evolve and progress and in so doing engage human systems in new ways” (Bullet 1). At the heart of transformative learning is the way we communicate with each other (Moir-Bussy, 2010), which is a key ingredient in counsellor education. The learning in the workshop and interview components of this study draws on these elements of transformative learning.

The transformative learning theorists propose: Critical reflection and reflective discourse (Mezirow, 1978, 1985, 1991, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2003), personal and social empowerment through conscientization (Freire, 1972); spirituality and soul work (Dirkx, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2012; Tisdell, 2003); emotions and implicit memory (Taylor, 2001); reflection in action (Hoshmand, 2004; Schön, 1983; Wong-Wylie, 2003); intuition (Lawrence, 2009, 2012; Marks-Tarlow, 2013); transformative learning within the body (Freiler, 2009); the relationship between teacher and learner (Clark, 1993; Cranton, 2006; Daloz, 1986; Taylor, 2000a, 2000b); neuroscience ends the rational versus the emotional debate in transformative learning (McGilchrist, 2009) and a holistic approach to transformative learning (Papastamatis & Panitsides, 2014).

Given this wide scope in meaning, it is important to give the background to transformative learning theory and how it relates to teaching the NSST approach. This review begins with the origins of transformative learning and discusses how the concept
has evolved through the work of other influential scholars and how the application of all the elements applies to the present study.

2.2. Mezirow: Critical Reflection and Reflective Discourse in Transformative Learning

The architect of transformative learning theory is Jack Mezirow, an American sociologist and education theorist. His research into adult learning and education began in the 1970s. Mezirow has been remarkably influential and appealing to educators embedded in a wide variety of traditions, disciplines and settings. In 2007, Taylor reported that Mezirow’s theory was the most researched and discussed theory of adult learning in the United States at that time and that he was also well regarded in European educational scholarship. Influenced by the humanist thought of the time, Mezirow (2000a) believed the goal of adult education was to produce autonomous and responsible thinkers who are more inclusive in their perceptions of the world, who are more discriminating, open to other points of view and who are able to integrate their differing experiences (Mezirow, 1991).

According to Mezirow (1978), the process of transformative learning begins with a characteristic “disorienting dilemma” an unfamiliar and motivating experience upon which people can critically reflect and evaluate themselves. Through this reflective process, they begin to experience themselves in a new way of being, which enables them to make new decisions and finally integrate new perspectives (King, 2003). Thus, transformative learning is about change in perspective and reflective thinking enables such an opportunity. Over the years this broad, foundational change in understanding has been described as new “meaning perspectives” (Mezirow, 1978), new “frames of reference” (Mezirow, 2000a), new “habits of mind” (Mezirow, 1997) and new worldviews (King, 2003).

For Mezirow (1981), humans do and should construct their own meaning via their experiences and interactions with others and with the world at large. He held that meaning "exists within ourselves rather than in external forms such as books" (p. xiv). He believed that "personal meanings that we attribute to our experience are acquired
and validated through human interaction and experience” (p. xiv). He was ahead of his time in saying that future experiences are seen through the lens of our past experiences.

The process, which Mezirow (1997) called “meaning-making”, results in the unconscious development of frames of reference. These are default ways in which we perceive the world which “shape and delimit our expectations, perceptions, cognition and feelings” (p. 5). Frames of reference have two dimensions: “habits of mind” and “points of view”. A habit of mind is a “constellation of belief, value judgment, attitude and feeling that shapes a particular interpretation” (p. 6). Habits of mind are more firmly embedded while points of view are more consciously approached and thus more subject to the potential of change (Mezirow, 2003). Mezirow (1985) identified four ways through which learning takes place. The first is to expand the range of existing perspectives by adding in further evidence. The second is to establish new points of view. The third way is to transform a point of view and the fourth is to transform our habits of mind by becoming aware of our own biases. He believed that when transformative learning occurs, meaning structures are changed (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow placed a high priority upon critical reflection on assumptions that underpin our beliefs. He held that in order to change our interpretations we must become/be made consciously aware of our own assumptions and beliefs through discussion with others, moving to action on newly-acquired perceptions, subsequently assessing and acting on the new thinking (Mezirow, 1985). He emphasized what he calls reflective or ideal discourse, which requires complete information, the ability to evaluate arguments objectively and freedom from coercion and self-deception. He admitted that ideal discourse is not something attainable in actual practice, but believed that it stands as a model for “what reflective discourse should be” (as cited in Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2013, p. 7). Thus, critically reflecting upon the assumptions on which we base our interpretations, beliefs and points of view is key because our perceptions are loaded with our experiences and objectified through language (Mezirow, 1997).

According to Mezirow and Taylor (2009), transformative learning results in complete paradigm shifts, experiences that alter our very core identity or worldview. They refer to these paradigm shifts as ah-ha moments: they are “epochal, . . . involving dramatic or major changes” (as cited in Meyer, Land, & Baillie, 2010, p. 23) like “passing
through a portal” (p. ix) so that a new perspective of some aspect of the world or one’s life comes into view (Meyer et al., 2010).

Significantly, other leading theorists in the field began to object to focusing exclusively on rational and analytical processes. For example, Taylor (2000a) argued that transformative learning granted too much importance to critical reflection and underestimated the role of emotions and feelings in the process of transformation. Similarly, Dirkx (2001) objected that emotions in adult education should never be dismissed as unimportant to learning because they are “deeply interrelated with perceiving and processing information” (p. 68). In the next section, we examine further theoretical ideas on transformative learning.

2.3. Freire:
Personal and Social Empowerment through Conscientization in Transformative Learning

While Mezirow’s (1990) concept of transformative learning is directed towards personal development, Freire’s theory (1972) of transformative learning is rooted in a sociocultural approach. Freire’s idea of transformative learning has the goal of social change. Freire seeks to liberate adult students through developing critical thinking skills or "conscientization" in order for them to become aware of the oppressive social structures in which they find themselves (Freire, 1972). According to Freire, personal empowerment and social transformation are two inseparable processes because conscientization enables individuals to reflect on their assumptions. The beliefs that arise from their changed view of themselves help them to identify and question the interconnections and broader meaning of the world they live in, which enables them to take subsequent action to change the world.

2.4. Dirkx:
Spirituality and Soul Work in Transformative Learning

John Dirkx, a prominent theorist in the field of adult and continuing education, was concerned with the emotional-spiritual dimensions of transformative learning. According to Dirkx, learning, which is truly transformative in nature, is “a kind of learning
that integrates our experiences of the outer world, including the experiences of texts and subject matter, with the experience of our inner worlds” (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006, p. 126). Dirkx (2006) was strongly influenced by Robert Boyd’s (Boyd, 1991; Boyd & Myers, 1998) theoretical perspective of depth psychology, which was based upon the ideas of Carl Jung. Jung said that people have inner, private lives of which they are not consciously aware and which drive their decisions and actions (as cited in Boyd, 1991). Boyd believed that the work of the adult learner was to become aware of these unconscious aspects of themselves. Dirkx adopted concepts from Jungian and post-Jungian depth psychology to focus on unconscious issues in adult learners associated with the development of the individual, interpersonal interactions and social development (as cited in Boyd & Myers, 1998). In a dialogue with Mezirow, Dirkx defended the inclusion of the personal, the private, the spiritual and even the religious, arguing that, “learning and making sense of what we are studying and our lives involves the personal. How can it not involve the person?” (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006, p. 129).

Dirkx was a strong proponent of integrating our unconscious with our conscious in our day-to-day living, wanting to know:

how our inner lives shape and influence the ways in which we make sense of our lives, of our being in the world [and] from this . . . how we might provide for curricular and pedagogical experiences that more fully integrate the presence of this inner world with what we experience from without.  
(as cited in Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006, p. 127)

By inner life Dirkx included not only conscious thought but also the part:

That shows up in seemingly disjointed, fragmentary and difficult to understand dreams of spontaneous fantasies that often break through to consciousness in the middle of carefully orchestrated conversation, deep feelings and emotions that erupt into our waking lives with a force that surprises even us, . . . its presence . . . shrouded in a veil of fog, . . . stubbornly [concealing] the . . . multiple voices, multiple identities that often relay mixed and even conflicting messages to the more conscious me that mediates between them and the outer world.  
(Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006, pp. 126-127)

Dirkx placed the focus of transformative learning squarely in the affective domain. Emotionally-charged images, which Dirkx (2001) called “messengers of the soul” (p. 66), prompted by encounters with subject matter, with texts, with educators and within the social context of the learning environment, emerge through imaginative and creative activities such as journal writing, literature, poetry, art, movies, storytelling,
dance and ritual. They provide access to the psyche and allow the individual to “know [him/herself] as a more fully individuated being” (pp. 69-70).

Dirkx (2012) maintained that the unconscious world hosts our spirituality—wonder, awe, peace and beauty, which he termed “soul”. He spoke of transformation in higher and adult learning as something spiritual, as the “nurturing of the soul” (Dirkx, 2012, p. 116).

Many other transformative learning theorists have followed this emphasis of what could be termed spiritual: Tisdell (2003) said that spirituality involves the further development of self-awareness, a sense of interconnectedness and a relationship to a higher power and what we individually and collectively experience and attend to and honour as the “sacred” in our lives (p. 29). Kidd (1973) says that spiritual learning involves the celebration, the affirmation, the enlargement of full consciousness and the search for that part of the individual that is truly human. English (2005) suggests that it is the educator’s work to encourage exploration of the student’s inner lives, which enables the student to tap into the “quest for ultimate significance and meaning” (p. 604).

2.5. Taylor: Emotions and Implicit Memory in Transformative Learning

In contrast to Mezirow, Freire and Dirkx, Edward Taylor presented alternative theories of transformative learning. Taylor (2001) argued that critical reflection was only one way to promote change in perspective, suggesting, “at times introspection should be de-emphasized, with greater attention and appreciation given for nonconscious ways of change” (p. 234). He showed in his study of neurobiological research that emotions and rationality were much more interdependent than previously understood, “each acting in concert with the other in the decision-making process” (p. 231). As early as 1993, Parrott and Schulkin argued that rather than Descartes’ dualism of mind and body, contemporary research indicated an integrated relationship between cognition and emotions wherein the latter “anticipates future needs, prepares for action and even prepares for thinking certain types of thoughts” (p. 56). Taylor (2001) cited a 1993 study by Sveinunggaard who found that when exploring the role of affective learning in a
transformation, participants could not act on cognitive learning until they had engaged in “learning how to identify, explore, validate and express affect” (p. 278). Emotions, far from being separate or even interfering with learning, are viewed as central to the process where they guide—or distort—the process of reasoning (de Sousa 1991, p. 197) mostly at a non-conscious level.

Taylor (2001) maintained that learning occurs through a variety of means rather than just rational discourse and critical reflection. He found, for example, that some participants in a study, living in a second culture, used thoughtful action and an experiential conditioned approach to their learning instead of critical reflection (Taylor, 1994). Research on memory by Kihlstrom, Roediger, Greenwald, Banji and Schacter (as cited in Taylor, 2001) revealed that a great deal of learning takes place outside our conscious working memory and has a “tremendous influence on how we look and act in the world” (p. 219). Taylor considered specifically the role of implicit memory of the right hemisphere of the brain in transformative learning. He wanted to know how it contributes to understanding the process of change that takes place at the non-conscious level. Implicit memory deals with the unconscious cognitive processing of past experience, whereby meaning structures are altered outside the participant's awareness. This called into serious question Mezirow’s reliance upon critical reflection in transformative learning. The habits and skills learned through implicit memory are inaccessible for introspection (Taylor, 2001) and out of conscious critical awareness.

### 2.6. Hoshmand, Lawrence, Marks-Tarlow, Schön, Wong-Wylie: Reflection in Action and Intuition

The conscious processes posited by theorists of transformative learning find interesting parallels in the work of Donald Schön’s (1983) work on reflective practice. Schön offers a further evolution of transformative learning towards an epistemology of practice that emphasizes “special expertise” (p. 49) or “artistic, intuitive processes” (p. 49). Schön stresses that these processes are often difficult to explain, given that they are “tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing” (p. 49).
Schön (1983) uses the term “reflection-in-action” (p. 55), which privileges this intuitive knowledge. Schön says that to reflect-in-action, the learner cognitively brings “their awareness to their action during the performance of the action itself, 'noticing', 'thinking' or 'observing' something about the action” (p. 55). For Schön, reflection-in-action does not depend upon a rationally verified epistemic foundation, but a “knowing is in our action” (p. 49). Put simply, Schön says it is thinking about "doing something while doing it" (p. 54).

Wong-Wylie (2003) talks of a third practice which she calls "Reflection-on-Self-in/on-Action" (p. 10). She says, "it emphasizes salient personal experiences that influence and shape the person" (p. 10). Schön also used the term “reflection-on-action” (as cited in Wong-Wylie, 2003, p. 10) after the fact to make new decisions about future encounters.

And yet, despite the potential benefits of incorporating reflection in counsellor education, there is little research about the benefit of opportunities for counsellors during their graduate counsellor education to be given time to reflect on their own sense of being in the world (Hoshmand, 2004). In the words of Hoshmand, there needs to be a “humanistically oriented counseling education program that emphasizes the development of the personhood of the counselor [that] would focus on the student’s self-understanding and the use of self in the process of learning and potentiating positive development in others” (p. 89). Successful focus of the personhood of the counsellor, says Hoshmand, could be achieved through reflective practice.

Transformative theorists see the use of intuition as a tool of transformative learning. Intuition is a type of knowledge, which is a subjective experience that comes into our conscious awareness through implicit learning (Lawrence, 2012; Schore, 2017). Intuition has been described in many ways by: Lawrence (2012) as “spontaneous, heart-centered, free, adventurous, imaginative, playful, nonsequential and nonlinear” (p. 5); Vaughn describes intuition as “a way of knowing that transcends intellect and reason” (as cited in Lawrence, 2012, p. 5); and Blanchard defines intuition as “a realization of wholeness which is simultaneously internal and external, it is an event which is both experiential and cognitive” (as cited in Lawrence, 2012, p. 5). Intuition is a way of knowing that is not conscious but is experienced through the body—as a "gut feeling" (p. 9).
Transformative learning in counsellor education promotes the value of intuition that is increasingly espoused as a therapeutic tool. In therapy, Marks-Tarlow (2014) sees intuition as an effective component of the therapeutic relationship. She argues that the therapist should make use of intuition as a guide to their own participation in and the direction of the therapeutic process. Marks-Tarlow sees intuition as “playing with possibilities, ambiguous edges and fuzzy truths” (p. 308). She says that clinicians should follow their gut, as they can sense a lot about their clients “based only on a tiny sliver of exposure” (p. 309). She refers to Malcolm Gladwell’s concept of “thin slicing” (as cited in Marks-Tarlow, 2014, p. 309), where we are able to find patterns based on a narrow window of experience but “where accuracy depends on lots of prior exposure to build up an implicit repertoire of knowledge” (p. 309). She says her clinical work: “Depends exquisitely on what emerges out of me, according to the particulars of the moment. Because this level of attunement is impossible to predict or prescribe, my technique is spontaneous and intuitively guided” (pp. 312-313).

Marks-Tarlow (2014) goes on to say that it is not just her intuition that is important but so too that of the client, which is the relational unconscious connection through right brain/body.

2.7. Freiler: Transformative Learning within the Body

Embodiment is defined “as a way to construct knowledge through direct engagement in bodily experiences and inhabiting one’s body through a felt sense of being-in-the-world” (Freiler, 2009, p. 40). As Freiler points out, in many cases being in touch with tears, the breath, or held pain can create “a sense of connectedness and interdependence through the essence of lived experiencing within one’s complete humanness” (p. 40). To be in touch with one’s own body requires reflection and guidance on the part of the teacher/therapist. The term self-disclosure is where the teacher/therapist discloses the experience of himself or herself. When attuned to the student/client, the teacher/therapist can feel what the student/client is feeling. The teacher/therapist then uses language from their left-brain to express what is going on for
them and subsequently what is happening in the student/client’s right brain and body to help them become aware of their physical sensations (Quillman, 2011).

2.8. **Clark, Cranton, Daloz, Taylor:**
*The Relationship between Teacher and Student in Transformative Learning*

Transformative learning considers the special connection between student and teacher (Taylor, 2000b) and Clark (1993) expands on this as being a “relationship of care”. Transformative learning is seen as an interdependent process built on trust and involvement of other individuals, rather than as an independent act, as almost all learning issues are associated with relationships (Taylor, 2000b). The teacher’s role is akin to Daloz’s (1986) notion of “Mentor” or “keepers of the educational fires” (p. 33) by “providing support, challenge and vision” (Clark, 1993, p. 49). Most importantly is to establish a genuine “authentic and helping relationship” (Taylor, 2000a, para. 40), with every student. The teacher within a transformative learning context needs to strive to be genuine and authentic and secure, which affords awareness of others (Cranton, 2006).

2.9. **McGilchrist:**
*Neuroscience Ends the Rational versus the Emotional Debate in Transformative Learning*

The transformative perspectives of Mezirow’s rational versus Dirkx’s affective debate¹ in transformative learning has benefited from a fruitful examination of the separate roles of the hemispheres of the brain (McGilchrist, 2009). Neuroscience is now able to shed light on how both the primary affective process (right brain) and the secondary rational process (left brain) are essential to any learning.

¹ The terms affective domain and emotions are often used synonymously; however emotions, said McGilchrist (2009), are certainly part of affect, but are only part of it. Affect is ultimately a "way of being" in the world (p. 185). McGilchrist suggests that emotions come before cognition and that "affective judgment is not dependent on the outcome of a cognitive process" (p. 185). Thus, our emotions are pre-cognitive. McGilchrist sees the body as "the necessary context for all human experience" (p. 119).
Based on studies of people with brain lesions, temporary experimental hemisphere inactivations, transcranial magnetic stimulation and electroconvulsive therapy, neuropsychiatrist Iain McGilchrist (2009) put forward a comprehensive perspective of the interrelatedness and separateness of the two hemispheres in the brain in his book, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*. He maintained that the assessment of experience is initially through a sense of the whole, which is a right-brain process. Then specific aspects, which are a left-brain process, are seen in relation to the whole. Thus, our affective judgment and our sense of the whole depend on the right hemisphere and occur before cognitive assessment of the parts, which is the role of the left hemisphere. The latter "actively narrows its attentional focus to highly related words" (p. 41). Therefore, it is no longer accurate to speak of imagination or gestalt of the right hemisphere and logic and language and linear functions of the left (McGilchrist, 2009); emotions cannot work without the connection to rational thought which has to then return to the right hemisphere for emotional consideration (McGilchrist, 2009).

2.9.1. **Right brain versus left brain**

McGilchrist (2009) suggests that there is a fundamental difference between the hemispheres not so much in their function but in the type of attention they give to the world. The right brain allows our experiences to be present to us "in all their embodied particularity, with all their changeability and impermanence and their interconnectedness, as part of a whole which is forever in flux" (p. 93). The right hemisphere is about attachment to other (McGilchrist, 2009; Schore, 2015b). The left-brain allows us to step outside the flow of experience and "experience experience" (McGilchrist, 2009, p. 94) in a special way. The world of the left-brain is a simple yet clearer representation of the truth, which is more useful for manipulation of the world and one another; it is "explicit, abstracted, compartmentalised, fragmented, static, essentially lifeless" (p. 94). McGilchrist says this left-brain perspective gives us a feeling of being detached and thus powerful. It pays attention to the virtual world that it has created, a world that is "self-consistent, but self-contained" (p. 93).
2.9.2. **Reason versus rationality**

McGilchrist (2009) makes the distinction between reason and rationality. Rationality is typically a left-hemisphere process that is context-independent, rule based and can be taught. According to McGilchrist, rational thinking is a linear, sequential argument, "clearly better executed by the left hemisphere" (p. 60), which he maintains is a world of "the rational, the mechanistic, the certain, the humanly controlled" (p. 351).

Reason on the other hand is right-brain based. It cannot be taught: it develops out of an individual's experience and is "incarnated in that person with all their feelings, beliefs, values and judgments" (McGilchrist, 2009, p. 331). McGilchrist says, "the popular stereotype that the left hemisphere has a monopoly on reason, like the view that it has a monopoly on language, is mistaken. As always it is a question not of 'what', but of 'in what way'" (p. 64).

Thus, the rational versus emotional debate appears moot. Far from being mutually exclusive, both the rational and the emotional are required in learning. The rationally dominant left hemisphere and the emotionally dominant right hemisphere work in close proximity, for the rational thinking of the left hemisphere requires the emotional component of the right hemisphere.

2.10. **Papastamatis and Panitsides: A Holistic Approach to Transformative Learning**

Papastamatis and Panitsides (2014) advocate for an adult learning approach that is based on a more holistic pedagogy, "in which all developmental measures, intellectual, social, emotional, moral and spiritual, are attended to" (p. 78). According to Mezirow (1991), one of the most important learning tasks in adulthood is making meaning. Papastamatis and Panitsides (2014) don't disagree but they believe that the physical, affective and spiritual domains are also concerned with meaning making and should be considered "equally useful in providing a convincing rationale for interpreting adult learning" (p. 78).

Research findings have depicted that holistic approaches in transformative learning can foster meaning making, empowerment and the emergence of self-
managing groups (Nitschke & Malvicini, 2013), helping learners develop a critical engagement with their world and subsequently arriving at alternative courses of action (Yorks, 2000).

2.11. Key Issues in Transformative Learning for the Context of this Study

The workshop component of this study embraces Mezirow’s humanistic approach to adult education. The idea of the workshop component was to develop responsible and discriminating counsellors. The process of using the sand tray and reflecting on the interface of old patterns of behaviour and new possibilities certainly has the potential to create for the participants an unfamiliar experience upon which people can critically reflect and evaluate themselves. The creating images of past, present and future in the sand tray affords the opportunity for the participants to form in part new “meaning perspectives” (Mezirow, 1978), new “frames of reference” (Mezirow, 2000a), new “habits of mind” (Mezirow, 1997) and new worldviews (King, 2003). Through this process, they begin to experience themselves in a new way of being, which enables them to make new decisions and finally integrate new perspectives (King, 2003).

Freire’s (1972) theory of transformative learning is relevant to this study because the intention of this training is to elicit the participants’ openness to develop a sense of personal power as well as interfacing with themselves to make themselves better people and subsequently interface with the world to make it a better place.

As with Mezirow and Freire, Dirkx’s (2001) theories of transformative learning resonate with the workshop component and the interview component of this study. The use of imagination and creativity and the playing with possibilities is central to the NSST approach and is modelled in the demonstrations. The opportunity to play between the edges of chaos and imagination is critical to the NSST approach and it provides access to the psyche and allows the participants to know themselves as more fully individuated beings (pp. 69-70).

Taylor is separating out the introspection of left-brain conscious learning from the holistic implicit memory of the right hemisphere also referred to today as implicit consciousness (Schore, 2017). In the didactic teaching part of the workshop component
of this study, the participants learning of the basic techniques of NSST is through the left-brain conscious state. However, the primary emphasis in the modelling of a securely attached congruent self throughout the workshop component and the interview component by the researcher is to use the right mind/body consciousness (Schore, 2017). The same right mind/body implicit consciousness (Schore, 2017) applies to the experiential triad work by the participants and the demonstrations of the NSST approach by the researcher.

The workshop component in this study teaches participants how to access “knowledge through direct engagement in bodily experiences” (Freiler, 2009, p. 40). The participants are taught didactically, but primarily through modelling and demonstrating, how the body communicates to self and others. The participants learn to be aware of their own internal state and how it informs them about the state of their client. This right mind/body communication is a 2-way process in therapy with both parties using implicit unconscious communications with each other (Schore, 2017).

Central to my being the teacher and interviewer in this study was the “relationship of care” (Clark, 1993), between the participants and myself throughout the workshop component and the interview component. My role as teacher and interviewer is similar to Daloz’s (1986) notion of “Mentor” or “keepers of the educational fires” (p. 33) by “providing support, challenge and vision” (Clark, 1993, p. 49). To do this work, I need to strive to be genuine and authentic, which is made possible because I am secure within myself, which affords awareness of others (Cranton, 2006).

McGilchrist’s (2009) scientific findings are included in this section because this study uses his understanding of the brain throughout the training. The role of the right mind/body in personal growth is emphasised in teaching NSST. It is through the right brain/body that for example the students benefit from the securely attached congruent modelling of the teacher. Also, the participants learn about the nuanced non-verbal right-brain to right-brain communication between the therapist and the client.

Finally, the workshop component and interview component of this study embraces Papastamatis and Panitsides (2014) holistic evolution of transformative learning theory, which has embraced critical thinking, spirituality and depth psychology, embodied knowing, the role of emotions, the role of intuition and expressive art and the
influence of the pedagogical relationship. This study takes as a given that human beings must be understood as the interface of mind, body and spirit (Papastamatis & Panitsides, 2014). Nowhere is this more appropriate and applicable than in counsellor education where personal growth is central to the student counsellor’s use of self in the therapeutic relationship.

In summary, for Dirkx (2012), the essential transformations of learning through which individualization and integration of the individual is produced occurs via "soul work" (p. 116), which teachers enhance by using a transformative pedagogy which facilitates the emotional responses of students, using: myth, poetry, music, metaphor and “creative approaches to learning [which] bypass ego consciousness and allow for expressions of deeper dimensions of our psychic lives” (p. 68). Taylor (2001) cites work on intuition (Brooks, 1989), affective learning (Clark, 1991; Scott, 1991; Sveinunnggaard, 1993) the guiding force of feelings (Taylor, 2001) and whole person learning (Group for Collaborative Inquiry, 1994), all of which support a central role for other ways of knowing in transformative learning—ways such as emotions, spirituality, or embodied forms of knowing. Other ways of knowing in transformative learning which are encouraged by transformative pedagogy and experienced in transformative learning and counselling practice include a variety of art forms whereby the “messengers of the soul” (Dirkx as cited in Dirkx, 2012, p. 120) are expressed—in the classroom through visual arts, music, poetry, dance, drama, storytelling and creative writing (Taylor & Cranton, 2012) and similarly, in the counselling space through dance therapy, play therapy, art therapy and sand tray therapy (De Little, 2015a).

2.12. Transformative Pedagogy

According to McCaleb (1997), transformative pedagogy “attempts to facilitate a critical capacity within the classroom while promoting the integration of students, families, communities and the world” (p. 14). McCaleb elaborates the following concepts as key to transformative pedagogy:

- Teaching and learning take place in a socio-historical context.
- Education takes place within the context of community.
- Teaching begins with student knowledge.
Skills and voices develop out of a need to know and to act. Teaching and learning are both individual and collaborative processes. Teaching and learning are transformative processes.

Transformative pedagogy is used within the context of this study because it helps us understand what foregrounds and affords personal growth opportunities in educational contexts. Transformative pedagogy sets up teaching methods and activities to bring about both personal and social transformations by making authentic connections between teaching, learning and living (Farren, 2016). It is intentional, mutual relationship-focused pedagogy. Transformative pedagogy has been described as “critical pedagogy” (Freire, 1972), “liberatory pedagogy” (Shor & Freire, 1987), “pedagogy of empowerment,” and “activist pedagogy” (Ukpokodu, 2009, para. 3).

Using transformative pedagogy, educators are able to facilitate deep learning by modelling the risk of taking “the vulnerable step toward transparency in relationship with students and the classroom community” (Scofield, Saginak, Reljic, & Harper, 2009, p. 1). The teacher is presented both as a source of wisdom and a source of humility. Such transparency reduces the power differential between student and teacher to allow for honest, collaborative and reciprocal relationships to develop (Scofield et al., 2009). Using self-disclosure allows the boundaries between teacher and learner to become flexible, which “allows students to reveal their authentic selves, which ultimately helps them to connect personally with their learning” (p. 2) and personally with themselves.

Transformative pedagogy offers an interactive, collaborative, dialogic relationship between educator and learner and is usually used in the context of questioning and struggling with social as well as personal issues (Meyers, 2008). It moves beyond engaging with content to “trying to bring into being, something that goes beyond a present situation” (Greene, 1995, p. 51). Transformative pedagogy changes the meaning of teaching and the role of the teacher. It’s more about the being of the teacher creating opportunities for the being of the student to develop.

The traditional emphasis on verbal content and insight as the major change mechanism in learning focuses on improving the analytic processing of the student’s left hemispheres with the help of the educator’s left hemisphere (Cozolino, 2010). However, Schore (personal communication, 2017) points to the long forgotten and now embraced
by modern pedagogy, right mind/body processes of creativity, imagination, risk taking, the use of intuition and attunement.

Hoshmand (2004) suggests that counsellor education within the widest definition of transformative pedagogy could be problematic, because some counsellors typically and traditionally serve as "unquestioning supporters of the existing system, whether they concern school systems, mental health systems, or other human services" (p. 88). This is precisely what Freire’s (1972) contribution to transformative pedagogy addresses, with his focus on questioning the existing macro status quo.

This study embraces transformative pedagogy because it fundamentally addresses and encourages personal growth, which is central to counsellor education.

This study uses transformative pedagogy to educate student counsellors and practicing counsellors in the NSST approach and to understand and foster their personal growth. The participants are encouraged to learn in “intentional, responsible and meaningful ways rather than as passive receptacles of information” (Scofield et al., 2009, p. 1) in order to first become aware of themselves (Miller, 2001) (intrapersonal), and then to see themselves as making a difference in the world (interpersonal).

For the purpose of this study, I have defined transformative pedagogy as the intentional authentic way the educator sets up the programming to create a democratic and emancipatory learning context in a safe and nurturing dialogic relationship as co-learners. The intention in this study was for the participants and educator to experience this engagement, which would facilitate empowerment and personal agency by constructing and reflecting on the meaning they made at the intersection of their head and heart, which challenges the personal and social status quo.

This activist agenda relates to this study in the following way: Transformative pedagogy elicits people’s openness to interface with the world to make it a better place and develop a sense of personal power as well as interfacing with themselves to make themselves better people. In this way, they prepare themselves for the work of helping others to do the same.

The researcher used all of these aspects of transformative pedagogy in the workshop and interview component of this study. This was done by emphasizing the
teaching modalities that best promoted transformative pedagogy. In order of emphasis, they were:

1. modeling a securely-attached transparent congruent self through the use of non-verbal communication
2. facilitating self-reflection
3. facilitating, experiential work
4. demonstrating
5. showing examples of both successful and challenging sand tray work by the researcher's clients
6. facilitating discussions
7. didactic teaching: the didactic part of the workshop component used a model of differentiated teaching. This included, auditory, visual kinaesthetic presentations.

The way to gain empowerment and personal agency proposed by transformative pedagogy is for the teacher to set up a teaching environment that mirrors what the transformative learning theorists are proposing. This is an appropriate approach to use in counsellor education because the students are given the opportunity to grapple with concepts and information and construct their own meanings, leave with a sense of their own self-efficacy and in turn create liberating and transformative spaces for themselves and their future clients.

When transformative pedagogy is adopted by teachers, transformative learning can happen. This chapter has seen how transformative pedagogy and transformative learning theory has developed and how each perspective offers new and useful insights. The next chapter seeks to explain further the content of the NSST workshop component.
Chapter 3.

Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray (NSST), Play Therapy, Sand Tray Therapy, and the Importance of Play

Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray (NSST) is an approach to therapeutic transformational change using the sand tray with children and adults. This chapter outlines the background, content and curriculum that is associated with using this approach in therapeutic settings (e.g., play therapy and sand tray therapy) and the workshop component used in training.

The NSST workshop component consists of the following: What does the research tell us about the efficacy of play, play therapy and sand tray therapy; using the sand tray in the NSST approach; the importance of play; the play circuitry in the brain; the origins and development of sand tray therapy; the contribution of hermeneutics to play therapy and sand tray therapy; non-verbal communication through the sand tray; the place for creativity and imagination in the sand tray; Transformational Systemic Therapy; therapeutic attachment and attachment between children and caregiver in relation to mirror neurons; the fear response, the drive for safety and the underlying defence patterns of coping; awareness of shifts in body states; personal growth of the self; the role of intuition in the NSST approach and epigenetics.2

3.1. What Does the Research Tell Us about the Efficacy of Play Therapy with Children?

In October 1999, Bratton and Ray (2000) presented their report, “What the Research Shows about Play Therapy”? at the Association of Play Therapy conference. They reviewed case studies in the literature between 1942 and 2000 that documented the effectiveness of play therapy over a wide range of presenting problems and focused on 82 specific studies that "clearly identified at least one treatment as consisting of a

2 The NSST workshop component is also detailed in my book, Where Words Can’t Reach: Neuroscience and the Satir Model in the Sand Tray (De Little, 2015a).
play therapy intervention and employed pre and post measures" (p. 48). They reported substantial evidence that play therapy was an appropriate and effective intervention over a vast range of presenting issues, while cautioning, "case studies are rarely accepted as clinical research and certainly do not provide generalizable results" (p. 48). Reviewers of the research agreed that the sample sizes were too small to make valid generalizations and so the researchers turned to meta-analysis, a statistically valid method of combining the outcomes of studies to increase reliability.

In 2001, Leblanc and Ritchie used meta-analysis in search of empirical evidence supporting the efficacy of play therapy. They wanted to identify factors that influenced therapeutic outcomes. They found that the effectiveness of the treatment was enhanced when parents were included in the therapy and that the efficacy of play therapy was greatest when the treatment duration was 30 sessions on average. They recommended that future research should seek to identify the important qualities that characterized effective therapists and effective treatment protocols.

In 2005, Bratton, Ray, Rhine, and Jones performed a comprehensive meta-analysis of the 67 studies on play therapy published from 1953 to 2000. The researchers coded and measured for the influence of the following factors: the theoretical model used; the treatment provider; the usage of mental health professionals versus trained paraprofessionals (primarily parents) supervised by a professional; the treatment setting; duration; format (group vs. individual); the presenting problem behaviours; the type, number and source of outcome measures; the gender, age and ethnicity of the child participants; whether the studies were published or not; the study design; and the reasons for referral of the child for treatment. The researchers found strong evidence: that play therapy is an effective intervention for a wide range of internalizing and externalising problems; that age, gender and presenting issues did not influence how effective the therapy was; and that treatment was more effective when humanist non-interventional approaches were employed and when parents were included in the therapy. They did, however, discuss the lack of rigorous well-designed studies, including the fact that many studies had not reported on the training that the play therapists had received or on the specifics of play therapy procedures used. There was also a lack of research that compared play therapy to "more traditional behavioral plans, cognitive techniques, or school guidance curricula" (Bratton et al., 2005, p. 386).
More recently, Ray, Armstrong, Balkin, and Jayne’s (2015) investigation of 23 random control trials evaluating the effectiveness of child centered play therapy conducted in elementary schools, provided quantitative support for its use in the school setting.

These studies demonstrate a statistically significant effectiveness for children participating in play therapy (Ray et al., 2015). Yet not much has changed since 2010 when Baggerly, Ray, and Bratton (2010) cautioned that research on play therapy in large measure still lacked clear and rigorous methodology. They pointed out that the research failed to take into account differing aspects of treatments and the theoretical orientation of therapists. Baggerly et al. recommended investigation into the effectiveness of play therapies across different cultural groups. They noted that the many approaches called play therapy are dissimilar and said that, in particular, interventionist versus non-interventionist (direct versus non-direct) play therapies need to be distinguished from one another.

A literature review of the efficacy of sand tray therapy, a subsection of play therapy with children or adult clients produced no results.

3.2. Using the Sand Tray in the NSST Approach

This section contains a brief overview of the NSST approach that was taught to the participants, discussed with the participants, used in the demonstrations, practiced in the triads, reflected on by the participants and modelled by the researcher throughout the workshop component of this study.

The NSST approach is appropriate to use with adults and children in counselling. The training in the workshop component of this research included examples of working with all ages. Asking the adult or child client to make a picture of what is going on for them and what brings them to counselling is the first step towards the client’s transformation. Choosing a few figurines from hundreds lined up on the shelves and placing them in the sand tray begins to connect the underlying implicit patterns of memories to the conscious mind of the client. With guidance from the therapist the client creates another scenario that depicts how it would be for them if they did not feel this way. This usually involves a choice of trees, angels, words like peace, joy carved on
stones, musical instruments, flowers, a lit candle to symbolise a sense of peace and freedom. The next phase involves looking at what is getting in the way of being in this ideal state. This is usually some form of coping with a difficult past and is usually represented by a blockage, that is, a defence. This barrier is explored and unpacked by seeing what part of it has been helpful, each time illustrating the experiences with figurines to create a picture of past, present and future. With the helpful parts of protection firmly in place, the client is able to look and see if he/she can appreciate that part of the blockage and choose to let go of the less helpful part and replace it with something similar but smaller, or remove it completely. This process utilises the non-verbal mind/body connection to play with past patterns of protection, to re-organise them, change them and become aware of the subsequent feelings, perceptions and expectations of themselves and others within the safety of the therapeutic attachment relationship.

### 3.3. The Importance of Play

Play is central to the NSST approach for children and adults. According to Landreth (2002):

Play gives concrete form and expression to children's inner worlds. Emotionally significant experiences are given meaningful expression through play. A major function of play is the changing of what might be unmanageable in reality to manageable situations through symbolic representation. (p. 12)

Ginott (1994) sums up symbolic play by saying, “through the manipulation of toys, the child can show more adequately than through words how he feels about himself and the significant persons and events in his life” (p. 51).

Nietzsche considered play vitally important, asserting it to be the "highest form of human activity" (as cited in Hinman, 1974, p. 111). Freud (1958) also shared this sentiment. For well over a century, individuals involved in the social, emotional, or psychological welfare of children have been aware that play helps children to develop resilience, empathy, creativity, social skills and leadership abilities. It provides them with a means of releasing tension, regulating affect and affording repair. It helps them to master their environment and gives them a sense of security (Schaefer, 2011).
In his review of the decline of free, unstructured play in the lives of American children over the past 60 years, Gray (2011) presents a convincing and chilling argument that a lack of play has caused psychopathology to increase amongst children and adolescents. He states that:

In play, children develop intrinsic interests and competencies . . . learn how to make decisions, solve problems, exert self-control and follow rules . . . learn to regulate their emotions . . . [and] make friends and learn to get along with others as equals . . . Play makes children happy and its absence makes them unhappy. (pp. 454-457)

Wild animals play better when they are not in danger and if they have had adequate opportunities for play, they are more likely to survive when faced with danger (Brown, 2008). Scientists have discovered that play keeps mind and brain flexible, helping children cope with a constantly changing and possibly dangerous world (Brown, 2008). Brown interviewed thousands of people about their history of play and found that those who had played a lot were light hearted, empathic and flexible and had a sense of optimism and hope. Brown also looked at the early lives of mass murderers, including Texas Tower murderer Charles Whitman and argued that there was a link between their sociopathic behavior and the suppression of play behavior in early life. Rats and young rhesus monkeys who lacked opportunities to play with others of their kind during critical phases of their development "later overreacted emotionally to stressful situations and, for this reason, failed to cope adaptively. They showed both excessive fear and inappropriate aggression" (Gray, 2011, p. 456). In his Ted Talk, Stuart Brown (2008) says that play is serious business and affords the opportunity to “explore the possible.”

The work of Bessel van der Kolk (2015) has shown how traumatic stress rewires the brain’s functioning, particularly in the areas of pleasure, engagement, control and trust and has given us insight into how play can release trauma that is stuck in the non-verbal parts of the brain. His work lends great support to the consensus among neuroscientists present at the 2015 UCLA Extension and Lifespan Learning Institute, Neurobiology Conference that imaginative play provides children with the opportunity to release trauma by acting out different scenarios and bringing them into conscious awareness. When we play and laugh, it creates the same response in the brain as meditation and prayer, which is to stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, which
slows the heart rate and lowers blood pressure creating a sense of peace (Valliant, 2008).

3.4. The Play Circuitry in the Brain

In the workshop component, the training of the participants in the use of NSST and discussion that followed touched on the play circuitry in the brain. Neuroscientists have located emotional operating systems that are universal in all human behaviour, in the subcortical areas of the brain. They are named “circuits” by Jaak Panksepp, a psychiatrist and neurobiologist. Panksepp (2010) identified seven emotional operating systems, which are common to all mammals and underlie our survival and social behaviours: SEEKING, FEAR, RAGE, LUST, CARE, PANIC and PLAY (Panksepp uses capital letters throughout). The most basic one is the “seeking circuitry” (p. 11). It “fills the mind with interest and motivates organisms to effortlessly search for the things they need, crave and desire” (p. 11). This system in humans generates and sustains curiosity from the “mundane to our highest intellectual pursuits” (p. 11). It is also strongly activated by perceived threats, including violence, abuse and neglect. Feelings of frustration and disappointment happen when the seeking circuitry is not satisfied. Then rage and anger come on-line.

The fear and grief (separation, distress) circuitry, when activated by events in the environment, signal feelings of disconnectedness from others and a lack of safety. On the other hand, circuitry, which builds connection to others, care, lust and play, create a sense of safety. When safety is established, powerful feelings can be mobilized without fear of humiliation to the point where unacceptable, unconscious wishes and feelings can emerge (Gabbard & Lester, 2003, pp. 39-41). There is an indisputable mind-body-brain connection between the physical brain structures and circuits, the behavioural and emotional components of these circuits. The behavioral and emotional components of these circuits are our instinctive drives and are the yearnings of Satir’s model that is used in NSST.

It is the circuitry of panic, fear and play on which the NSST approach primarily focuses in theory, in therapy and in the training. Panic deals with abandonment and loss and fear with the classic fight, flight or freeze responses, whereas the play circuitry
mediates our socialization and emotional behaviours and our ability to engage with others (Panksepp 2010). Creating a safe learning environment for the participants in this research allowed the participants’ seeking behaviour to diminish sufficiently for them to feel safe enough to be vulnerable and open to playing and exploring.

The play system, for Panksepp (1998) is primarily physical activity and secondarily symbolic or fantasy play. Play occurs only when basic needs have been met—until that point other instincts predominate. Panksepp (2010) has shown that active play selectively stimulates both the amygdala, where emotions are processed, to produce the brain-derived neurotrophic factor, which stimulates the growth of neural tissue. Play also selectively stimulates the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex where executive decisions are processed.

According to Carroll (n.d.), play is behaviour that is characterized by unpredictability and spontaneity and is terribly hard to fake and depends on the other even more than does attachment (Carroll, n.d.). Carroll suggests that play developed at “an evolutionary later date, because it is highly sociable and has a highly integrative function” (para. 20). According to Panksepp (1998) play allows for integration because it engages parts of the brain involved with reframing in terms of other and involves the combining of all the senses.

The play and seeking systems are complementary: whereas REM sleep (related to the seeking system) is involved with organizing affective information, play allows for actively trying out that same information. Panksepp (2010) suggests that play may be the daytime version of dreaming.

Panksepp (1998) describes three levels of functioning in the brain. At the top is the tertiary level of cognitive executive functioning, which allows us to reflect and be aware of what we have learned. This could mean that when a child wants to play they can override this wish by their tertiary process and go and do the chores. Panksepp (1998) describes the cortex as the “playground of the mind” because play has a powerful effect on the cortex.

The secondary level is where classical conditioning and behavioural and emotional habits are derived. It is in this part of the brain where “the unconditioned emotional responses to environmental events are felt as ‘rewards’ and ‘punishments’”
Panksepp and Biven (2012) suggest that the PLAY system allows children to learn social rules such as giving and taking, how to win and how to be a good sport.

The primary process, at the sub-cortical level, gives us the “tools for living” (Panksepp & Biven, 2012, p. xii). This is the area where the seven primary motivational systems lie. This part of the brain is involved with pleasant and unpleasant feelings, homeostatic functions like thirst, hunger and emotional affects like “intentions-in-action” (Kestly, 2014, p. 45). It is this last type of process, the “emotional affects” (Kestly, 2014, p. 45) that is utilised in therapeutic play. The intentions-in-actions give the therapist the signs such as smiles, giggles, laughter and eye contact that indicate a relative sense of safety in the child.

The interweaving of the emotional levels begins early on with the primary-process instinctual emotions connecting within a healthy attuned attachment relationship. This creates “joyous lives by knowing how and when to use playfulness, even during our most serious and challenging moments” (Kestly, 2014, p. 50). This is referring to the right-brain to right-brain attachment that is used throughout an NSST therapy session and throughout the workshop component of this study between the teacher/researcher and between the participants themselves.

3.5. The Origins and Development of Sand Tray Therapy

British psychologist Margaret Lowenfeld (1979) was the first child therapist to employ the technique of using small figurines placed in a sand box. Lowenfeld did not see this method as a diagnostic tool or as a way of reaching and exploring children's conscious and unconscious feelings; rather, she saw it as an activity that was, in itself, inherently healing without interpretation from an adult.

Dora Kalff (1981), a Jungian psychoanalyst, adapted Lowenfeld's (1979) “World Technique” to Jungian psychotherapy with children. The sand tray proved a valuable tool that solved many logistical difficulties for Kalff (1981). She felt that traditional Jungian analysis was unsuitable for children because they hadn't developed the cognitive and verbal skills that traditional Jungian analysis required (De Little, 2015a). The theoretical basis for sand play was Jung's intrapsychic "depth" psychology, where the terms “ego,”
“self,” and “shadow” are seen to be located in both the conscious and unconscious mind. This framework rested on the Cartesian assumption of duality, which emphasized the separateness of subject and object, self and world, spirit and body. It saw “psychological phenomena as contained structures that communicate with each other from separate vantage points” (Donald, 2014, p. v).

Since Jungian analysis was popular throughout the globe, the adaptation of sandplay to the psychoanalytic treatment of children rapidly gained wide acceptance. In 1982, Kalff initiated an annual gathering of sand play therapists from all over the world. Subsequently, in 1985, the International Society of Sandplay Therapy was formed (Bradway & McCoard, 1997, p. 33).

_The World Technique_ (Lowenfeld, 1979) specifically contrasted the author’s approach to placing objects in the sand with that of psychoanalysts. In psychoanalysis, the therapist confronts the child with the meaning of his play by interpreting it. For Lowenfeld, the child is confronted with parts of his own emotional world, thoughts and memories, simply by virtue of the fact that "the child himself has laid them out for his own inspection" (as cited in Urwin & Hood-Williams, 1988, p. 297). However, Kalff (1981) was to openly and deeply disagree with Lowenfeld’s core beliefs. Kalff argued that the therapist was to give an interpretation to the child, based upon the symbolic meanings of the archetypes that Jung claimed were at play within the psyche (De Little, 2015a). Both Kalff and Lowenfeld’s approaches held, as does the NSST approach, that it was critically important to create a loving, safe and protected environment in which the child could play.

In the latter half of the 20th Century, postmodernist thought arose which was to transform the use of the sand tray in a therapeutic context. Postmodernist thought rejected exclusive reliance on the authority of science and reason for knowledge and considered valid multiple ways of knowing including knowing through intuition and spirituality (Gallerani & Dybic, 2011). Postmodernism was a significant departure from the scientific cause-and-effect paradigm of many therapeutic and educational philosophies, which based interpretations on the proposition that a person’s past

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3 The terms sand play, sandplay, sand tray, sandtray therapy, are used by different philosophies. Generally, therapists using a Jungian approach refer to it as sand play. Others use the words “sand tray therapy.” The NSST approach uses the term sand tray.
determines their present. Gallerani and Dybicz characterized postmodernism as having an emphasis on:

A future orientation, the articulation of identity, highlighting personal agency, highlighting strengths and successes, tapping into goals and dreams, a collaborative relationship, the notion that the client is the expert and the client–therapist relationship as one of author-editor. (p. 165)

Gisela De Domenico (1988), a therapist working with children, adults, families and couples, developed a new way of thinking about what happens when children play in the sand tray. Breaking away from the choice between analyzing (Kalff, 1981) or remaining silent (Lowenfeld, 1979), De Domenico (1988) used a third approach, a hermeneutic process emphasizing the client's unique experience of their inner world (Davenport, 2001). The approach, which she called "sandplay-worldplay", was grounded in her belief that people exist at multiple levels of being—not just intrapersonal, interpersonal and social levels, but also cultural and spiritual levels—and have different types of understanding at each level. De Domenico (1988) used the terms "builder" (client) and "witness" (therapist) to describe the therapeutic relationship. The builder is seen as the expert who teaches the witness. The witness is an observer who jointly reflects upon and experiences the child's world (in the sand tray) and silently reflects on which objects the child chooses and where the child places them. Dialogue with the witness encourages the builder to look at the world from all angles, including "actively engaging with the myth material as it appears in the sand tray world" (Davenport, 2001, p. 6). De Domenico (1988) held that, at the deepest spiritual level of being, the psyche reveals several perspectives on an issue and that these different perspectives may emerge when the world is looked at from different vantage points. The psyche is thus seen as an ally who directs the entire play process for the ultimate benefit of the client's growth, development and healing (Davenport, 2001, p. 6).

The NSST approach embraces wholeheartedly this use of the sand tray.

One of many postmodern influences on therapy was the philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1984) whose beliefs included the proposition that we create a narrative about ourselves wherein we selectively choose or omit content. In studying the construction of narrative, Abbott (2002) identified two parts to this narrative structure: constituent events and supplementary events. Constituent events are the essential facts; supplementary
events lend “meaning to the constituent events and emphasize a particular identity feature within the protagonist of the narrative” (Gallerani & Dybicz, 2011, p. 168). The constituent events of the past cannot be changed but the supplementary approach of how an individual sees themselves can be changed. Thus, we are able to craft a new narrative about our lives (Gallerani & Dybicz, 2011). Because “sandplay is a window to understand the child’s preferred identity and values” (Gallerani & Dybicz, 2011, p. 170), these authors maintain that sandplay allows children to be the “creators of their identity” (p. 170). They are then potentially able to say, “who I am” (p. 169) and “who I want to be” (p. 173).

This is consistent with the Satir approach that holds that we cannot change the past, but we can change how we feel about it and we can make new decisions for ourselves and for our future (J. Banmen, personal communication, April 7, 2016). It is also consistent with transformative pedagogy and transformative learning theory, which suggests that in a learning environment the facilitator, is able to assist the students to be the authors of their own lives. And it is consistent with the NSST approach in that it maintains we are the agents of our own future where the impact of the past is made present and becomes the point of departure for new decisions to be made (Dauenhauer & Pellauer, 2014).

From the hermeneutic perspective, the transformation of meaning is understood to emerge within a particular historical, cultural, and social context, which is shared with the therapist (Donald, 2014). As Virginia Satir would say, we are not stand-alone islands: therapy is systemic both intrapsychically and interpsychically (J. Banmen, personal communication, April 7, 2016). In sand tray therapy, play is the client’s way of understanding his or her own self, through their meaning-making using play materials. Changes occur “in the context of the dialogue inherent in [the client’s] play with symbolic material and our verbal and nonverbal interactions” (Donald, 2014, p. 102). The therapist, therefore, must be aware of the context, the assumptions and their own biases and must further be open to the possibility that a picture may have a different meaning for their client than for themselves. In order for there to be the congruence necessary in the therapeutic relationship, the therapist must be trained to be aware of their own simultaneous processing and embodied responses. As Donald says "sandplay
therapists, like all human beings, are always subject to the influences of their own situatedness" (p. 93). Donald continues:

Hermeneutics recognizes the interpretations of our own and other persons' lived experience as dynamic and fluid processes that are dialogic, contextual and continually evolving. By contrast, in the Cartesian worldview in which Sandplay was developed, the 'Self' and psychological processes are viewed as structures located in an enclosed, hierarchically arranged internal world. (p. 93)

NSST recognises the intersubjectivity of the therapist and the client. The NSST approach makes no assumptions about what is happening in the sand tray, but asks questions of the client about the figurines.

3.6. Non-verbal Communication through the Sand Tray

The sand tray provides a “free and protected space” (M. Kalff, 2003, p. xiv) of the therapeutic frame that is created by the therapist, which Dora Kalff (2003) believed was inviolable and necessary if the client was to experience change. She describes this free space as occurring in the therapeutic setting when the therapist is fully able to accept the client so that the therapist, as a person, “is as much a part of everything going on in the room as is the patient himself” (p. 7; also as cited in Donald, 2014, p. 96). The sand tray affords further deepening of understanding and expression and reflection as using images enables access to the right-brain implicit or unconscious narrative or self (Badenoch, 2008). The sand tray affords the client to see themselves and all their parts in space and time (Badenoch, 2008). According to Schore and Schore (2008), the self is not a single entity but a “left-brain self-system” and a “right brain self-system” (p. 119). The NSST approach is founded on the belief that therapy has to allow for implicit, unconscious expression of the right-brain self-system and the sand tray facilitates this process through the creation of symbols and pictures of the unconscious implicit right-brain system (De Little, 2015b). In this unfolding of the previously un-aware, disorganized, un-articulated world there is also the underlying process wherein the self emerges as a result of interpersonal neurobiology (Schore, 2009).
3.7. Imagination, Creativity, and the Power of the Metaphor in the Sand Tray

The NSST approach asks the client to imagine and then make a picture in the sand tray of what it would look like for them if they didn’t have their problem that they need help with. The creative process of the NSST approach like other creative processes moves from the right hemisphere to the left hemisphere where language is added and objectivity is utilised and back again to the right. When the right hemisphere is engaged then the left quietens, allowing the right to be inspirational (A. Schore, personal communication, March 4, 2017).

Playing on the edge of imagination and forming a new image for oneself to symbolically articulate future possibilities is a creative act. Creativity means “coming into being” whereby unconscious parts of the implicit right hemisphere are revealed (A. Schore, personal communication, March 4, 2017).

This creative process is the coming together of the right hemisphere/body with the figurines. The use of novel metaphor in this creative process has the potential to move the client to look beyond the familiar, to open up otherwise unknown parts, and to clarify distorted parts in order to construct and subsequently experience a new relationship with self. The moving, adding and taking away of the figurines in the sand tray allows for the client to play spontaneously with new possibilities and to juggle elements into previously unconsidered juxtapositions, to create a new sense of being (Rogers, 1954). It is in this process of creatively pruning old patterns of defence and forming images of new ways of being that the true current essence of the client emerges and they experience the ah-ha moment of which Mezirow and Taylor (2009) speak. At the same time, the client is able to reduce the size and power of the old patterns of defence by creating images of how these patterns have helped and subsequently appreciating them. These were previously unknown protective, motivating, determined, strong parts that grew out of their defences. This is the power of the metaphor.

This creativity can only be achieved on the part of the client if there is complete safety and freedom to have “time out of time” (Amend & Benne, 2013, p. 4) space to imagine and play with these possibilities. The therapist has to be secure in themselves to hold and stay with their client as their client abandons their familiar patterns of coping.
and moves into the potentially unknown liminal emotional chaos, which they need to pass through in order to imagine and move towards a new way of being.

3.8. Transformational Systemic Therapy (TST)

3.8.1. The 14 basic tenets of the Satir model

The Transformational Systemic Therapy (TST) model (Satir et al., 1991) is one part of the NSST approach used in this research. Satir continuously added to her model of therapy, however her philosophy remained consistent (as cited in Banmen & Maki-Banmen 2006). The following 14 basic tenets of Satir’s model are integrated throughout the NSST workshop component of this study.

- Human beings are all unique manifestations of the same universal life force.
- Human processes are universal: All human beings experience themselves through doing, thinking, feeling, expecting, yearning and spiritual connection.
- People are basically good: At their core-essential level of life energy, people are naturally positive.
- People all have the internal resources they need in order to cope successfully.
- The symptomatic behaviour is the subconscious attempt to resolve the perceived problem, even if it creates dysfunctional patterns of behaviour; the “problem” is not the problem. How people cope is the problem.
- Therapy needs to focus on health and possibilities.
- Change is always possible.
- We cannot change past events; we can only change the impact that the past events have had on us.
- People do the best they can at any moment in time.
- Feelings belong to us . . . we can choose to let go of [those] that create negative energies . . . and replace them with acceptance appreciation, forgiveness, love and peace.
- Wholeness, growth and evolution are natural human processes and, therefore, need to be the focus of any therapeutic change.
- The therapist’s use of self is the greatest therapeutic tool that the therapist has.
- Therapists who experience their own positively directional life energy are able to provide clients with therapeutic relationships based on care, acceptance and new possibilities.
• Hope is a significant component or ingredient for change to take place.

Satir believed that the presenting problematic behaviours were, at their origin, coping strategies adopted to protect the self from insupportable grief, fear or unmet needs (as cited in Banmen & Maki-Banmen, 2006). In Satir’s words, “the problem is not the problem” (J. Banmen, personal communication, June 2, 2016) by which she meant that these learned patterns of response under stress are simply patterns of behaviour that clients adopt in order to cope with their unmet yearnings for safety and acceptance. She called them coping stances and identified four—“Placating”, “Blaming”, “Super-Reasonable” and “Irrelevant” (Satir et al., 1991, see pp. 31-64)—to which I have added a fifth coping stance that I have called “Frozen” (De Little, 2015a; based on Porges, 2011, polyvagal theory), which is a part of my NSST training sessions and the workshop component of this study. Although these coping behaviours can manifest differently under different circumstances they are all indicators of a loss of self-worth and a sense of powerlessness and a need to self-protect. Initially effective, over time they become traps and prisons for the child, maintained through the use of internal resources and robbing the child of joy and connection (De Little, 2015a, pp. 50-52).

The bedrock of Virginia Satir’s approach is the belief that all people are essentially driven by a constant, healthy, positive desire to thrive . . . [and] all humans have a life force that motivates us to survive and to know (often unconsciously) what we need to survive. (De Little, 2015a p. 15)

Satir called this “life energy”.

3.8.2. The five essential elements of the Satir model required to bring about transformational change

The TST model focuses on facilitating growth and change. From observing Satir’s work five therapeutic process elements were identified (as cited in Banmen & Maki-Banmen, 2006). These were explained to the participants in the workshop component of this study.

• The first is that therapy must be systemic, considering the individual as an intact system, but also as a part of their internalized system of relationships with others, including others who may no longer be present in the client’s life.

• The second element is that the process is experiential which means that the client is led to be consciously aware of their experiences of the past in the present, including the physical feelings associated with those experiences
(body memory) and to be aware of changes as they occur, especially somatically, during therapy;

- The third element is that the therapy must be *change focused* from the very beginning. The old stuckness of the client very quickly becomes a tension between the stickiness and the possibility of change.

- The fourth element is that the therapeutic process is *positively directional*. The questions asked by the therapist help the client recognize the positive intentionality of the problematic coping behaviours.

- The fifth element is how the therapist must be present or *congruent*, as Satir et al. (1991) called it, by being authentically and emotionally available to the client in order to create a safe, accepting, and nurturing space for the client. Satir called this element the *use of self* (J. Banmen, personal communication, June 2, 2016). This involves for the therapist, a state of congruence, which is possibly the most powerful element of any therapy. The congruence of the therapist allows for the communication between the client and the counsellor to flow freely, no matter what the therapist’s theoretical orientation or training (De Little, 2015a, p. 28).

NSST places Satir’s five essential elements at the centre of the approach.

### 3.8.3. The elements of the Satir iceberg metaphor as a model for being human

Building upon Satir et al.’s (1991) theoretical and methodological foundation, John Banmen added the metaphor of an iceberg as an analytical template (Figure 1). It has become the modern Satir therapist’s primary lens for seeing and understanding the behaviour of a person in their external and internal worlds. External behaviours are represented by the above-the-waterline part of the iceberg and internal thoughts and feelings are shown as being below the waterline. This template enables the therapist to move beyond external, observable behaviours, our conscious rationales for action and penetrate ever deeper into the thinking and pre-thinking (unconscious) processes that support the maintenance of the participant’s problematic choice. This is achieved in the Satir model by asking questions about these elements. For example, “How do you feel about feeling sad?”; “what do others expect of you?”, etcetera.

At the waterline, we find the coping stances, our learned patterns of response under stress (Satir et al., 1991). Beneath the waterline is where the therapist’s interest is primarily focused as it reveals the inner experiences of the client or “internal working model” (Schore, 2017). Satir outlined five layers of experience: Feelings, feelings about feelings, expectations, perceptions and yearnings. We now understand from
neuroscience that the iceberg is both the explicit memory of the left hemisphere and the implicit memory of right hemisphere. Cozolino (2010) says that the right hemisphere is:

Reflected in unconscious patterns of learning stored in hidden layers of neural processing, largely inaccessible to conscious awareness . . . from repressed trauma to riding a bicycle, to getting an uneasy feeling when we smell a food that once made us sick. Explicit memory is the tip of the experiential iceberg; implicit memory is the vast structure below the surface. (p. 77)

The iceberg is integral to the NSST approach. I have adapted the diagram of the iceberg (Satir et al., 1991) to reflect the current understanding of neuroscience (Figure 2). What happens in the NSST approach is that the metaphor of the client's issues, typically come from below the waterline and is projected in the form of figurines in the

Figure 1. The iceberg as a metaphor for being human. Adapted from The Satir Model: Family Therapy and Beyond by V. Satir, J. Banmen, J. Gerber, & M. Gomori, 1991. Copyright 1999 by J. Banmen; used with permission.
sand tray. The above elements of the Satir model are integrated into the NSST training to form a base of working with clients when using the sand tray. According to Satir et al. (1991), all of the iceberg elements together constitute the self “as the source of our inner experiences” (p. 148). Neuroscience today expands on Satir’s understanding of these inner experiences. They begin in a humans’ life with a developing intersubjectivity between the right hemisphere/body of the infant with the right hemisphere/body of the mother through the emotional communication of the attachment bond (Schore, 2012).

![Figure 2. The Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray (NSST) iceberg. Based on The iceberg as a metaphor for being human by J. Banmen, 1999 (see Figure 1). Copyright 2017 by M. De Little.](image)
**Feelings.**

The TST approach, as do many others therapeutic models, works with feelings. A key insight from the TST therapeutic model (Satir et al., 1991) points out that feelings are “past-based” (p. 155). In other words, although we experience feelings in response to past experience, the impact is still being felt in the present. Thus, it is the present impact of the past event that we are dealing with and therapists must focus on the feelings in the present (the impact) rather than on the experience of the past (the story). This is a concept central to the NSST approach where the participants learn how to focus on expressing the impact of the experience through the figurines.

Badenoch (2008) a sand tray therapist, maintains that to access feelings, it is necessary to take into account the response of the body. She says:

> In an effort to begin where our sandplayer is, we can ask a question about the feeling of the tray in both body and affect, rather than going straight for cognitive meaning. We don't want to catalyze a leap from right- to left-hemisphere processes, but rather open the highway for right to offer itself to the left. (p. 224)

The NSST approach brings out the client’s feelings in the same way. Access to sensations in the body is discussed later in this chapter. A particular set of figurines that is often used by the client in the NSST approach are 2-inch-high eggs with facial expressions on them representing feelings. Even when the client makes a scene in the sand tray without these eggs, I am still able to ask questions about the feelings of the figurines and how they are placed; for example, "Show me how does that guy feels when he is hanging upside down?" In the NSST approach when clients can’t answer a question about the feelings of the figurines, I will take a guess saying something like, "Maybe he is scared that he might fall?" The questions are always tentative; they are merely a way to get the client started with identifying feelings and if the client tells me something else, then I simply concur with their assessment.

**Feelings about feelings.**

Feelings about feelings illuminate how we judge our feelings. They are responses that we often learned primarily from our family of origin. Satir et al. (1991) said:

> Recognizing how people feel about their feelings indicates most clearly where many of the therapeutic interventions are needed. People need a lot more help
with these reactive feelings to their feelings than with how they feel about the meanings they make. Feeling bad about their feelings gets people into all kinds of emotional dilemmas, inner conflict and symptomatic body reactions.” (p. 127)

Recognizing how we feel and how we judge our feelings can be helpful to the healing process. In the NSST approach, the therapist asks questions about the figurines such as, how does he feel about being so scared/angry/sad? My experience tells me that children, in particular, often have difficulty with this concept, but it is always worth asking them. If they don’t know how the figurine feels about their feelings—scared or angry, sad or happy—then I can always make a tentative gentle guess. Again, if the client makes a different answer, I simply accept it without question or judgement.

**Perceptions.**

Perceptions are also referred to by Satir et al. (1991) as beliefs or values. We develop our perceptions of ourselves and the world from an early age and because of being young they are limited (Satir et al., 1991). This leads to distortions, interpretations and conclusions based on incomplete information (Satir et al., 1991). Therapeutic intervention helps to expand these perceptions, which brings about a change in interpretation of the experiences of events. In the NSST approach the choice and placement of figurines conveys without words, how the client perceives themselves and the world.

**Expectations.**

Central to the TST model and to the NSST approach is the importance of expectations. Central to that is the notion that people/clients have control over their inner world and control as to how they react to their external world.

In the NSST approach when asking questions that elucidate expectations, I make inquiries about the figurines such as: What do you think he should do? What do the others expect him to do? What do you think he wants them to do for him? Or are there rules that he is obeying here? The client typically chooses one or several figurines, which they identify as themselves. I am careful to invite the client to only talk about the expectations of their figurine in relation to themselves and others.

Expectations are the manifestations of our most primal yearnings. According to Satir et al. (1991) they are “usually formed from universal yearnings” (p. 152).
Expectations are the specific ways in which we anticipate having those yearnings met. When these expectations are thwarted, we are left with un-met expectations. So the therapist guides the client to look at what to do with their unmet expectations; the client usually decides: to hold on to the unmet expectation, to let go of the expectation, to find alternatives to the expectation, to find a different way to meet their expectation, or to work to meet the expectation.

**Yearnings.**

Satir et al. (1991) describes universal human needs as yearnings and focuses on them in the TST model; in particular, on the basic human “longing to be loved, accepted, validated and confirmed” (p. 151). How these yearnings are met or not met has a profound impact on how we develop, mature and cope with our feelings. Coping with chronically un-met needs can lead to deeply ingrained defences, which eventually become dysfunctional and are typically the presenting problems in therapy. Using the TST to uncover the underlying feelings, perceptions, expectations and yearnings, the therapist can and is required to, understand and respect the positive intentionality of the client’s defences.

The NSST approach asks the client to create an image of how they would like to be different. This typically involves them making a scene of beauty, with flowers, trees and butterflies and angels. The client usually describes this image of their yearning as wanting freedom, happiness and peace. The client is able to experience this yearning deeply in their bodies and it often elicits tears of sadness as they experience what they have been missing and what they are longing for. The therapy continues from this place to see what is getting in the way of this sense of peace and beauty.

**Congruence.**

Satir et al. (1991) saw congruence as a state of being and a way of communicating with others and ourselves. She saw congruence as having three levels: Level 1 is where there is awareness of feelings, feelings about feelings, perceptions and yearnings. When clients are not in a state of congruence they are using ways to cope, which have a positive intention but become unhelpful. Satir called Level 2 the “I Am: self, Wholeness” (p. 172). This level is also about awareness and acceptance as well as being in “harmony with our self” (p. 171).
This study is concerned with how counsellors come to achieve the Level 2 of congruency of being through personal growth, which means being authentic, securely attached, confident, and having a strong sense of self.

**Spirituality.**

Satir et al. (1991) included a higher level of being which she called Level 3. She saw this as spirituality: universality, where congruence is about “being in harmony with our self and our life energy, spirituality or God” (p. 171). John Banmen talks of a fourth level or fourth birth, which he describes as enlightenment and as a spiritual dimension (J. Banmen, personal communication, June 2, 2016). Satir et al. (1991) talked of spirituality and Dan Siegel (2016b) a neuroscientist, refers to it as energy flow, which connects us all with the universe. Siegel called this state “MWe” where we are all connected.

All my clients make a wish for themselves at the end of the counselling session. I see this as part of the spiritual theme as the wishes generally touch on the deepest yearnings, to be loved, accepted, to have peace and freedom in our lives.

The rule when making a wish is it has to be a wish for something that money can’t buy. Before the client/star/participant makes a wish, I always tell them what my wish is for them. At the end of the triad and demonstration sessions in the workshop component, the research participants would make a wish. I continued this practice at the end of the interview session, including saying my wish out loud for them. The intention of the wish making is to anchor the experience and orient it in the direction of the future. In the NSST approach, wishes are typically seen as specific expectations of safety, love, peace, connection or acceptance. Unlike some definitions of wishes, the ones made in the playroom are about their newfound selves; and in my experience of the last 20 years of using NSST; they do come true, as the change is both profound and lasting.

**The iceberg in summary.**

The power of applying the lens of the iceberg to working with clients using the sand tray, in the NSST approach, is that the client’s internal world can be accessed not only directly, but indirectly by asking questions of the figurines’ iceberg because the client projects their internal world of experiences and the subsequent meaning via the figurines and their unconscious arrangement. Carl Jung defined projection as an:
Unconscious automatic process whereby a content that is unconscious to the subject transfers itself to an object, so that it seems to belong to that object. The projection ceases the moment it becomes conscious, that is to say when it is seen as belonging to the subject. (as cited in Ammann, 1991, p. 126)

The iceberg provides a metaphor for the comprehensive understanding of the clients’ behaviours, feelings, and motivations because a window to their inner world has been presented in the sand tray. Questions are asked of the figurines (projected material) in the sand tray—not about the client—in order to both address the underlying trauma and keep the play safe for the client. For example, some questions asked might be: “How is the figurine feeling?”; “how does the figurine feel about those feelings?”; “what does the figurine think about himself/herself?”; “what does the figurine think about the world?”; “what do others think of him/her?”; “what does he/she expect of himself/herself?”; “what does she/he expect of others?”; “what do others expect of her/him?”; and “what does she/he truly need or want?” Can you show me by modifying your sand tray picture? Once changes to the figurines, such as placement, size, and choice, have been made in the sand tray at all of the levels of the iceberg, then the experience of the tray for the client is articulated by answering questions from the therapist, such as: “how do you feel now that the guy (referring to the figurine) is safe?”; “Where do you feel that in your body?”; etcetera.

3.9. Other Elements of the Training in NSST

3.9.1. Therapeutic attachment and attachment between children and caregiver in relation to mirror neurons

In order to understand the essential and delicate nature of the therapeutic relationship, the primary attachment relationship of child and caregiver must first be understood.

The attachment relationship of child and caregiver.

Bowlby (1969) defined attachment as a “lasting psychological connectedness between human beings” (p. 194). The theory of attachment suggests that children come into the world biologically pre-programmed to form attachments with others in order to survive. Spontaneous social behaviours such as crying and smiling which stimulate
caregiving responses from adults are dynamic and adaptive, serving to preserve the safety of the helpless infant in the face of unsafe, threatening and dangerous situations.

Schore (2009) characterized a secure attachment relationship as “interactive synchrony” (p. 110), a relationship wherein the caregiver is positively attuned to the state of the infant’s internal arousal. “Through visual-facial, gestural and auditory-prosodic communication, caregiver and infant learn the rhythmic structure of the other and modify their behavior to fit that structure, thereby cocreating [sic] a specifically fitted interaction” (pp. 109-110). This positive attachment bespeaks a positive “biological regulation between and within organisms” (p. 110). Feinberg and Keenan conclude:

The right hemisphere, particularly the right frontal region, under normal circumstances plays a crucial role in establishing the appropriate relationship between the self and the world . . . dysfunction results in a two-way disturbance of personal relatedness between the self and the environment that can lead to disorders of both under and over relatedness between the self and the world. (as cited in Schore, 2012, p. 35)

It is not always necessary for there to be perfect attunement of the caregiver. There can be stress, or “asynchrony”, between the child and the caregiver (Schore, 2009), but in optimal caregiver/child relationship, following such stress the caregiver re-establishes the synchrony allowing the child to recover his/her regulatory equilibrium. Schore (2017) refers to this phenomenon as disruption and repair. Thus, the child gains reassurance of its safety and gains resilience. Schore (2009) has pointed out that maintaining such resilience in a stressful context is a clear indicator of secure attachment. When the primary attachment figure acts as a secure base for exploring the world, the child is able to self-regulate, to evolve strategies that successfully modulate the intensity and/or duration of aroused psychobiological states. The long-term result is that the child is able to form successful relationships, to be empathic, to set appropriate boundaries, to make good decisions, avoid risk; and to develop intellectually (p. 110).

The nature of the care and responsiveness from the primary caregiver determines the quality of the attachment. When this secure base is not achieved either through unintentional or intentional lack of caring or responsiveness it can have severe consequences for the child (Bowlby, 1969), particularly as the relationship becomes the base for all future relationships through the development of an internal working model. If the primary caregiver is absent (unavailable), or abusive, or unreliable (unpredictable),
the level of arousal in the child remains high. The neuronal circuits that are being built underlie and reflect experiences in which the world is a place that is unreliable, inconsistent and/or unsafe. Because the world is indifferent to their needs, the child is unable to achieve a regulated state. The result of such parenting may manifest in a variety of extreme behaviours, which are termed *attachment styles* (Reebye & Kope, 2007). Table 1 indicates one particular way to categorize attachment styles. They are avoidant attachment, anxious ambivalent or resistant attachment and disorganized attachment.

Table 1. Types of Attachment Disorders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant</td>
<td><em>Dismissing and rigid behaviours.</em> “I can do this by myself” The caregiver does not attune to the internal state of the child. The child does not connect to an attachment figure. As they learn not to depend on anyone. This can lead to the emotional withdrawal of the child or indiscriminate sociability and extend to all social interactions. The child does not seek comfort or display affection from the attachment figure. However, the child will seek close seek proximity or comfort from strangers, with an absence shyness or reticence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious Ambivalent or Resistant</td>
<td><em>Pre-occupied and chaotic behaviours.</em> The child has an attachment figure but they give inconsistent and intrusive forms of communication. The child does not have a secure base, as they are unable to see who they are as the boundaries between them and the attachment figure becomes blurred. They appear chaotic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorganized Attachment</td>
<td><em>Unresolved with rigid and chaotic behaviours leading to dissociation.</em> This state involves a response associated with parental frightening or terrifying behaviours and cause relational trauma. The child moves away from the source of terror and conversely is motivated to seek comfort from the same attachment figure. This leads to the child searching for attachment from the caregiver followed by detaching from the caregiver. The child’s sense of <em>self</em> is fragmented making relationships with others problematic. This disorganized attachment can lead to dissociation, as there is no strategy to deal with the “biological paradox” (Siegel, 2012, p. 21-4).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from Siegel (2012) and Reebye & Kope (2007).

Poor attachment experiences in early childhood are not necessarily unalterable. Secure attachment can be earned (Siegel, 1999); this is done through experiences later in life where the individual is able to reflect upon and make sense of how their own early negative attachment experiences have affected their lives. New neural pathways are laid down via this process, as the adults come to terms with their history and thus construct a logical, coherent life story in which the negative experiences are present but do not overwhelm. This is known as “earned secure attachment” (Siegel, 2012, p. AI-26) and is possible to develop within a safe therapeutic relationship.
The role of mirror neurons in attachment.

Attachment is brought about by mirror neurons. When an individual can follow a sequence of actions of another they can determine what is going to happen next and the observer is able to create a map in their head of the other’s intentions (Siegel, 2016a). This concept is taught in some detail in the NSST workshop component of this study. One of the goals of the teaching was for the participants to pick up on the non-verbal information in the therapy sessions through the use of their mirror neurons.

The role of mirror neurons in the human brain has been noted in Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation by Fadiga, Fogassi, Pavesi, and Rizzolatti (1995). The results of the study provided evidence that humans have a mirror system similar to that in monkeys. This phenomenon has relevance to the mother and child attachment connection (and the therapist/client relationship) because these mirror neurons allow us to form a conception of what emotions the other person is expressing and the sensation they are experiencing by means of “simulation of the related body state” (Gallese, Eagle, & Migone, 2007, p. 141). This finding of shared activation is seen by Gallese et al. as “embodied simulation” (p. 131) that consists of the “automatic, unconscious and noninferential simulation in the observer of actions, emotions and sensations carried out and experienced by the observed” (p. 131). Gallese et al. also propose that this shared neural activation pattern and the accompanying embodied simulation constitutes a “fundamental biological basis for understanding another’s mind” (p. 131). The implication is that when the mother is securely attached themselves and is a “goodenough mother” (Winnicott as cited in Abram, 2007, p. 266) then the child will pick up the positive emotions and sensations and similarly when the parent is insecurely attached or under stress or ill then the child will experience a different “embodied simulation” (Gallese’s term as cited in Gallese et al., 2007, p. 132).

These interactions with the primary caregiver provide the child with a lens through which they come to see the world:

Parents reflect to us what they see going on in our inner world, not just noticing our behaviors but, for example, reflecting to us about our feelings, what we might be thinking, remembering, perceiving. All of these are ways we get signals back from our caregivers that help us see the internal world with clarity.

(Siegel, 2016a, “Developing and Improving,” para. 2)
Secure attachment experiences produce a state of mental well-being, which Siegel (1999) called “integration” (Table 2). Siegel (2016c) says that:

integration is where you take distinct parts and link them to create more well-being. Relationally, what it means is you create more kindness and compassion toward others and even toward yourself. Another outcome is curiosity and creativity and openness to life as it unfolds. (para. 28)

Integration “has the sense of harmony, it’s flexible, it’s adaptive; it has a coherence to it that holds together and that’s energized and stable” (Siegel, 2016a, “Developing and Improving,” para. 2) and being in a state of integration appears to enable the individual “to have an internal sense of connection to the past, to live fully and mindfully in the present and to prepare for the future as informed by the past and the present” (Siegel, 2001, p. 77). He called this state of being “autonoesis” (p. 90), a “self-knowing awareness associated with episodic and autobiographical memory and connected to ‘mental time travel’—the linkage of past, present and anticipated future” (p. 90). The creation of this “coherent autobiographical narrative” (pp. 77-78) is dependent upon the self in interaction with other selves and secure attachment is necessary for this integration to occur. Integration is essential for mental well-being, not only within the individual and the family but, Siegel suggests, is also fundamental for the healthy functioning of an entire nurturing community. In the NSST workshop component the participants learn the importance of helping the client become self-aware and integrate past and present and create a new sense of their future, by working through the choice and placement of the figurines. This is done through demonstration, discussion and practicing in the triad work.

When secure attachment is not present and integration is not able to occur, the lens through which the child understands self and others is distorted or incoherent, or even shut down. This is how dissociation and fragmentation arise. The behavioural results of this fragmentation are what others have called attachment disorders occur (see Table 2; Siegel, 2010). Siegel (2016a) likens our being in the world to being in a river with a riverbank either side. One of the riverbanks is rigid and the other chaotic. Integration is in the centre, between the two banks. Our clients can be more on one side or on the other, but they can move away from these states. The aim of therapy is to have them experience longer periods in this calm flow state (Siegel, 2016a).
Table 2. Continuum of Safety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Para-Sympathetic System</th>
<th>Sympathetic System</th>
<th>Play-State</th>
<th>Spiritual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polyvagal System (Porges, 2011)</td>
<td>• Immobilized = Life-Threatening</td>
<td>• Mobilized = Danger</td>
<td>• Social-Engagement System = Play State</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment (Schore, 2012; Siegel, 2012)</td>
<td>• Avoidant</td>
<td>• Anxious Ambivalent / Resistant</td>
<td>• Secure</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated (Schore, 2012)</td>
<td>• Dissociated</td>
<td>• Fragmented</td>
<td>• Integrated</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration (Siegel, 2010)</td>
<td>• Rigidity</td>
<td>• Chaos</td>
<td>• River of Integration / Window of Tolerance</td>
<td>• MWE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Regulation (Levine, 2010; Schore, 2013; Shanker, 2013)</td>
<td>• Affective Dysregulation</td>
<td>• Affective Dysregulation</td>
<td>• Self-regulation</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stress</td>
<td>• Stress</td>
<td>• Inattention</td>
<td>• Inattention</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inattention</td>
<td>• “Stuck off”</td>
<td>• “Stuck on”</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arousal (Schore, 2012)</td>
<td>• Hypo</td>
<td>• Hyper</td>
<td>• Regulated</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorders (APA, 2013)</td>
<td>• Depression</td>
<td>• Mania</td>
<td>• Mentally Healthy</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Select Mutism</td>
<td>• Attention Deficit Spectrum</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• School Avoidance</td>
<td>• Obsessive Compulsive</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Separation Anxiety</td>
<td>• Sleeplessness</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Generalized Anxiety</td>
<td>• Dissociation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Chronic Pain</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Coping Stances (Satir et al., 1991; Banmen, pers. comm., 2016)</td>
<td>• Frozen</td>
<td>• Placating</td>
<td>• Level 1 Congruence</td>
<td>• Level 3 Congruence</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Blaming</td>
<td>• Level 2 Congruence</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Super-reasonable</td>
<td>• “I Am”</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Irrelevant</td>
<td>• Self</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symptoms (Medical Model)</td>
<td>• Lethargy</td>
<td>• Panic Attacks</td>
<td>• Physical Well Being</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exhaustion</td>
<td>• Sleeplessness</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low Motivation</td>
<td>• Chronic Pain</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Chronic Fatigue</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Low Blood Pressure</td>
<td>-</td>
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Siegel (2016a) maintains that these distorted or fragmented lenses can be altered by the individuals themselves through a process which he calls *mindsight*, by “taking [your] mind and awakening it to the fact that you aren’t just a passive participant in life, but . . . an active captain of your own ship” (“What Is Mindsight,” para. 2) you can “transform the connections in the brain, to move the brain to a more integrated, harmonious way of functioning” (“You Can Change,” para. 3).

The brain is an integral part of the central nervous system, which in turn is interwoven within the whole body. Thus, integration involves the flow of information vertically between the brain and the body and laterally between the two hemispheres of the brain. It also flows interpersonally. According to Siegel (2016a) there can be a blockage in the flow of information and energy both within the mind and between minds. One example of the failure to achieve integration is in the various forms of dissociation. Siegel (2001) describes how these unresolved dissociated states may involve the intrusion of elements of implicit memory in the absence of an explicit memory counterpart for past traumatic experiences. This thwarted resolution creates a blockage in the flow of energy and information between two minds: such impairment may be a central feature of disorganized attachments. In this manner, we can see that impaired internal integration may lead to impaired interpersonal integration (Siegel, 2001).

*The therapeutic attachment of right-brain to right-brain is critical to transformational change in therapy.*

In therapy, changes in the brain begin when the client experiences the therapist as trustworthy and safe (Badenoch, 2008). It’s crucial for the therapist to be calm and fully attuned to the client. This behoves the therapist to continually work to resolve their own personal issues in order to maintain a balance of being such that their “resonant circuits” are freed up to enter the child’s world with pure curiosity (Badenoch, 2008). This process is identical to that of the child and caregiver attachment relationship described above.

From the moment a client enters the playroom, changes to the brain occur (Badenoch, 2008). As the therapeutic alliance develops, the child’s brain activity changes to reflect his or her deeper sense of safety and connection. This lays the groundwork for the process of neural integration and regulation (De Little, 2015a).
In particular, the right-brain connection between the client and the therapist is essential to attunement and subsequent re-attachment to self by the client as there is evidence that engagement in therapy can modify attachment styles (Beebe, Knoblauch, Rustin, & Sorter as cited in Macaski, Meekums, & Nolan, 2012). This is because the right brain is largely responsible for the attachment process through non-verbal implicit communication (Schore, 2017). Schore (2012) proposes that, just as the left-brain communicates its states to others’ left-brains via conscious linguistic behaviors, the right brain nonverbally communicates its unconscious states to other right brains tuned to receive these communications. He suggests that the implicit system (self) of the therapist interacts with the implicit system (self) of the client. Schore singles out this phenomenon as being “the core of the therapeutic alliance” (p. 85). Thus, for Schore, “psychotherapy is not the ‘talking cure’ but the affect-communicating and regulation cure” (p. 85). Moreover, therapy has more to do with the communication through our mind/body than through the verbal language of the left hemisphere (De Little, 2015a).

With the “earned secure attachment” Siegel (2012, p. AI-26) of the therapeutic relationship, the NSST approach affords the fragmented, dissociated, disorganized, disintegrated incoherent parts to be literally laid out in front of the client as symbols in the sand tray. These previously unknown implicit parts or body memories are given cohesion in time as past, present and anticipated future is reorganized and made sense of, to allow for the flow or “autonoesis” (Siegel, 2001, p. 90). New decisions can be made by the client about whether to keep the defensive fragmented parts, which served to protect in the past or use other more healthy parts to allow for a “coherent autobiographical narrative” (Siegel, 2001, p. 89).

It is important for counsellors to experience continual personal growth opportunities for their own well-being so that they can provide a better service for their clients (Wilkins, 1997). And yet, despite the widespread recognition that therapists have a responsibility to address their unresolved emotional issues (Clark, 1986; Dryden & Feltham, 1994; Irving & Williams, 1999; Johns, 1996; Kumari, 2011; Mearns 1997; Norcross, 2005; Norcross & Connor, 2005; Norcross et al., 1992; Norcross & Guy, 2005; Norcross et al., 1988; Orlinsky et al., 2005; Rake & Paley, 2009; Rizq & Target, 2008; Rogers, 1961; Rowan, 1976; Satir et al., 1991; Von Haenisch, 2010; Wigg et al., 2011), there is a lack of clear guidance about what this means in counsellor education.
3.9.2. **The fear response:**  
**The drive for safety and**  
the underlying defence patterns of coping

The basis for understanding the continuum of fear and how it is manifested and presented in the training workshop component of this study has been outlined in the “Continuum of Safety” Table 2.

Porges’ (2011) work gives psychotherapy insight into three processes of protection. Porges terms the first line of defence, “the social engagement system” (p. 16) (the green column) where we use eye contact, a smile and a positive voice tone and disposition in order to try and gain safety when sensing a threat. This system is the youngest in evolutionary terms (Porges, 2011). When the social engagement system is compromised the “two older neural systems foster mobilization behaviors of flight or fight via the sympathetic nervous system or immobilized behaviors of death, feigning, freezing and behavioral shut down” (p. 193).

Our clients come to us using some form of these two older neural systems (see Table 2). The social engagement system is where we, at minimum, want our clients to be functioning. Other theoreticians call this state: Attachment (Schore, 2012; Siegel, 2012), integrated (Schore, 2012), integration (Siegel, 2010), self-regulation (Levine, 2010; Schore, 2012; Shanker, 2013), arousal (Schore, 2012), disorders (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013), coping stances (Satir et al., 1991) and symptoms (medical model).

The second method of defence is either to mobilize (Porges, 2011, p. 16) (yellow column) by attacking, blaming, physically fighting and arguing, or to run away in order to escape the conflict (fight or flight). This method of protection looks different according to different theoretical perspectives: ambivalence and disorganized attachment (Schore, 2012; Siegel, 1999); fragmented (Schore, 2012); chaos (Siegel, 2010); affective dysregulation (Levine, 2010,Schore, 2013; Shanker, 2013), hyper-aroused (Schore, 2012); mania, attention deficit disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, dissociation (APA, 2013); coping stances (Satir et al., 1991); physical symptoms like panic attacks, chronic pain and sleeplessness (medical model).
The oldest method of protection is immobilization (Porges, 2011, p. 16) (red column), which in evolutionary terms enabled an animal to freeze and feign death and therefore appears dead only to escape when the attention of the predator is lessened. While still essential to survival under life-threatening conditions it is also manifest in various ways in humans: avoidant and reactive attachment (Schore, 2012; Siegel, 2012) dissociated (Schore, 2012); Rigidity (Siegel, 2010) affective dysregulation (Levine, 2010; Schore, 2013; Shanker, 2013); hypo-aroused (Schore, 2012); depression, select mutism, school avoidance, separation anxiety, generalised anxiety (APA, 2013); frozen coping stance (De Little, 2015a, Satir et al., 1991); physical symptoms such as lethargy, exhaustion, low motivation, chronic fatigue, low blood pressure (medical model).

In the fourth column I added spirituality, which is not included in the polyvagal system but is termed “fourth birth” by J. Banmen (personal communication, June 2, 2016) and MWe by Siegel (2016b) meaning that we are all interconnected in the universe. This is not a place of defence. Rather, it is the ultimate place of safety and peace and, therefore, belongs on the chart.

The social engagement, mobilized, immobilized continuum provides a blueprint for many theories. The names can often be confusing but they are all referring to the same polyvagal system of immobilized, mobilized and social engagement. I have placed the various theories in relative order of health from immobilized, mobilized, social engagement to the spiritual.

**The fear response in the NSST approach.**

Central to the NSST approach is to help the client understand how they have kept themselves safe since early childhood either through mobilized or immobilized states, which have become automatic default responses which potentially become the problem. The drive for safety through attachment is the basis of all coping behaviours and so the work in the sand tray creates images for the protective stance, the fear that lies behind it and subsequently accepting, appreciating and embracing the role these defences have played in keeping the client safe so that they can be evolved and transformed.

Neuroscientists see the underlying patterns of learning and subsequent defensive behavior as belonging to implicit memory (Cozolino, 2002). It is these implicit
memories that are the wellspring of reactive and automatic coping behaviors when we encounter stress. The intention of the coping behaviors is protection of self. One of the essential keys to therapeutic transformational change is for the client to recognize, accept and appreciate how these coping protective behaviors have been trying to keep them safe. Subsequently the client can make decisions and create an image of what part of their coping has been useful in terms of motivating them and what part of the coping is no longer required.

3.9.3. **Awareness of shifts in body states**

*Clients body awareness.*

The NSST approach involves inviting clients to express how their body is reacting to the placement of the figurines in the sand tray. The body is regarded as an informant of the world and facilitating the client to bring their body sensations into awareness, ensures that the body is not an object in the world but a means of "communicating with it" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 106). Churchill (1998) has noted that "we sense in and through our own bodies the intentions and affects that animate the others and we simultaneously understand our tacit experience as significative of the other's expression" (p. 180). Being in touch and aware of shifts in body state under a variety of situations can provide both subjective and objective information that can be acted upon. In NSST, questions are asked of the client such as: "Where in your body do you feel that? What are you tears saying?"

When we experience trauma in the past, it potentially stays in our body as physical pain in the present (Diaz, 2010a). This pain has a negative energy field that occupies the body and mind, which Eckhart Tolle calls the emotional “pain-body” (as cited in Diaz, 2010b, para. 1). The patterns of trauma are held in our bodies impeding the flow of energy in the body/mind connection. When trauma is not released from the body, the patterns of energy remain with a “negative e-motional charge” (NEC) (cited in Diaz, 2010a, para. 3) These patterns of negative energy can be released from the body with the help of the therapist in assisting the client to track shifts in their own body state as their emotional states transform.
The therapist's awareness of their body.

The therapist focuses on the subtle shifts in the client’s facial expression, posture, tears and breaths by internally generating somatosensory representations that simulate how an individual would feel when displaying a certain facial expression (Schore, 2015a). By registering the internal expressions of the client in their own body through the right-brain implicit process, the therapist assists the client to become aware of their changing body states. This ability of the right hemisphere of the therapist allows them to know their client “from the inside out” (Bromberg, 1991, p. 399) by accessing their own sensitive bodily-based intuitive responses to the client’s non-verbal communications. Mathew (1998) says:

The body is clearly an instrument of physical processes, an instrument that can hear, see, touch and smell the world around us. This sensitive instrument also has the ability to tune in to the psyche: to listen to its subtle voice, hear its silent music and search into its darkness for meaning. (p. 17)

The articulation of these changes in body state indicates for the therapist if there is positively directional movement occurring for their client. Of note some adult clients who have experienced profound or early trauma and many children, are not in touch, with shifts in their body state. This part of the NSST approach, helps them become aware of these changes.

3.9.4. Personal growth of the self

The NSST workshop component aims to facilitate two levels of learning. The first part focuses on learning new skills to help the participant in the professional domain of counselling adults and children. The second part focuses on facilitating personal growth or the development of the self for each of the participants. The philosophical basis of the self constantly interacting with the environment derives from Sartre’s (1948) philosophy of, "existence comes before essence" (p. 26) and Kierkegaard’s (1941) idea that "an existing individual is constantly in the process of becoming" (p. 79). This development of self as a Mobius loop of experience with the world and in the world was first noted by Heidegger (1962) who called it “dasein” or intersubjectivity.

What the neuroscientists tell us now about the self is that it is the interacting with others in a safe environment that is the critical element of attachment (Schore & Schore, 2008). This interacting and interconnecting attachment with others is the basis for safe
and lasting secure attachment in individuals (Schore & Schore, 2008). In therapy, the relationship between the therapist and the client is critical to the client regaining a sense of a secure attachment to self.

This NSST training of therapists in this study includes the understanding of the role of the right-hemispherical mind/body expression within the sand tray and the critical role of the therapist in 2-person relational attachment (Schore, 2015b). This training was facilitated through transformative pedagogy by the teacher and transformative learning for each participant. The nurturing connection was purposeful to create an optimum open, warm, safe environment for the participants to facilitate learning, professional growth and personal growth.

3.9.5. The role of intuition in the NSST approach

This dissertation has already referred to Marks-Tarlow (2012) and the importance of intuition in therapy. The use of the therapist's intuition in the NSST training is promoted and encouraged. Many counselling theorists in the past worked on intuitive hunches including: Freud (1958), Jung (1953), Rogers (1980), Bowen (2015) and Satir et al. (1991). These hunches or use of intuition can be can be “far more compelling than thought information” (Bohart, 1999, p. 294) and the therapist who considers their methods and decisions exclusively the result of conscious reasoning is most likely mistaken (Welling, 2005). He continues:

No therapist can reasonably deny following hunches, experiencing sudden insights, choosing directions without really knowing why, or having uncanny feelings that turn out to be of great importance for therapy. All these phenomena are occurrences of intuitive modes of functioning. (p. 19)

The therapist’s use of intuition comes from the implicit communication of the right hemisphere and according to Schore (A. Schore, personal communication, March 4, 2017) will come with practice. Intuition is used at the point where positive and negative moments meet (Marks-Tarlow, 2012). No matter the theoretical orientation of the sand tray therapist, be it Jungian, Gestalt, or NSST, the use of the sand tray gives rise to a right-brain, intuitive process that “taps into creative self-expression and bypasses conscious deliberation” (p. 110).
The use of intuition is embraced by many therapies, but it is particularly useable in sand tray therapy. The sand tray provides an additional domain to work with. The participants in the workshop component of this study are taught that they can see more and intuit more from the visual and kinaesthetic information presented in the sand tray.

3.9.6. **Enactments**

Embedded in the psychoanalytic relationship is the patient’s hope to be emotionally known and understood (Bromberg, 1998). However, there is a push-and-pull in the therapeutic relationship due to the implicit “repeating conflicted and tortured attachment styles” (Ginot, 2007, p. 324) or defences activated by the therapist. An enactment is the term for when there is clash between the client’s defensive dissociative states often unconsciously triggered by the therapist. I see it as the client moving beyond the old patterns of defence to fight for their core self in an authentic way. In the NSST approach, the defences are made explicit and much of the emphasis is on looking at how they have been helpful in the past. Looking at the implicit patterns of energy in the form of figurines appears to bring into the conscious the dissociated parts in the sand tray. The emergence of these previously unknown dissociated parts allows for them to be known, recognized, understood, appreciated, and integrated. This process is facilitated through the questions of the therapist, which often arise from their own unconscious subjective experience possibly through mirror neurons (Ginot, 2007). There is rarely a clash or a moment of tension for the client, because the client does not see the questioning of the figurines by the therapist as a threat. The therapist is able to be empathetic to the emotions of the client and to their ways of keeping safe in the past. The therapist is able to feel what the client is experiencing and what is going on for them. Self-disclosure on the part of the therapist as described earlier can assist the client to be in touch with the reactions of their body. Some questions that can trigger an enactment that I have experienced are: “The figurine has to stay under the stone forever—my body is feeling like it is suffocating”; “There are so many expectations here, and yet there is no room for compassion”; “Everything is disjointed, spread out. Nothing is connected”; “This is really confusing; it’s hard to know who is good or bad, who is on whose side, or what they are fighting for”; “Can you accept / appreciate that it was working so hard to keep you alive?”
In my experience, an enactment can be cathartic for the client as he/she encounters a coming together of previously isolated dissociated states—this can be a profound experience.

3.9.7. Epigenetics

Neuroscience is also contributing to a deeper understanding of empathy in relationship building. Cozolino (n.d.) says “there’s probably activation through epigenetics of the client’s brain being stimulated to grow in the context of a safe relationship” (p. 10). Epigenetics is now informing the theory and practice of learning and counselling practice. Epigenetics is the investigation into how our DNA, in the genes, gets activated and expressed through the generation of protein structures that become parts of our brains. Through these investigations, we now know that the experiences we have, positive or negative, determine which genes are turned on or off and therefore which proteins are made or not made. These proteins make up our neurons and the neural networks throughout the brain (Lipton, 2015). Any “‘ah ha’ moment” (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009, p. 23) in counselling has the potential to create new proteins, create new neural pathways and potentially create a new sense of self. That is what transformational change is and why it is lasting.

3.10. Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has outlined the main theoretical concepts of the NSST approach that were taught in the 2-day workshop component of this study. The NSST approach represents the most highly evolved postmodern model of sand tray work.

The next chapter looks at a review of the literature on personal growth during counsellor education and play and sand tray therapy training.
Chapter 4.

Literature Review of How Personal Growth Is Facilitated during Counsellor Education

This chapter turns to the literature to further our understanding of the two research questions of this study: “How is personal growth experienced by counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray (NSST; a new experiential play-based therapy); and how might transformative pedagogy foreground understanding in ways that foster personal growth opportunities among counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning NSST?”

There is increasing agreement among therapists from different professional and theoretical backgrounds that reflection on personal experience to gain greater self-awareness is a key process in counsellor education (Atkinson, 2006; Kiweewa, Gilbride, Luke, & Seward, 2013; Luke & Kiweewa, 2010; Macaskie, Meekums, & Nolan, 2012; Schmidt & Adkins, 2012; Wong-Wylie, 2007).

The reasons given include: The increased effectiveness in use of skills; the ability to relate authentically with clients; respecting the role of the client (Atkinson, 2006); the use of self and the intersubjective nature of the therapeutic relationship (Macaskie et al., 2012; Norcross & Wampold, 2011); and embodied attunement (McCluskey, 2005).

Norcross (2005) made the following statement to sum up counsellor education as part of his acceptance speech when he was awarded Distinguished Contributions to Education and Training:

In the end, the ultimate goals of practitioner training and of personal therapy are identical: integration. This entails integration of the person of the psychotherapist, integration of science and practice and integration of diverse approaches to behavior change. In educating psychologists, let us avoid fragmentation and commit to the seamless acquisition and simultaneous integration of both technical competence and personal formation. Decades of training experience, empirical evidence and practitioner reports converge on this message. (p. 847)

This literature review explores just how personal growth in counsellor education is integrated. The review starts relatively wide. Initially it includes counsellor education
course planning that has an intentional personal growth component with incidental skill development (Luke & Kiweewa, 2010; O'Leary, Crowley, & Keane, 1994; O'Leary & Page, 1990). Then it moves to programming that has an intentional skill training emphasis with incidental personal growth outcomes (Manthei & Tuck, 1980). Narrowing the focus, the literature review moves to counsellor education programming that intentionally integrates personal growth promotion concurrently with teaching skill development (Bohecker et al., 2014; Fraser & Wilson, 2010; Kiweewa et al., 2013; Lim, 2008; Pieterse et al., 2013; Schmidt & Adkins, 2012; Wong-Wylie, 2007). A further narrowing of the focus involves the inclusion of an intentional transformative pedagogy in the planning of counsellor education course curriculum (Batthyany-De La Lama & De La Lama, n.d.; Hoshmand, 2004; Macaskie et al., 2012; Moir-Bussy, 2010; Prosek & Michel, 2016; Thiemann, 2013). The literature review continues to narrow to an exploration of personal growth when learning play therapy skills (Bratton, Landreth, & Homeyer, 1993; Joiner & Landreth, 2005; Kao & Landreth, 1997; Shirk & Phillips, 1991). Finally, the literature review examines how the sand tray is used to develop the personal growth of student counsellors (Lahad, 2000; Markos & Hyatt, 1999; Paone, Malott, Gao, & Kinda, 2015; Stark, Frels, & Garza, 2011).

4.1. What does the literature tell us about counsellor education course planning that has an intentional personal growth component where counselling skills are learned incidentally?

O'Leary and Page (1990) looked at the outcome of personal growth in group therapy. They conducted a controlled study using a person-centred Gestalt therapy group with postgraduate counselling students. The experimental and control groups each consisted of seven participants. Three participants in each group were doctoral students in counselling psychology while the remaining four were students in a master’s counselling program. The experimental group met for 20 hours with a certified gestalt therapist whose role was to facilitate the personal growth of each participant using a person-centred approach combined with appropriate gestalt techniques. Change was evaluated with pre-and post-therapy measurements using the “Semantic Differential Scale (Osgood, Sugi, & Tannenbaum, 1957). This instrument employs opposing-
adjective pairs to assess how a person regards a concept, person, or thing. The students evaluated concepts such as gestalt therapy, anger, my real self, my ideal self, fear, love and guilt. Changes in attitudes were seen in those who participated in the therapy group: these participants felt more intensely about gestalt therapy and about love after taking part in a gestalt group in which one of the topics discussed had been their interpersonal relationships with significant others. O'Leary and Page (1990) concluded that person-centred gestalt groups offer personal growth to graduate students. The emphasis of the study was to look at personal growth, but the study provided extra training in Gestalt group therapy.

This work by O'Leary and Page (1990) provides some insight into how personal growth and learning a counselling technique can be integrated. The focus started and finished with personal growth and the understanding and use of the approach was secondary. The study by O'Leary and Page provides a starting point to this research as it focuses on the student counsellors’ relationship with themselves and others while they experience a counselling approach.

O'Leary et al. (1994) investigated the personal growth outcomes in a group of 10 students in a 1-year full-time Diploma in school counselling, matched with a control group. The personal growth component was a separate entity from other courses, however it also encompassed learning group facilitation skills. Attitudes and self-esteem were measured using both the Semantic Differential Scale and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. In addition, a post-training questionnaire was administered, which asked "What does personal growth mean to you now?" The trainee counsellors perceived five categories that reflected what personal growth meant to them. The five categories were: self-awareness, dynamic movement, authenticity, emotional reactions and reference to a spiritual connection.

It was found that after the training, the students had a "higher sense of self-worth than normal adults" and "evaluated awareness more positively" (pp. 139-140). The researchers concluded that personal growth opportunities during training are beneficial to student counsellors because their relationship skills with themselves and others are essential to a healthy practice. O'Leary et al. (1994) state:

An effective counselling relationship is fundamental to successful practice. Consequently the acquisition of the attitudes and skills necessary for an effective...
relationship is paramount. This in itself involves a certain emphasis on the personal growth and development of the counsellor. It is therefore an anachronism that so many counsellor-training courses largely ignore the personal development requirement. (p. 133)

The work by O'Leary et al. (1994) provides some insight into a way that personal growth can be brought into counsellor education and incidentally students learn how to facilitate group-counselling skills. It is relevant to this study as it emphasizes the importance of student counsellors articulating different areas of personal growth including a spiritual dimension.

Luke and Kiweewa (2010) studied the personal growth and awareness of counselling trainees during their counsellor education. This study utilized a grounded theory methodology to explore the experiences of 14 master's-level counsellor trainees who participated in an experiential group as part of their counsellor education course work. The data was collected through weekly reflection journals. The trainees identified “thirty systemically interconnected aspects of their experiential group participation as contributing to their personal growth and awareness” (p. 365). The 30 aspects were clustered into four groups: intra-personal, inter-personal, group-as-a-whole, and supra-group (a supra-group included the facilitators’ interventions, process observer feedback and weekly reflective journaling). The participants identified evidence of their personal growth. In addition, they mentioned ways in which their growth had been challenged or in what areas they “remained underdeveloped” (p. 380).

This research by Luke and Kiweewa (2010) is included here because it has an intentional personal growth focus through a reflective process and incidental skill development.

4.2. What does the literature tell us about intentional skill training programming in counsellor education where personal growth is incidental?

The following study focuses specifically on counsellors in training where skill development was the goal of the experience and personal growth happened incidentally.
Manthei and Tuck (1980) studied four groups of postgraduate students in New Zealand. Two of the groups were enrolled in school counselling courses and the other two in high school teaching courses. No specific or exceptional training or opportunity for personal growth was given to any of the four groups. The Personal Orientation Inventory was administered before and after training. Significant and lasting changes on the Inner-Directed Scale were observed from the group receiving training in school counselling. The authors suggested that, through "extensive involvement in a training group" (p. 257) the trainee counsellors were able to gain insights into their own "inner worlds" (p. 257). Teacher trainees, on the other hand, had no such opportunity for personal work. The authors concluded: "Attitudes and values that have been shown to be associated with counselling effectiveness were enhanced by (counsellor) training" (p. 263).

The conclusion of this research by Manthei and Tuck (1980) supports the argument that the teaching of counselling strategies and techniques in counsellor education in and of itself will produce some personal growth. For this reason, it has been included in this literature review.

4.3. What does the literature tell us about counsellor education programming that intentionally integrates personal growth promotion concurrently with teaching skill development?

Wong-Wylie (2007) interviewed five doctoral counselling students to explore barriers to reflective practice and opportunities for reflective practice for students while in a counsellor education program. These students had been involved in a counsellor education program and had experienced the intentional use of reflective practice.

Wong-Wylie’s (2007) results included both factors that hindered reflective practice: “(a) experiencing mistrust/unsafe relationship, (b) interacting with non-reflective fellow students, (c) receiving unsupportive/jarring feedback, (d) facing a systemic barrier/unsafe educational landscape and (e) interacting with unsupportive academic personnel (supervisor, instructor, administrator)” (p. 64) and factors that facilitated reflective practice: “(a) experiencing a trusting relationship …, (b) opening up with fellow
students, (c) engaging in reflective tasks, (d) having self-trust/risking and (e) interacting with supportive academic personnel” (p. 69).

Wong-Wylie’s (2007) recommendations were that “counselling programs would benefit from examining curriculum practices that foster students engaging in reflective tasks, taking self-risks, and experiencing a trusting relationship” (p. 72) with peers and professionals. Wong-Wylie also advocated for the recruitment of faculty who value and were able to model and facilitate reflective practice. This involved an open dialogue amongst faculty on how to facilitate student empowerment.

This work by Wong-Wylie (2007) is pertinent to this particular research as it makes explicit how reflective practice has the potential to be helpful to developing self-awareness when integrated throughout the learning of specific counselling approaches and techniques. It also sheds light on the factors that make reflective practice less effective.

The study by Lim (2008) looked at the personal growth of eight counselling students while she was teaching about the use of the genogram technique, by having them do their own. Lim used phenomenological interviews and a survey questionnaire to gain an understanding of the “genogram as process” (p. 35). The particular focus was on the personal growth, and transformative aspects of working on the student’s own genogram. This study looked at the impact on the graduate students during the time that they constructed and presented their genograms. The author used qualitative analysis of the data from which themes were identified that reflected personal and professional growth.

In addition to the experience of creating their own genograms, it created transformations in students’ relationships with their family-of-origin (Lim, 2008). Students reported that the genogram work contributed to their development and effectiveness as counsellors.

This small piece of work by Lim (2008) is useful to this research as it illustrates how personal growth can be integrated when learning counselling techniques and approaches.
Fraser and Wilson (2010) looked at how an intentional counselling approach and personal growth were integrated. They used a qualitative narrative study to explore seven students’ perspectives (five of whom had graduated and the remainder had nearly completed their training) about their personal growth after doing an undergraduate self-case study on cognitive therapy 1 to 3 years previously. For this self-study, participants had chosen their own “manageable’ problem behaviour” (p. 109) such as procrastination, comfort eating, perfectionism, and social anxiety as if they had been the counsellor assessing and treating themselves.

Fraser and Wilson (2010) used unstructured individual interviews for data collection. Data analysis involved identifying themes and analysing the narrative structure of stories. The themes that emerged from the analysis were: “understanding the problem, the tutor relationship, the writing process, personal development, childhood trauma, empathy, and integration of cognitive therapy skills” (p. 109). Participants said they had experienced the self-case study in cognitive therapy 1 to 3 years previously as “deeply challenging, liberating and personally transformative” (p.113).

Fraser and Wilson’s (2010) study is retrospective. It is included in this present research as it illustrates how personal growth can be intentionally brought about while learning a counselling approach in this case cognitive therapy.

Schmidt and Adkins (2012) studied a counsellor education program that specifically integrated reflective practice into every aspect of the counsellor education program. This particular program emphasized the importance of reflective practitioners. Schmidt and Adkins felt little was generally understood about the counselling student’s conceptualization of reflective practice or the effectiveness of counsellor educators’ use of it. It was based on Schön’s (1983) work of “reflection on action” (p. 55), and “reflection in action” (p. 55).

The authors interviewed a total of six master’s-level counsellors and counsellor education faculty through in-depth interviews, observations, and “artifact analysis” (Schmidt & Adkins, 2012, p. 80). The authors wanted to capture a thick description of the individual’s perspective and chose an “interpretivist paradigm” (p. 80).

Schmidt and Adkins’ (2012) research questions were:
a) How do individuals define reflection in the context of training second year master’s-level counseling students who are providing services to clients and their families within an educational setting?

b) What is the role of reflection within counselor education?

c) How are student reflective capacities both taught and learned? (pp. 79-80)

Generally, the findings were positive and participants described how reflection was a natural part of who they were (Schmidt & Adkins, 2012). However, in some situations, there was the sense that their reflections were only valued as long as it did not take up class time (Schmidt & Adkins, 2012).

Schmidt and Adkins (2012) believe that the reflective process needs to be clarified for student counsellors in particular how to reflect in action. The authors concluded that counsellors in training could benefit from overviews of the role and process of reflection as it specifically relates to particular courses and activities (p. 91).

Schmidt and Adkins (2012) advocate for a counselling program that has students reflect on their personal and professional growth and in so doing come out of their comfort zone and learn how to see the perspective of other. They also recommend more individualized feedback from faculty on the reflections and integrate new and creative pedagogical methods like “cultural auditing, theoretical emergence modeling, and metaphoric stories to guide their students through this exclusively individualized process of reflection (Collins, et al., 2010; Guiffrida, 2005; Sommer, et al., 2010)” (as cited in Schmidt & Adkins, 2012, p. 92).

Of note to this present research, the faculty in this study by Schmidt and Adkins (2012) agreed that there needs to be a continuous balance between challenge and support and that this support “can be pedagogically demanding” (p. 93). Schmidt and Adkins note how reflection can give comfort with “dissonance invoking experiences, extending perspective taking abilities, and gaining a greater awareness of personal development” (p. 90). The authors advocate for a “quantifiable measurement of students’ reflective awareness and growth over time” (p. 92).

This piece of research by Schmidt and Adkins (2012) informs this current study because the emphasis on reflection is not just incidental, but intentional throughout an counsellor education program.
Pieterse et al. (2013) suggest that an integrated approach to self-awareness in the training of counsellors is lacking in published literature and “self-awareness development is often viewed as a by-product of the therapist’s training” (p. 190). They present a theoretical framework for self-awareness development through their Integrated Model of Self Awareness Training (IMSAD), which includes, personality preference, family of origin, relational style, racial and ethnic identity, social class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious and spiritual orientation. The authors propose a “socratic approach of systemic questioning and inductive reasoning to self-awareness development” (p. 198). The authors propose that the IMSAD would be delivered in a specific course designed for self-awareness and include self-reflective writing or within a program that is coordinated across course work.

This research by Pieterse et al. (2013) is relevant to the current study as it highlights and outlines the need for an explicit, co-ordinated, and integrated approach to personal growth when learning counselling techniques and approaches in counsellor educational programs.

Kiweewa et al. (2013) set out to study the intentional development of personal growth while learning group counselling work. Despite noting an increased emphasis on personal development in counsellor training, Kiweewa et al. say that there is limited empirical research on experiences, strategies, and processes that promote such growth and development. Their research was to identify personal growth factors during a semester-long master’s-level experiential group training class in three different institutions. The 27 students learned about group process and reported 12 growth factors that impacted their personal growth and awareness. The students filled out a critical incident questionnaire each week and they were also asked specifically:

of the events, which occurred in this group session which one, did you find to be the most important for your personal growth. Describe the event and what actually took place; what was your own reaction? Why was it important for you? (p. 74)

These journal entries were coded using a “taxonomy of growth factors” (p. 76). “Vicarious Modeling” (p. 81) and “Genuineness / Authenticity” (p. 81) were the two most frequently cited factors, each occurring 30 times across all participants. Students reported that seeing other members of the group take risks helped them to take risks.
Just over half of the participants reported that expressing their feelings, thoughts, and reactions in an “honest, open, and spontaneous way resulted in some degree of personal growth and awareness” (p. 81). Self-Disclosure was the third most cited factor, with participants reporting that their self-disclosure “created opportunities for healing and insight into the motivations, values, beliefs that influence their behaviors” (p. 81).

In addition, the authors conclude that:

Reflective journaling can be a valuable source of learning about the factors that influence participants’ perceptions of their growth and awareness as they take part in experiential group training. (p.89)

This above statement reflects Kiweewa et al.’s central relevance to the present research, in particular the importance of integrating modelling and authenticity as key aspects of personal growth.

The study by Bohecker et al. (2014) qualitatively explores the level of understanding and personal growth of student counsellors who participated in an intentional learning and experiential mindfulness group. The study is based on “a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values” (Association for Experiential Education as cited in Bohecker et al., 2014).

Nearly 1 year after the training began, the participants were interviewed on two occasions. One of the interviews was an interpretive dialogue, the other was an “intensive interview” (Bohecker et al., 2014, p. 269) in order to go “beneath the surface” (p. 269) of the participants thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. The categories that arose were:

Levels of Knowing (… about group process), Relationships (… both within and outside of the group), Receiving Feedback, Application of Mindfulness in Counseling, Personal Growth and Awareness (awareness of feelings connected to self and others), and Impact of Process Outside of Group. (p. 269)

Bohecker et al. stated that the results of this pilot support the use of mindfulness in a small group of student counsellors.
This piece of research by Bohecker et al. (2014) is included in this literature review because it focused on personal growth while learning a counselling technique.

This literature review so far has shown how intentional personal growth in counselling education can assist students learn counselling skills (Luke & Kiweewa, 2010; O'Leary et al., 1994; O'Leary & Page, 1990). The literature review has also shown that a graduate counsellor education curriculum, in and of itself, can have a significant impact on students' perspectives of themselves (Manthei & Tuck, 1980). The third type of personal growth approach in counsellor education has shown an integrated approach to personal growth and the learning of counselling skills (Bohecker et al., 2014; Fraser & Wilson, 2010; Kiweewa et al., 2013; Lim, 2008; Pieterse et al., 2013; Schmidt & Adkins, 2012; Wong-Wylie, 2007).

One of the strategies used in the promotion of personal growth in counsellor education, whether intentional, incidental or integrated has been the use of reflective practice (Bohecker et al., 2014; Fraser & Wilson, 2010; Kiweewa et al., 2013; Lim, 2008; Luke & Kiweewa, 2010; O'Leary et al., 1994; Pieterse et al., 2013; Schmidt & Adkins, 2012; Wong-Wylie, 2007). Ongoing reflective practice is referred to in all the studies in the next section that discuss the importance of transformative pedagogy in counsellor education.

4.4. What Does the Literature Say about Transformative Pedagogy in Counsellor Education?

This section explores what is already known about the specific use of transformative pedagogy and transformative learning in counsellor education. It provides the background for understanding the second research question: “How might transformative pedagogy foreground understanding in ways that foster personal growth opportunities among counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning NSST?”

This study embraces the following understandings about transformative pedagogy and transformative learning. Transformative pedagogy and transformative learning offer rich opportunities for bringing about change in individuals and in society through education. Counselling practice, too, is concerned with change and personal
growth. In transformative learning in general and in the education of counsellors in particular, students could be given the opportunity to integrate their learning as they study the many techniques of counselling practice. Programming could allow for the counselling students to reflect on their own personal journey of change as they assume the role of the client; explore their own barriers to healthy communication and improve their own emotional and mental functioning; gain a better understanding of themselves and how they deal with conflict and stress, especially that which can arise in counselling practice.

However, Thiemann (2013) says that there is "a dearth of research, from a phenomenological perspective, that speaks to the lived experience of the transformation that can occur in the training environment, particularly in the context of counsellor training programs" (p. 24). The following four studies do, however, place consistent emphasis on transformative learning in counsellor education.

Batthyany-De La Lama and De La Lama (n.d.) presented a theoretical framework proposal for integrating personal growth and skill development. They looked at the effectiveness of transformative learning practices, specifically self-reflection, in counsellor education. Their concern was to promote awareness of the need to avoid “imposing values that are inconsistent with counselling goals” (p. 3). The authors concluded that “transformative teaching promotes the implicit, developmental, critical, constructivist and post-modern goals and objectives of counselor education” (Mezirow as cited in Batthyany-De La Lama & De La Lama, n.d., p. 12).

Batthyany-De La Lama & De La Lama (n.d.) stated that while reflective and critical practices on content, process and premise are necessary to counsellor education, they do not occur naturally and must be “promoted by the instructor and actively engaged in by the learner” (p. 14).

The work of Batthyany-De La Lama and De La Lama’s (n.d.) informs this study as it sets out to intentionally use transformative pedagogy in counsellor education; in particular, the active promotion by the instructor of critical and reflective practice.

Macaskie et al. (2012) outline a theoretical framework for an intentional transformative pedagogy as they advocate for a Relational Dynamic Approach to counsellor education. Macaskie et al. base their work on that of Norcross and Wampold
(2011), which is to provide student counsellors with training in the effective fundamentals of the therapeutic relationship and the ability to adapt the therapy to the individual client.

Macaskie et al. (2012) advocate for counselling education to involve a “personal development group and personal therapy as well as experiential pedagogic approaches and a critically reflective engagement with theory” (p. 358). In this model the students have to continually reflect on the impact of their theoretical learning and their own attachment styles on their personal growth and the implication on that as future counsellors. The authors also support personal therapy as well as a personal development group work as “students may experience a temporary ‘madness’ as they engage with unexplored aspects of themselves” (p.358).

The detailed self-reflection proposed in this work by Macaskie et al. (2012), is pertinent to the present study. The design of the NSST workshop and interview component adopted specifically the experiential and self-reflective aspects, and effective ways of being in the therapeutic relationship of the Macaskie et al. approach. The NSST approach focuses the attention of the participants on their personal development in particular their attachment style, their attachment to themselves and others.

Thiemann (2013) defined personal growth in counsellor education as “a deep change that a person has experienced in his or her training that has impacted his or her intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships in a significant way” (p. 4). He conducted a qualitative study of four counsellors in training to give voice to and describe what it is like to undergo such a deep change during their regular counsellor education. The participants identified four main themes in their description of their transformative experience: vulnerability, awareness, ownership and acceptance. In his discussion, Thiemann pointed out that during their training the student counsellors are called upon to take risks, to open up and “face a number of transformative opportunities that require [them] to venture beyond what they think they know or are comfortable with to reach a new perspective” (p. 6). Without opportunities to self-reflect on their sense of themselves, their beliefs and their knowledge, Thiemann suggests, “counselors are hampered in their ability to enact a therapeutic encounter with their clients” (p. 7). It is of interest to note the participants’ experience was not coming from an intentional transformative pedagogy.
Thiemann’s study is included here for two reasons: first it puts consistent emphasis upon transformative learning in counsellor education. Second, the four themes that emerged from the students’ experience inform this study.

Prosek and Michel (2016) organised a transformative cultural 10-day experience for 13 (12 female and one male) master’s-level counselling students. This study was based on the “Multicultural Immersion Experience model” (Pope-Davis, Breaux, & Liu as cited in Prosek & Michel, 2016, p. 64). The authors used a phenomenological approach for the inquiry to answer the question: “What were the lived experiences of counselor trainees participating in a short-term study abroad experience in Ireland?” (Prosek & Michel, 2016, p. 65). Self and critical reflection of their own cultural identity was embedded in the process.

Prior to going the students learned about the history of Ireland. Whilst there, they were formally and informally involved in community activities and connected with counselling agencies. They learned first-hand about the impact of religious conflicts as they walked the impacted neighbourhoods. The participants experienced a change in their perspectives and assumptions about themselves and others. Three dominant themes were identified from the participant’s accounts: “(i) cultural self-awareness, (ii) witnessing peer growth and (iii) global connection (Prosek & Michel, 2016, p. 68). In their conclusion Prosek and Michel sum-up the participants’ experiences with a quotation: “Consistent with transformative learning theory, their exposure to the new environment served as a catalyst for self-exploration of ethnocentric views” (Mezirow as cited in Prosek & Michel, 2016, p. 72).

Whilst this research involves a stand-alone program, this intentional use of transformative learning theory and practice by Prosek and Michel (2016) is mirrored in the way the present study explored the second research question.

Whilst not research based, the theoretical ideas proposed by Hoshmand (2004) and Moir-Bussy (2010) buttress the argument in favour of purposefully structuring a transformative educational climate within counsellor education. Hoshmand (2004) said that research needs to be conducted on the benefits that arise when graduate students are given time to reflect on their own sense of being in the world: there needs to be a “humanistically oriented counseling education program that emphasizes the
development of the personhood of the counselor [that] would focus on the student’s self-understanding and the use of self in the process of learning and potentiating positive development in others” (p. 89) through reflective practice. Hoshmand recommended the practice of “critical reflection [emphasis added] in all inquiry, including self-evaluative processes that are potentially self-changing” (p. 83), and suggested that it is not what is being taught that makes a training a transformative learning process; moreso, it is “the intellectual and interpersonal climate of a program that enables all participants to question and debate deeply personal existential assumptions and differences” (p. 85). Clearly this indicates a context of transformative pedagogy in counsellor education. Finally, Hoshmand observed that, in order to include transformative learning goals in the accreditation of counsellors, changes to professional standards would be required to avoid focusing solely on curriculum content.

Hoshmand’s (2004) conclusion that transformative goals need to be integrated into counsellor education is a central tenet of this current study as it attempts to answer both of the research questions. Her theory and practice and overall philosophy of counsellor education are mirrored closely by the design and application of all aspects of this current study.

Moir-Bussy (2010) is a counsellor educator. She has developed a theoretical model of dialogic teaching intentionally designed to facilitate transformation of her student counsellors’ way of thinking and being. Her specific concern was the cultural context of counselling. She sought to enable students to adapt the theory of western psychology to the myths and philosophies of the East, an endeavour that requires a dialogic relationship with self and others on the part of the students. In an open and safe learning space of multi-lateral reflective dialogue, participants developed the capacity to hold the ambiguity of new ideas and conflicting emotions. They revised, restructured and transformed their own sense of themselves personally and professionally through a continual dialogue of deep inner reflection, which Moir-Bussy suggested is the same as the counselling process itself. The many ways that Moir-Bussy considered how students process and integrate their learning includes: Scharmer’s “generative dialogue” (as cited in Moir-Bussy, 2010, p. 161), Raimon Panikkar’s “dialogical dialogue” (p. 164), “contemplative silence” (p. 163) and physical movement, whereby new ideas are able to
percolate through the body and mind somewhat like an "alchemical vessel where raw material is transformed into gold" (p. 163).

Moir-Bussy’s (2010) advocacy for a model of dialogic teaching informs and has influenced the development of this current study and pertains to both of the research questions.

4.5. What Does the Literature Tell Us about Play Therapy Training for Counsellors in Relation to Their Personal Growth?

The NSST workshop component of this study focused on two goals: to teach the participants the skills to do sand tray therapy and to develop the participants’ sense of self, preparing them for the personal growth necessary for them to successfully carry out the responsible work of sand tray therapy with children and adults. What does the literature tell us about play therapy training for counsellors in relation to their personal growth?

In the 1960s and early 1970s therapy was primarily oriented to the treatment of adults. Opportunities to learn to treat children were limited and un-supervised and for many years therapists learned to treat children through optional courses, specialized internships, or on-the-job experience (Tuma & Pratt, 1982). There was concern however that counsellors were not required to undergo a standard accreditation before treating child-clients (Mannarino & Fischer as cited in Routh, 1986). Roberts (1982) warned that it is "far too easy for a student to 'pick up' brief, superficial training (e.g., attend a few workshops or take a semester or two of child work) and then join the specialty ranks" (p. 20). In all of this research, there was no reference to the personal growth of the counsellor. In 1985, the American Psychological Association (APA) proposed strategies for the inclusion of child clinical training into post-graduate programs and internships (as cited in Tuma, 1985). A strong and comprehensive clinical foundation, in the opinion of the APA, needed to include a broad range of client scenarios; familiarity with multiple methods of assessment and multiple interventions; an awareness of the unique ethical and legal issues pertinent to child therapy; and an understanding of the social contexts.
that children live within (Tuma, 1985). However, the personal growth of the therapist was not mentioned.

A literature review by Shirk and Phillips (1991) on the training of child therapists found the selection criteria for admission to training in child therapy focused exclusively on academic qualifications, ignoring the aptitudes, experiences and interests of the candidates. Although the work of Bowlby (1988) on attachment theory was gaining prominence as an approach in therapeutic interventions with children and families, there was a lacuna when it came to the question of the ideal characteristics of a child therapist. There was no examination of how to train therapists who could best facilitate the kind of relationship that would lead to lasting therapeutic change for children.

There was one significant inquiry into the kind of personal growth that can arise out of learning a play-based therapeutic approach to counselling. In 1993, Bratton et al. held a 3-day intensive workshop to train 12 professional play therapists. Their model:

- takes into consideration the complexity and varying levels of training/experience of each play therapist. Consistent with other developmental models, the therapist is viewed not just as lacking specific skills, but as an individual who is in the process of developing, with the end goal of integration of skills, theory, and awareness of self and others. (Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1988, cited in Bratton et al, 1993)

The participants reported positive changes in the areas of personal growth and of skills improvement. They reported gaining a new and deeper understanding of the processes involved in play therapy and their responses reflected the importance they placed on looking at their own personal needs and issues and how these could impact the play therapy process. The findings sounded an alert to designers of play therapy training programs on the importance of the trainees’ personal growth and the researchers’ recommendations included the incorporation of a 3-day intensive learning format into the initial stages of a practicum to provide counsellors/therapists with training in play therapy.

This work by Bratton et al. (1993) informs this study due to their findings of both improved skills and the reported positive changes in personal growth. The participants reported a direct relationship between their own personal growth and their effectiveness as play therapists.
By 1995, some recognition of the unique needs of trainees in child therapy was beginning to emerge. A comprehensive study of 1,166 professional graduate counsellors, therapists and psychologists was conducted by Phillips and Landreth (1995) to determine practices, issues and perceptions that were pertinent to play therapy for children. A significant gender-based disparity between level of training and professional practice was identified: the higher the degree of the practitioner the less likely it was that child-specific training had been received, which the researchers pointed out needed to be addressed. They recommended that university psychology departments provide more graduate-level education in play therapy and that play therapists should receive clinical supervision. However, there was still no reference to the personal attributes required while working with children.

In 1997, a study by Kao and Landreth examined the effects of a comprehensive child-centered play therapy training course for 37 new counselling graduates. The training included lectures, discussions, readings, writings and practicing play therapy with well-adjusted healthy children over 15 weeks. The control group consisted of 29 graduate counseling student volunteers who had no experience of any play therapy. The experimental group showed greater knowledge of and increased confidence in applying play therapy skills, as well as a decrease in their "dominance tendencies" (p. 10). They had learned to constrain impulses to be forceful and they reported more positive feelings about their child clients. The above study produced some insights into the play therapists' awareness of themselves as a person doing therapy with children.

This study by Kao and Landreth (1997) is included here as there was an opportunity for the student counsellors to reflect on how they personally interacted with the children during play therapy.

In 2005, Joiner and Landreth constructed a complete curriculum for training play therapists. They asked seasoned practitioners to suggest core elements and practices then had the suggestions ranked by 180 play therapy professors. In addition to academic items such as history and the major contributors to play therapy, relevant terms and organizations and different methods of play therapy, the experts included, supervised practical experience, a core set of required skills and training in the advanced skills needed to work with special populations.
The literature review in this study has revealed that in the teaching of play therapy, as part of counsellor education, there has been little said about the personal growth that needs to be integrated into learning a play based therapeutic approach. Joiner and Landreth’s (2005) comprehensive curriculum is an example of this lack of reference to the centrality of personal growth in the education of counsellors working with children using play therapy and for this reason it is included here.

In 2012, the Association for Play Therapy (APT) stated that "the increase of graduate courses and APT approved Centers for Play Therapy bodes well for the continuing growth in academic offerings, supervision and possible research opportunities" (as cited in Kenney-Noziska, Schaefer, & Homeyer, 2012, p. 251). It is of note that nothing was mentioned about intentional personal growth programming for play therapy trainees.

With the exception of the study by Bratton et al. (1993), the limited emphasis on the personal growth of the student counsellor while learning the techniques of play therapy is evident from the literature over the last several decades.

This limited emphasis continues in the following section of the review of studies looking at the personal growth of student counsellors while learning the techniques of sand tray therapy. In none of the following studies is sand tray therapy being taught while personal growth is being promoted. Instead sand tray work is being used as a way to help student counsellors reflect on their skill development and personal growth arising out of learning about and practicing other counselling approaches.

4.6. Research on How Using the Sand Tray Impacts the Personal Growth of Students in Counsellor Education

Counselling educators have advocated for the use of the sand tray as a way of promoting personal growth while developing their skills in other counselling approaches. For example, Markos and Hyatt (1999) described how the sand tray encourages regular student counsellors to embrace the thoughts and feelings of their innermost self, taking ownership of personal strengths and resources through developing metaphors using the miniatures in the sand. Lahad (2000) suggested that the use of the sand tray in
supervision helps students achieve greater insight with regard to addressing potential struggles that might negatively influence therapeutic work. He stated that the use of the figurines empowers the students "to cope with difficulties by strengthening introspection and the visualization of concepts and problems" (p. 15). Stark et al. (2011) observed that the "sand tray aids supervisees in shifting to a place of self-reference, looking inside themselves to discover what they think, feel and need" (p. 278).

Though Markos and Hyatt (1999), Lahad (2000), Stark et al. (2011), and the following research by Paone et al. (2015) have the importance of intentional integration of skill development and personal growth in counsellor education (transformative pedagogy) in common with this current research on NSST. However, not one of the studies discussed (including Paone et al., 2015) were concerned with the intentional teaching of sand tray therapy at the same time as the promotion of personal growth. They proposed that students creating sand trays was simply a way of expressing their personal issues as they learned other counselling techniques and strategies. Here, the sand tray was being used as a tool for self-reflection. What is significant was that, even without any training in the sand tray approach itself, the sand tray was still seen by the students only as an effective way to self-reflect.

Paone et al. (2015) discovered that a depth of personal and professional reflection could be facilitated when 43 students used the sand tray to express their experience of a multicultural counselling course. In their qualitative study, they used a phenomenological approach of open-ended interview questions to understand the students' "lived experience" (p. 192). For 3 weeks, the students created a sand tray to express their journey in the course. Four different sets of data were collected: (a) written journals, (b) photographs of each of the sand trays, (c) written answers to questions regarding the sandplay and (d) focus group transcriptions.

Five core themes emerged: sandplay as a positive experience; sandplay as facilitating new learning; sandplay as meaningful in a group context; sandplay facilitated expression; and difficulties with sandplay (Paone et al., 2015).

Those having difficulties were uncomfortable using the sand tray, feeling that it did not match their learning style or that they could not do such creative work. The researchers concluded, however, that through the sandplay "participants were able to
express emotions that may have otherwise impeded learning, bringing to their awareness thoughts and feelings not always consciously recognized” (Paone et al., 2015, p. 201). They were interested and surprised, to observe how the participants created images of future hopes for their own racial identity growth.

This work by Paone et al. (2015) is pertinent to this current study because the sand tray affords intentional, integrated, personal growth opportunities while studying any counselling course. This work is a powerful endorsement of the use of the sand tray even without any training in how to use it. This current study takes Paone et al.’s work a step further by integrating the intentional use of the sand tray for personal growth with the intentional teaching of the skills of how to use the sand tray in therapy with adults and children.

Even as early as 1981, Kalff emphasized that therapists need to receive strong and specialized training, both personally and professionally, before using the sand tray with clients (Mitchell & Friedman, 1994). Bradway had stated to these authors that "the founding members of the International Society of Sandplay Therapy Organization (ISST) believed that completing one's own sandplay process is more important than any other aspect of sandplay training" (as cited in Mitchell & Friedman, 1994, p. 115). This proposition is one of the key aspects of this current study as the sand tray affords profound personal transformations and the student counsellor must understand such an experience if they are to ask it of their clients.

The use of the sand tray as an instrument of self reflection has been shown to assist student counsellors to gain greater insight for themselves, while learning other counselling skills, which in turn affords them more effectiveness in helping their clients (Lahad, 2000; Markos & Hyatt, 1999; Paone et al., 2015; Stark et al., 2011).

4.7. Summary

This literature review starts with a wide lens of two criteria: personal growth and counsellor education. The focus is gradually narrowed to include some key criteria, which inform this current study. These are: The intentional integration of personal growth promotion in counsellor education while learning counselling skills using transformative pedagogy. There are a number of theoretical models (Hoshmand, 2004; Macaskie et al.,
2012; Moir-Bussy, 2010) that propose a framework for counsellor education programming that include all of these criteria. However, there are no studies of counselling students in actual counselling programs that match the set of criteria used in this current study. The literature review again narrows the focus to add the criteria of play therapy training and sand tray therapy training. This further narrowing produced no studies theoretical or otherwise that matched this current study.

The next chapter describes the methodology of this study.
Chapter 5.

Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research methodology, including a full description of the NSST workshop component, how the participants were recruited, the location of the workshop, interview component, how the interviews were conducted, the transcription, data analysis process and ethical considerations.

5.1. Overview

This research employed a qualitative action research design whereby knowledge is generated and the “development of new practices are integrated and theorized” (Given, 2008, p. 6). The research drew on the experience of the researcher as a counsellor and counsellor educator. Participants were given the opportunity to improve their own educational practices in a collective, collaborative, self-reflective and critical inquiry (Masters, 1995). There are four basic themes to this action research: the empowerment of the participants; collaboration through participation; the acquisition of knowledge; and personal change. The process, by which the researcher sought to achieve this, was through an iterative process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Zuber-Skerrit, 1993, p. 2).

The aim was to explore how practicing counsellors and student counsellors experienced personal growth when engaged in learning NSST and to understand how personal growth opportunities were fostered by examining NSST through the lens of transformative pedagogy. The chapter begins with a description of the NSST workshop component and the recruitment of participants using a pre-screening and pre-training interview questionnaire. This is followed by a description of the interview component, that is, individual interviews using NSST to elicit responses and a follow-up questionnaire, 3 months to 2 years later. The chapter ends with a consideration of the ethical implications of the research, the analysis process and the researchers’ reflections on the study.
5.2. The Workshop Component

The NSST workshop component consisted of three separate 3-day weekends with six research participants attending at a time. A total of 18 people were recruited to participate in the workshop component. One participant was unable to attend at the last minute and was not replaced. This made a total of 17 participants. The workshop components took place at the researcher’s house and playhouse (located in the garden where the researcher conducts her professional counselling practice) in Fort Langley, British Columbia. The first 2 days were spent in a workshop format learning how to use the NSST method, which the author had developed previously (De Little, 2015b). The third day was spent continuing practicing the NSST approach in the triads while the researcher carried out the Interview component by interviewing each participant individually using the sand tray.

5.3. Recruitment of Research Participants

Research participants were recruited from the British Columbia School Counsellors Conference, the British Columbia Play Therapy Conference and by word of mouth (Table 3; also see Appendix A for the recruitment invitation). The participants’ ages ranged from 21 to 65 years. There were 16 female participants and one male participant.

Table 3. Recruitment of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>How participants were recruited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>signed up at British Columbia School Counsellors Association Conference in October 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>signed up at from British Columbia Play Therapy Conference in March 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>by word of mouth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A pre-screening interview sheet (Appendix B) was sent out to 30 interested parties to ascertain whether they met the criterion of being a master’s student or a qualified counsellor. The participants were selected intentionally to “represent a perspective” (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009, p. 49). They were a relatively homogenous group, either therapists with a master’s degree in counselling or a related field, or
students currently enrolled in a master’s in counselling program (Table 4). None of the participants had any significant training in NSST or in TST.

Table 4. Job Description and Education-level of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Job description</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Elementary School Counsellors</td>
<td>1 working on Master’s in Counselling p/t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>High School Counsellor</td>
<td>Working on Master’s in Counselling p/t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>High School Teacher</td>
<td>Working on Master’s in Counselling p/t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Students in Master’s in Counselling</td>
<td>All Master’s Counselling Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student in Master’s in Art Therapy</td>
<td>Master’s in Art Therapy student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Counsellors in private practice</td>
<td>Completed Master’s in Counselling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>Completed Master’s in Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Art Therapist</td>
<td>Completed Diploma in Art Therapy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pre-screened participants were invited to one of the 3-day workshops that were offered during the winter and spring of 2015. All participants filled out a pre-training survey to ascertain what they were hoping to gain from the training and what they could contribute (Appendix C).

5.4. Location and Welcome

The workshop component, including the demonstrations, took place in the researcher’s house where each set of five or six participants as well as an assistant and the researcher could all sit comfortably. The triad work (see weekend schedule, below) was done either in the small playroom in the garden or in another room in the house. The interviews took place in the playroom.

There were aspects of “housekeeping” which established an atmosphere designed to enhance the participants’ experience and promote transformative learning. The intention was that immediately upon arrival, participants would feel welcome, safe and nurtured. My assistant greeted the participants outside as they parked their cars; the participants arrived in time to sign in and get comfortable with a cup of freshly brewed coffee or tea; they brought their own lunches to be eaten all together; there was a homemade apple pie intentionally cooking in order to create a lovely aroma in the kitchen living area; the wood stove was on; classical music playing.
The letter of consent (Appendix D) was read aloud to the research participants at the beginning of the first day of training and the signed consent forms were collected. The researcher began by introducing herself and explaining the purpose of the study. Each of the five or six participants was then asked to introduce themselves and say why they had volunteered to be in this study. The researcher then told the participants that she was going to do a demonstration after the break and to think about whether they would like to volunteer to be the star in the demonstration. It was made clear that the volunteer star would be working on a real issue.

5.5. Weekend Schedule

Throughout the schedule below, modelling by the researcher of a securely attached, congruent, authentic, confident and competent self, the corner stones of transformative pedagogy, was used.

For Days 1 and 2, the schedule was:

9:00-10:30: Introductions, didactic teaching of theory and practice, discussion, self-reflection, showing slides of successful and challenging clients’ work, preparation for the demonstration.

10:45-11:30: Demonstration by the researcher with a participant.

11:30-12:00: Discussion of demonstration, self-reflection

12:00-1:00: Lunch and continued discussion and self-reflection of above

1:30-2:00: Preparation for triad work for the participants: looking at process questions for the therapist to use and post-triad questions by the observer to the therapist and star. (The star was the name used for the participant in the triad or demonstration that is the client). They work on real issues for the star. This allows another participant to practice being their therapist.

2:00-3:00: Triad work: Experiential part of the workshop

3:00-3:15: Break, further discussion and self-reflection.

3:15-5:00: Didactic teaching of theory and practice, discussion, self-reflection, showing slides of successful and challenging clients’ work.

5:00 Alerting participants to changes in their bodies, advising them to drive carefully as they will continue to process their changes, advising them to do some self-reflections, have some good sleep and exercise.
On Day 3, the participants met in the morning briefly to discuss the day’s triad work. Then one-by-one they were interviewed individually in the playhouse using the sand tray to describe their experience of learning the NSST approach and how it had impacted them personally. The interviews ranged from 20 minutes to over an hour. During the interview, the other participants continued to work in either a triad or a dyad (just therapist and star) to practice the use of the sand tray.

5.6. The Workshop Content

5.6.1. Theoretical subject matter outline

The workshop component began with an overview of the key theoretical and practical subject matter that would be covered over the 2 days of training (as described in detail in Chapter 3):

- Using the sand tray in the NSST approach
- The importance of play for brain development and self-regulation.
- The play circuitry in the brain
- The origins and development of sand tray therapy
- Contributions of hermeneutics to play therapy
- Non-verbal communication
- The place for imagination and creativity
- Therapeutic Systemic Therapy
- The 14 basic tenets of the Satir model
- The five essential elements of the Satir model
- The elements of the iceberg as a model for being human
- Attachment between children and caregiver in relation to mirror neurons and therapeutic attachment
- The fear response, the drive for safety and the underlying defence patterns of coping
- Awareness of shifts in body state
- Personal growth of self
- The role of intuition
- Epigenetics
5.6.2. **The core focus of the weekend work**

The most significant aspect that was focused on over the 3 days of training was the investigation of and reflecting on how participants had kept themselves safe in their lives. This essential piece of work was explained to participants and emphasis was placed on how we all develop defences that protect us when chronic or acute trauma is experienced. After time however, these defences tend to become problematic. For example, the use of alcohol or drugs keeps someone numb from the pain of losing a parent when young. Brought into the sand tray, the form of images can—and need to be—looked at. Changes and new decisions can then be made.

A number of participants did not state their personal growth goals in their pre-training questionnaire. However as the teacher of the workshop component, I had generic personal growth goals for the participants when they were working in the triad groups and these goals were verbally communicated to them. These generic personal growth goals for the participants were to:

- gain an awareness of their fears
- understand the origin of the fears
- gain an appreciation of how they have coped with the fear and how the coping has kept them safe
- become aware of their inner resources
- become aware of their yearnings for new ways of being
- make new decisions about the current useful part of their defences and the part of their defences they want to let go of.

The demonstrations and the triad work during the workshop component were designed to teach participants the skills as a therapist to:

- recognize what fear looks like in the form of figurines
- ask questions about whether the fear is still needed
- ask questions of the fear figurine
- ask if they are able to accept that it has been protecting them
- ask whether is there a place for an appreciation for the part that has been keeping them safe
- ask about their inner resources
- ask about what it would look like if they didn’t feel this way
• ask what the fear needs now; does it still need to be this big
• what would the star like to do with it now

5.6.3. Teaching modalities

There were seven different teaching modalities. With the exception of Teaching Modalities 1 and 2, which happened from the start and throughout the workshop component, the chronological order in the workshop component was the reverse of the order below. Significantly, they are recorded here according to the approximate amount of time spent on each teaching modality during the workshop component. The hypothesis of this study was that this order below would also reflect the extent to which each teaching modality would generate personal growth for the participants. Therefore, the modalities that were most emphasised for the participants by the researcher were: modelling, facilitating reflective practice, facilitating experiential work, demonstrations, leading and encouraging discussions and showing slides of actual sand trays from the researcher’s clinical practice. The researcher spent the least time and put the least emphasis on the didactic teaching modality. The seven modalities were:

1. Modeling by the researcher and the assistant, from the start and throughout the workshop component, of a securely attached, regulated and congruent state of mind and body, using tone of voice, eye contact, non-verbal gestures, gentle touch, humour and playfulness (De Little, 2015b). The researcher was also modelling a general welcoming demeanour, with a “social engagement system” (Porges, 2011, p. 16) fully online.

2. Facilitating reflective practice by the participants from the start and throughout the workshop component (De Little, 2015b).

3. Facilitating the experience of using the NSST approach by the participants in triads, by being the star and making their own personal pictures in the sand tray; experiencing being the therapist and being the observer (De Little, 2015b).

4. Demonstrations by the researcher in the role of therapist of how to facilitate transformational change experientially for a client using the NSST approach (De Little, 2015b).

5. Leading and encouraging discussions of the theory and practice of NSST (De Little, 2015b).

6. Showing slides of clients’ pictures (children’s and adults’) in the sand tray illustrating the basics of NSST (De Little, 2015b).

7. Didactic teaching of NSST (De Little 2015b).
5.7. Participant Responses

Responses from participants about their experience of the training and of any changes (personal growth experiences) was gathered in two ways: the interview component on the third day and the 3-month follow-up questionnaire.

5.7.1. The interview component

The research participants were invited on the third day to an individual interview where they were asked to create a sand tray that showed the impact of the training on them and what had changed for them. By this time, they were comfortable with the researcher as the interviewer because they had spent 2 (full) days together with me as the teacher in a relatively small group of six people and they were familiar with using the sand tray. The workshop component and the interview component both used the sand tray, which allowed for continuity between them. The duration of the interviews ranged from 20 minutes to over an hour. The sessions were video recorded and an assistant also took photographs. In one interview, the sound was not on, so the audio recording of the session was not available. This interview was repeated six weeks later.

As participants engaged in using NSST in the interview, their experience of the training was presented and articulated. Together we interpreted the experience (Vilhauer, 2010). The questions asked were modified during each interview in light of the participant’s choice and placement of figurines similar to a therapeutic sand tray session.

All of the interviews had some elements of a regular NSST counselling session, except that rather than projecting a negative problem into the sand tray, the majority of participants created images of hope, positive future movement, excitement and peace.

5.7.2. Post-training questionnaire

A follow-up post-training questionnaire was sent to participants 3 months after the workshop component to ascertain how the training was impacting them (see Appendix E). The questionnaire asked participants what personal growth goal they had set for themselves before the training, what changed during the workshop component and to describe any personal changes that they were experiencing now. The questionnaire also asked how others would know that they were different now.
Eight out of the 17 post-training questionnaires were returned between 3 and 5 months later. One of the participants moved away and could not be contacted. Seven participants did not complete the questionnaire upon the first, second, or third request. On the follow-up phone call 20 months later, of the seven, five participants returned their questionnaires for a total of 13 responses out of 17. One participant sent me an email 2 years later to follow-up on his journey of transformation (see Chapter 7, “Martin: Thick Description”). The content of this email is also included in the post-training discussion. This made a total of 14 post-training follow-up responses. Because of the difference in time taken to obtain post-training responses from five of the participants, caution was taken when interpreting the responses from these participants. However, when analyzing the themes (see Chapter 6), these participants described the continuing outcome of their experience as transformative, which was the same result as all but one of the participants who responded between 3 and 5 months.

5.8. Ethical Issues:
Confidentiality and Personal Safety

Prior to the start of the study, ethics approval was obtained from the Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University. Participants were assured of anonymity and this was maintained during the coding of information by removing direct identifiers from the information and replacing names with pseudonyms. However, the participants also signed the consent form to have their faces photographed and used in this research. A log of the pseudonyms to research participants has been kept securely in a filing cabinet accessible only to the researcher. All data and digital materials were transcribed, coded and analyzed using the special identifier pseudonym.

No one other than the researcher and supervisor were given access to the pre-screening, pre-training and post-screening questionnaires. These are stored on a password protected secure encrypted Canadian server and backup drives are stored in a locked cabinet in a secure office at the SFU Burnaby campus for 3 years after which time, a shredder will be used to destroy all files. Computer removal of digital data (files deleted, data sticks erased, video recordings) was supervised by a member of the university technical support team as soon as the transcription was completed.
The ethics of the closing evaluation interview were explained to the participants, as follows: Potentially sensitive material would be recorded, analyzed and presented as findings in a published paper, accessible to a wide community. All 17-research participants gave their consent, including permission to have their faces shown in the photographs. I made it clear to each participant that any reference to harming self or other would have to be reported to authorities. A qualified master’s level counselling assistant was present at all times during the workshop component to support any of the participants should the need arise.

5.9. Description of the Analysis

The method chosen to explore the participants’ experiences was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009). IPA enables a detailed exploration of how participants make sense of their personal and social worlds (Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA is concerned with the personal account of the individual as opposed to an objective account of an experience (Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA encourages participants to provide open and detailed descriptions and understanding of a given phenomenon, rather than making specific a priori predictions about what phenomena will be encountered (Chapman & Smith, 2002). IPA is informed by the theories, assumptions and practices underlying phenomenology, hermeneutics, idiography, and social constructivism. Since the theoretical orientation of IPA is a key component of the methodology, this section will begin with a brief introduction to these main concepts underpinning IPA.

5.9.1. Phenomenology

The theoretical background of IPA stems from phenomenological inquiry whereby the experience of participants is "examined in the way that it occurs and in its own terms" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 12). This is consistent with the epistemological position of my research. While phenomenology has been a much studied and debated philosophical concept, it has been important for this researcher to remember that it is "a live dynamic activity not just a scholarly collection of ideas" (p. 33).
There has been much written on phenomenological research. Finlay (2006) describes it like a dance between researcher and participant where they move "in and out of experiencing and reflection while simultaneously moving through a shared intersubjective space that is the research encounter" (Abstract, para. 1).

IPA also embraces Husserl’s concept of phenomenology, which states that participants may "accurately know their own experience of a given phenomenon" (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 12). IPA simply sets out to "capture particular experience as experienced for particular people" (p. 16) whereas Husserl was interested in finding the purest essence of an individual's own experience. Husserl’s philosophy is particularly fitting for this research as it broadly involves "individual psychological processes, such as perception, awareness and consciousness" (p. 16).

5.9.2. Hermeneutics

Heidegger’s work bridges phenomenological description with hermeneutic interpretation, which is the foundation of IPA (as cited in Smith et al., 2009). Heidegger was a student of Husserl’s, but he later rejected many of his teacher’s perspectives. In particular, Heidegger was critical of Husserl’s belief that knowledge about lived experiences can be ascertained in an unbiased way (Heidegger, 1962). Heidegger proposed the essence of experience cannot be known without any presupposition and that language is the vessel in which the question of being can unfold (Heidegger, 1962). Heidegger believed that in order to understand human experience, one must go beyond the statement to the experience itself or, as he put it, to "that which strives to be brought forth in language" (as cited in Freeman, 2008, p. 387). One of the underpinnings of this research is Heidegger's idea that humans are being "thrown into' a world of objects, relationships and language" (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 18). Another underpinning of this research is that our "being-in-the-world' [Heidegger] is always perspectival, always temporal and always in-relation-to something and consequently, that the interpretation of people’s meaning-making activities is central to phenomenological inquiry in psychology" (p. 18).

A 2-staged process of interpretation or double hermeneutics is used in this research whereby the interviewer is making sense of the participant’s worldview through
their own interpretive lens (Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA is connected to hermeneutics and interpretation theories (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Smith and Osborn (2008) identify two different interpretive stances—empathic hermeneutics and questioning hermeneutics. While trying to understand the perspective of the participant from their point of view (empathic hermeneutics) a detailed analysis is made asking important questions about what is underlying the participants’ perspective (questioning hermeneutics).

5.9.3. Idiography

This research used an idiographic approach, which is concerned with the particular and gives insight into how the individual ascribes meaning to a phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). This is generally achieved by a close, detailed examination of a small number of participants. The researcher can then examine for themes of convergence and divergence (Smith, 2004). The results from that small number of participants can then be transferred to similar situations (Smith et al., 2009).

5.9.4. Social constructivism

According to Smith et al. (2009), IPA adopts an epistemological position, which is situated within the social constructivist paradigm. This philosophical approach states that realities are subjective for each individual and that reality is socially constructed by interaction with others through language and meaning making (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

A social constructivist approach is appropriate to answer the two research questions because the goal of this research is to understand the participants’ subjective experience of the training in a specific therapeutic technique and not to measure or verify objective truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

5.10. Interpretation

In addition to the phenomenological aspect of what the participants thought about the research training experience, more importantly this research set out to understand how the participants interpreted it. Specifically, the research set out to understand the physical, emotional and spiritual meaning that the participants made of the research
training experience. This also included asking the research participants how they would be different after the training. IPA traditionally does not look at this existential level of being (Smith et al., 2009).

The data analysis involved interpreting the research participant’s verbal communication with the aim of capturing as much as possible their intended meaning. This goes beyond Heidegger’s philosophy, which questioned the possibility of "any knowledge outside of an interpretive stance" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 16).

The research interview and data collection in theory could have involved using Husserl’s philosophical notion of bracketing out the researchers “foreconceptions to find the true meaning of the story” (Freeman, 2008, p. 4) of the participants. However, Gadamer’s (1992) hermeneutic notion of the intersubjective link between reader and text is seen to be necessary in this research (p. 5) in order to create deeper understanding. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) see the researcher as being in the centre of the iterative interrelated process. The impact is the "space between" (p. 61). This research study resonates particularly with Gadamer's philosophy of hermeneutics in that he "urges us to listen, truly listen, to what the other says in trust that she or he may be right" (Barthold, n.d., para. 2).

5.11. Data Compilation and Analysis

The spoken word was transcribed and analyzed by the researcher using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis [IPA] (Smith et al., 2009). This "idiographic" (p. 3) approach seemed to be appropriate for this study as the researcher was also the interviewer and therefore was engaged in a "double hermeneutic" (p. 3) as the researcher assisted participants to make sense of their experience in the training. The dual role as researcher and teacher afforded the opportunity to access the participant's experience through their own words and images. IPA is seen as suitable for research into psychological phenomena and specifically it is concerned with "the systematic examination of the experiential" (p. 5). The researcher wanted to know what had changed for the research participants and the IPA approach was appropriate to gain such evidence. IPA does not have a rigid practice of data analysis and instead offers flexible guidelines that can be analyzed within IPA. Because the aim of the study was to
gain an understanding of participants’ subjective experiences of personal growth and transformative experience, IPA was considered an appropriate choice. According to Smith et al. (2009), there are five broad stages to IPA.

5.11.1. **Stage 1**

In this study, Stage 1 of the analysis of the interview component began by watching each videotape several times before beginning the transcription to help the researcher become immersed in the participant’s experiences again. The videos were then transcribed and simultaneously initial impressions of the data were written down. The spoken word was transcribed verbatim, both what the researcher and what the participant said. The elapsing of time on the video was included in the transcript. A free textual analysis was also written that included initial thoughts about areas of significance, such as the language used by participants, contradictions and initial conceptualizations of what the participant was trying to say.

5.11.2. **Stage 2**

The second stage started with uploading the transcripts into Atlas.ti. In depth notes were made in the margins of the transcript and close attention paid to the specific language used by the participants.

5.11.3. **Stage 3**

Stage 3 involved reading through the transcript again and highlighting each unit of meaning (Atlas.ti refers to them as quotations). Then each unit of meaning was given a code; e.g., to the phrase "I feel empowered that there is [sic] things I can use", the code empowered was attached. Initially 339 codes were generated from the 17 transcripts.

These 339 codes across all 17 transcripts were coded over a period of 3 weeks and then combined (Appendix F). For example, wishes and hopes and yearnings made one code of wishes; peace and peaceful were blended into one code named peace. This made a final count of 301 codes. A long time was spent with each statement, rewinding the video and re-reading the transcript. The process was iterative, returning to the original unit of meaning and its context. Each time more and more subtle information
was found to situate the participant's experience. Often a unit of meaning would be assigned more than one code, for example, the statement:

and the snake is that energy that rises from the base to the higher levels in that awareness; so the three of them are in that . . . sort of united in that sensation

was given two codes: grounded and powerful.

The codes were then sorted into 19 coded groups or clusters. For example, the cluster of “self-love” was made up of the following codes: acceptance of self, appreciation, be compassionate, beautiful, better care of self, deep, deserve better, gift, important, light, love self, love others, precious, self-worth, stand along side self, stronger, taken out of the shadows, taking care of self, uncovering things that got lost, wholeness.

5.11.4. Stage 4

Stage 4 involved a further iterative and selective process of reducing the 19 clusters into seven superordinate themes.

5.11.5. Stage 5

The fifth stage involved giving each of the seven superordinate themes a title, which communicated the conceptual nature of the themes.

The seven super-ordinate themes that arose from these 17 interviews were:

- Theme 1: Becoming aware of personal issues.
- Theme 2: Deep sense of connection to and freedom for self
- Theme 3: Richer choice of feelings, perceptions and expectations for self
- Theme 4: Body awareness and freedom from physical pain
- Theme 5: Powerful new insights about past self
- Theme 6: Being effective, competent, confident, personally and professionally.
- Theme 7: Feelings of being nurtured and safe.

An analysis for all the superordinate themes of the participants was then created (see Chapter 6).
Thick descriptions (Denzin, 2001; Ponterotto, 2006) of six of the participants were also written using these themes as a structure for the work, including using the photographs of their sand trays to help examine the narrative of their experience (see Chapter 7).

The researcher reflected on her own process throughout the analyses and thick descriptions.

5.12. Researcher’s Reflections of the Messiness of Qualitative Research

The “messiness” (Law, 2004, p.62) of qualitative research requires some explanation here. When different realities of roles overlap, they interfere with each other and while partially co-ordinated, they can become complicated (p. 62). I am fully aware that throughout this study, I have been the insider trying to be the outsider. This study involved a blending of myself as the designer, teacher, interviewer and as researcher engaged in action research, reflexive practice and critical pedagogy (McKernan, 1991). This blending of roles was intentional, as I wanted the interview component to reflect the training component. The intention of this research was to have a maximum amount of continuity between training and the data collection process by using the sand tray with each participant for the interview component. The research participants’ responses were more authentic because of this continuity.

The following sections discuss each of the above roles of designer, teacher, interviewer and researcher and how they impact the research as a form of reflexivity. Reflexivity is important to acknowledge because of the challenge in holding on to the dialectic of being aware and open to differing experiences of others, while having my own experience of the NSST approach. My own experience of the NSST approach as designer and teacher had the potential to colour what I was seeing and hearing from the participants as I had lived and breathed this approach to therapy and personal growth for many years.

Situating my own perspective in this research is an important way of acknowledging my self in the design of the NSST approach, in the teaching of the NSST approach to participants, in the interviewing of the participants and in the analyzing of
the data (Willingham, 2001). The nature of IPA is that the “research exercise is a dynamic process with an active role for the researcher . . . to take an ‘insiders perspective’” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). The presentation of this work is “messy” (Law, 2004, p. 62) in that: (a) I designed the NSST approach, (b) I designed the training program, (c) I taught it to the research participants, (d) I then invited the participants to reflect on the experience of the training in an interview component using the identical format that I had trained them in (i.e., the sand tray) and (e) I analyzed their reflections.

5.12.1. **Self as designer**

As the designer of the NSST approach, my expectations were that teaching within a transformative pedagogy, the use of Satir’s theory of transformational change and experiencing the NSST approach would facilitate personal growth. I had to suspend my expectations that every research participant would acknowledge during the interview component the personal growth experiences that they had had during the training, as my participants do in other non-research trainings and my clients do in my private practice. As I had spent 20 years developing the NSST approach, I needed to suspend my own wishes about the data in order to focus on grasping the experiential world of each of the research participants.

5.12.2. **Self as teacher**

*Relationship of care in the workshop component.*

Every effort was made to ensure that the workshop environment was nurturing and that participants experienced a sense of safety and a “relationship of care” (Clark, 1993, p. 49). The personal growth of the participants required an atmosphere that provided support together with challenge (Clark, 1993). Regarding messiness, the issue here is whether the nurturing constitutes biasing the results. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) talk of the “intimacy of qualitative research and how we are not outsiders nor insiders but we “occupy the space between, with the costs and benefits this status affords” (p. 61).

*Modelling of a therapeutic relationship.*

Throughout the workshop and interview component, the therapeutic relationship was modelled so that participants gained experience of how to treat their clients. According to Lambert (1992), 30% of change in a client in counselling is dependent on
the therapeutic relationship because the stronger the emotional bond between the counsellor and client the greater the likelihood that the client will progress in counselling (Bordin, 1979). The therapeutic relationship is similar to the attachment relationship between an infant and the primary caregiver as first conceptualized by Bowlby (1988). Bowlby (1988) also supported the idea that the role of the counsellor was to be an attachment figure for the client. There is now research that suggests that the therapeutic relationship can be conceptualized as an attachment relationship (Mallinckrodt, 2000) and that therapists serve as attachment figures (Siegel, 2010). A securely attached therapist is able to instil confidence and trust in their client, connecting with the patient by being flexible, honest, respectful, trustworthy, confident, interested, alert, friendly, warm and open (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003).

As the teacher of the therapeutic relationship approach, it is essential to be modelling what is taught to the students. The teacher needs to be open, integrated and securely attached in order to do this. Teaching this, for example, during the demonstrations, involved modelling how to “soak up” (Siegel, 2010, p. 212) the internal sensibilities of the client and fully understand and assist them to transform their stuckness. If the teacher/therapist has old default defences, then these will arise in the training and the demonstrations and the teacher/therapist will not be able to be present for the participants observing the demonstration and for the star in the demonstration. When the observing participants’ experience their teacher demonstrating a congruent, secure state as the therapist, they are then better able to find their own securely attached state and use it as the therapist in their triad work (De Little, 2015b). If the teacher/therapist is less secure and shows signs of stress or fear then he/she may tend to respond less empathically to the star and secondarily to the participants, particularly if the observing participants and star are themselves insecure or fearful (Rubino, Barker, Roth, & Fearon, 2000). The observing participants and the star are going to “soak up” (Siegel, 2010, p. 212) the sensibilities of the teacher/therapist whether they are positive or negative through the mirror neurons connected with the mind/body (Gallese et al., 2007). As far as qualitative research is concerned all of this constitutes acceptable messiness (Law, 2004).
5.12.3. **Self as interviewer**

The recognition of the messiness of qualitative research is never more important than in the data collection process. The researcher/interviewer “is in it but not in it.” As the interviewer, I was using the NSST approach for data collection and I had to be aware of the following potential biases: As the original designer of the NSST approach I had been looking for ways to do therapy and had developed the NSST approach to maximise positively directional transformational change. I had used it successfully as a therapist for 20 years in this way. More recently I have been using it as a teacher with the same goal and success for the participants in my workshops. In other words, participants had achieved significant personal growth as a result of being trained in the NSST approach.

I am familiar with interviewing people using the sand tray as I use this process during every counselling session with parents, children and couples in my counselling practice.

A further aspect of messiness occurred during the interview component with one participant. The interview component involved an unresolved problem of sufficient concern to me that I turned to a counselling role. This participant was so despondent that I felt a responsibility to help her to access her resources.

5.12.4. **Self as researcher**

As the researcher, I had to be "aware of the 'trappings' of assumptions in pedagogical and observational interpretations in order to address (and minimize) potential issues of power relations such as students wanting to 'please'" (Sparks, 2014). I stated clearly to the participants that they were to be honest with their responses of their experience of the workshop component.

Regarding messiness of qualitative research, I have a dual role as I am like, and yet unlike, the participant (Smith et al., 2009). By this I mean, like my participants I am a human being, experiencing them through my own sensed, informed, and embodied cognition and yet, from them, I have only the data that they report to me. Smith et al. state that the participants' meaning making is first order while the researchers sense-making is second order. This is sometimes referred to as double hermeneutics.
I was “indwelling” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 113) as a “complete member” (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 55) or “an insider” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 55). These authors are referring to the idea of being totally immersed within the research and implying a lack of distant rational perspective because the research exists “within and between” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 113). In many ways, I was and continue to be an “indweller” (p. 113) because I have lived and breathed this training program for years. I have continued to improve my ideas and approaches. I have written a book about it and I travel internationally facilitating the learning for many counsellors. I had to struggle with my own experience of the program and my wanting the best for the participants in terms of their being able to take on and embody their learning for themselves experientially. I think initially I was very much an indweller as the NSST approach means so much to me. However, in retrospect I believe that I was able to pull away from that place to be more in a "space between" (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) by becoming more curious about the responses. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) state that the intimacy of the qualitative research prevents the researcher from being an outsider and yet because of the role of the researcher it prevents them from being an insider. They see the researcher as being in the centre of the iterative interrelated process and the impact is the "space between" (p. 61).

Dwyer and Buckle (2009) believe that the “constructed dichotomies” (p. 62) of “insider or outsider” (p. 62), “subjective or objective” (p. 62), “complete” (p. 62) or “peripheral” (p. 62) is of little use in qualitative research and should be abandoned in order to “explore the complexity and richness of the space between entrenched perspectives” (p. 62). The authors go so far as to say that the researcher is “firmly in all aspects of the research process and essential to it” (p. 61). They continue:

We carry these individuals with us as we work with the transcripts. The words, representing experiences, are clear and lasting. We cannot retreat to a distant “researcher” role. Just as our personhood affects the analysis, so, too, the analysis affects our personhood. Within this circle of impact is the space between. (p. 61)

I know that when interviewing I was, a "human-as-instrument" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 193) as I was the only instrument that was flexible enough "to capture the complexity, subtlety and constantly changing situation" (p. 193). This description was my experience as the researcher throughout the three research trainings. I was in tune
simultaneously with all levels of human experience of those present, with the information from the sand tray and the figurines, with the subtle nonverbal cues from the participants, with their physical states and with their verbal expressions. I was fully attuned to each member of the group and this, in turn, afforded me the opportunity to adapt and be flexible over the 3 days.

In some cases, my role as designer/teacher/interviewer/researcher became even messier as it blurred into the additional role of counsellor/empathic listener as I iteratively made sense of participants’ phenomenological reflections (Finlay, 2006) on their own lived experience of the training. At the same time, I was fully aware of how my body was acting and subsequently was giving me embodied knowledge of the research participants through interpersonal attunement (Schore, 2012). As Merleau-Ponty (1964) stated “I live in the facial expressions of the other as I feel him living in mine” (p. 146).

The findings of these interviews are entirely dependent on my ability to get to the impact of their experience of the workshop component during the first two days. In the interview component, I used all of the elements of transformative pedagogy and transformative learning theory that I used during the workshop component e.g. my voice tone, body language, secure right-brain to right-brain attachment, understanding of soul work, intuition. For example, I did something that I had made a point of emphasising during the first 2 days with the participants. I had taught them, to stress with their clients in therapy sessions not to do something in the sand tray to please them. In this case, in the interview component I wanted them not to say something or do something in the sand tray to please me. Because they knew how important this research on the NSST approach was to me, I gave them permission to be truly honest about their experience of the workshop component. This was especially true as the research participants knew the essential question that my research was trying to answer and more importantly they understood how passionate I was about counsellors doing personal and transformative work to optimise their congruency in therapy.

In contrast to the messiness described above of being the designer, teacher, interviewer and researcher, the analysis of the data coming out of the interview component seemed fairly straight-forward initially. However, I found that reading the transcripts several times kept bringing out more and more themes that I had missed the first time. I realised early in the process that the dance that I do as a therapist, as well
as being the trainer of the NSST approach in workshops, is subtle, intuitive, complex and holistic. The work is dynamic and very much in-the-moment. While making a tentative hypothesis in my head, I ask the star to tell me about their experience. However, going through the transcripts and doing the analysis was in contrast a static process. I found myself saying “perhaps it means,” or “she could have been saying . . . .” This was difficult for me to do, as it felt almost disloyal to the normally dynamic and in-the-moment process. It was the opposite of what I do as the therapist. I don’t typically make definitive statements and my analysis is tentative and made in terms of suggestions. In this case, I was aware of the messiness of being both a therapist and of being a researcher/analyst but working with the same material.

The following chapter will look in detail at the seven superordinate themes in detail that were generated out of the 17 interviews.
Chapter 6.

Findings

In the interview component of this project, the participants displayed in the sand tray their personal evaluation of their experience of the NSST training. They made comments about their picture in the sand tray. Those comments were organised into 301 codes. Those codes were then organised into 19 clusters. Seven themes emerged from those clusters. Appendix G shows the frequency of these themes among the participants. The first six themes helped to answer the first research question:

How is personal growth experienced by counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray (NSST)— a new experiential play-based therapy?

Theme 1: Becoming aware of personal issues.
Clusters: Self-exploration, shame and acceptance, personal growth leads to being a better counsellor, family of origin, professional goals.

Theme 2: Deep sense of connection to and freedom for self.
Clusters: Intuition, soul work, self-love, imagination and magic and peace and freedom.

Theme 3: Richer choice of feelings, perceptions and expectations for self.
Clusters: Choice in feelings about self, choice in perceptions of self and others, choice of expectations of self and others.

Theme 4: Body awareness and freedom from physical pain.
Clusters: Positive physical changes, negative physical changes.

Theme 5: Powerful new insights about past self.
Clusters: Clarity about negative feelings and perceptions, clarity about potential, clarity about unmet expectations.

Theme 6: Being effective, competent, confident, personally and professionally.
Clusters: Personal confidence in their private lives, personal confidence in their professional lives.

The last theme helped to answer the second research question: How might transformative pedagogy foreground understanding in ways that foster personal growth opportunities among counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning NSST?

Theme 7: Feelings of being nurtured and safe.
(no clusters).
6.1. Theme 1: Becoming Aware of Personal Issues

These participants were keen to join me for this research. They were highly motivated to attend this research study because they had seen me present at one of 2 introductory workshops. I invited them to join the research study at that time. Out of 34 people who signed up from the two conference workshops, 17 finally arrived at my door to take part in this workshop and interview component for this research. In the pre-training questionnaire (see Appendix C), I asked “What are your personal growth goals during this training?” I was looking for their thoughts about how they wanted to develop personally through the skills training of the NSST approach. The idea was for them to set personal growth goals for themselves in the workshop component. Their answers would be part of the data, which would be analysed in order to answer the first of the two research questions:

- How is personal growth experienced by counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray (NSST)—a new experiential play-based therapy?

Interestingly when answering the question in the pre-training questionnaire, “What are your personal growth goals during this training?” most of the participants referred to their professional growth and not their personal growth goals. It was not clear on reading their answers to the pre-training questionnaire whether they didn’t understand the question, or whether they felt that they did not have anything in their personal world that required some personal growth. However, it became clear in the interview component on Day 3 that they had been unaware of personal issues. Further, their growing awareness of their personal issues was a predominant theme with the participants. Many ah-ha moments for the participants had occurred throughout the training and they expressed this in the interview component.

This category had 28 codes:

- awareness of self, be a better therapist, be less of an introvert, bridging gap between theory and practice, deep loving acceptance, different level of shame, expand knowledge, experiencing the sand tray from a child’s perspective, experiential, examining family system, feeling comfortable with the sand tray, grounded in Satir model, head knowledge, impact on clients, interpret sand tray work, more competent, more confident, more effective, personal growth improves
me professionally, reconnect, return to doing counselling, right-brain work, self-
exploration, skills in sand tray therapy, step outside comfort zone, tap into my
internal world, understand play therapy, understand sand tray therapy.

I divided these codes into four clusters:

- Self-exploration, shame acceptance
- Personal growth leads to being a better counsellor
- Family of origin
- Professional growth goals

In their pre-training questionnaire, 10 of the 17 participants offered no personal
growth goals at all, responding instead in terms of becoming more skilled at their work,
that is, professional growth goals. Four of the research participants (Cheryl, Kaila, Anne,
Kate) articulated personal growth goals, with two (Sandra, Zara) mentioning their belief
that their personal growth would enhance their ability to be effective counsellors. Martin,
Kaila and Sandra also mentioned their interest at looking at their family of origin for
potential personal issues.

6.1.1. **Self-exploration, shame, acceptance**

Self-exploration, shame and acceptance were the first cluster of 5 codes:

be less of an introvert, different level of shame, self-exploration, step outside
comfort zone, tap into my internal world.

Cheryl said that she wanted to have “self-exploration”, while Anne described how
she wanted to step outside of her comfort zone and “Experience the process myself, for
myself and be less of an introvert.”

Kaila was open to see if the sand tray revealed something different but wanted
specifically to work on her own personal issue of a “different level of shame/acceptance
if given the opportunity.”

Kate wanted to utilize the sand tray as another mode of learning “to tap into my
internal world.” In these instances, the participants knew that they wanted to explore
their own personal issues and in Kaila’s case explore her deep level of shame.

Four of 17 participants acknowledged their need to work on and resolve personal
issues.
6.1.2. **Personal growth leads to being a better counsellor**

Two participants made a clear link between personal growth and their role as a counsellor.

There were 3 Codes:

- awareness of *self*, impact on clients, personal growth improves me professionally.

Sandra said that she had signed up for the training with professional goals in mind, but added: "working experientially on my personal growth goals helps me to improve myself professionally."

Zarah had been training in the Satir method over the past few months and was excited to be able to integrate the sand tray with the Satir model. Her personal goal was to grow in her “awareness of *self*” and to see how that growth in turn impacts clients.

These two participants were able to see the link between personal growth and their work as a counsellor.

6.1.3. **Family of origin**

For three of the participants, personal growth meant working on themselves in relation to their family. There were 2 codes in this cluster:

- deep loving acceptance, examining family system.

Martin had the personal goal of re-examining his own family system through the lens of the training.

Kaila believed that “getting her own fingers in the sand” was essential to her family therapy work and particularly wanted to have the ah-ha moment. She said that she was really open to any transformational change where she could, “integrate and leave the sand tray/training changed and personally experience what this model has to offer.”

Sandra initially thought that she wanted to understand her own children’s experience of the world more fully in order to respond to them in more effective ways *and be a more effective parent* [emphasis added]. She also wanted to develop a loving
acceptance of her family of origin, “Now that it has been transformed by the loss of my brother.”

These three participants understood that they had issues with family members and wanted to take the opportunity to examine them as part of their personal growth work.

6.1.4. Professional growth goals

For 10 participants, “personal growth goals” was taken to mean goals for improving professional skills, while the 7 who mentioned personal growth goals also added their professional goals. All participants identified professional growth goals. There are 18 codes in this cluster:

- be a better therapist, bridging gap between theory and practice, expand knowledge, experiencing the sand tray from a child’s perspective, experiential, feeling comfortable with the sand tray, grounded in Satir model, head knowledge, interpret sand tray work, more competent, more confident, more effective, reconnect, return to doing counselling, right-brain work, skills in sand tray therapy, understand play therapy, understand sand tray therapy.

Kaila also included professional goals when talking about personal growth goals. She wanted to feel more empowered in her therapeutic work, stating that, “Gaining head knowledge, observing other therapist’s styles and practicing myself with other therapists (which is a rarity) will be rewarding in this way.” Kaila also wanted, to become more comfortable with the “nuances of building the ‘scene’ in the tray”, to find creative uses for different combinations of family members using the sand tray at the same time and to discuss nuances for different developmental stages.

Kate wanted to learn the science behind the NSST approach as well as the practical application; that is, to learn how and why this therapy works and to become equipped to utilize this learning with her clients. Kate wanted to integrate the knowledge she already had. She felt the training would be useful for her team at work as they had a sizeable but “under-utilized” sand tray in their playroom.

In addition to personal growth goals, Martin stated he wanted to solidify his learning in order to bring the sand tray therapy approach into his professional practice with individuals and families.
As well as stating her personal growth goals, Sandra wanted to be able to transfer her personal learning into her professional world and to understand the intrapsychic world of the children and adults that she works with. She also wanted to learn to help clients experience transformational change using the sand tray.

Zara understood that growing in her awareness of self would help her clients and in addition she wanted to learn how to use the NSST approach with her clients.

Naomi mostly wanted to deepen her understanding of sand tray therapy and work towards incorporating the method into her counselling repertoire. She stated that she wanted to try something new, to ask questions and to “fully commit to the experience.”

Ally was still a counselling student. She wanted to integrate her school learning with practical application. Specifically, she wanted to learn more about the sand tray in order to use it more in therapy. She had noticed that she would revert to psychoeducation (i.e., teaching about what to do differently) in her practicum sessions and wanted to be reminded about how to get back to “being with the client in the present moment, where they are at.”

Laura wanted to learn new methods of healing, gain a broader understanding of “sand play” and learn new tools to aid in her practice. She also wanted to expand her “knowledge of the therapies based in the subconscious.”

Ellie’s main goal was to increase her confidence in the use of the sand tray by gaining a “better theoretical background”. She was already utilizing the sand tray in an eclectic way, but could “use some direction.” Ellie said that she also wanted to become more grounded in the Transformative Therapeutic Systemic model of Virginia Satir.

As a beginning therapist with no training in play therapy, Linda’s personal growth goals were not personal but professional in nature. She said that the most important “personal outcome” of the training was, “Whether or not I felt comfortable initiating sand play with my students.”

She described how she wanted to:

Understand how to initiate and maintain therapeutic sand play, understand when to choose sand play as a therapeutic technique, its philosophy and ways
of interacting with a child through the sand tray . . . . [and] understand how to evaluate what is happening.

Cheryl’s personal growth goals were primarily professional. She wanted to understand, from a client’s perspective, “[The] process and how it feels and in addition acquire a different skill set for her work with children.”

Frances was interested in becoming a “more effective therapist” for children and parents; in particular, to recognize the, “Underlying issue a client is struggling with and what intervention would be most helpful.” Frances wanted to be better able to help her clients “express a more fulfilling life.”

Martha came to the workshop component with the personal growth goal (which was in fact a professional growth goal) of learning to interpret sand tray work, to be able to use the sand tray with her clients, to add tools to her counselling tool kit and to “take advantage of this opportunity in order to grow as a counsellor”.

Susie wanted to be better trained and skilled in the sand tray and to have a deeper understanding of the process. She was eager to learn a counselling technique that did not involve much talking, analyzing and rationalizing; and she hoped to learn how to use and access the right-side of the brain.

Soleil’s primary personal goal was not a personal goal but to feel more competent professionally, more confident at work, but mostly more skilled. She wanted to feel more skilled so that she could help kids “move along in the sand tray.” She wanted to learn how to help clients gain more insight and control and to let go of old stuff using a technique that did not call upon her to make interpretations of their work. She wanted to help her clients: “self-regulate in a sand tray.”

Chris stated her personal growth goals in terms of how she wanted to be professionally to:

1. Further recognize where my inherent skills lie.
2. Identify skills I need to improve on,
3. Understand better the art and application of play therapy/sand tray therapy,
4. Feel confident in my practical application of the skills and techniques taught,
5. Feel confident in my understanding of the science behind the skills.
Anne wanted to further explore what she had seen me introduce at the BC School Counsellors' Conference in 2014. She had been frustrated at work, feeling that she was doing more behaviour management than counselling and wanted to get her focus back on counselling. Her personal growth goal was also in the professional realm.

6.1.5. **Comment**

Initially the topic of personal growth goals was not addressed by 10 of the participants in their pre-training questionnaire. They saw their personal goals as being professional goals that is, having more skills and becoming a better counsellor. However during the workshop component, they did discover that they had personal issues that they wanted to work on.

6.2. **Theme 2: Deep Sense of Connection to and Freedom for Self**

A fundamental part of the NSST approach in therapy is to look at the defences that the client has used often unconsciously for many years. Then in therapy the client explores what parts of the defences were useful and which were not. Once they understand the positive intention of the defences, they are able to accept, appreciate, and let go of the part that is no longer helpful. The participants in this study during the demonstrations and triad work were asked to do exactly the same thing as the client in therapy. This involved going into their past to see where these defences originated and how they had been helpful at the time. They created images of their defences and subsequently placed other figurines to show how these defences had helped.

Throughout the training, the research participants had several opportunities to do this work using the NSST approach and as a result they experienced transformational change where they felt unburdened from their previously overly protected self. With the protection released then there was space for a sense of inner peace and freedom, which afforded personal growth.

In addition, in presenting the NSST approach, I emphasised the use of intuition in therapy, connecting deeply with the client and following all the non-verbal expressions of the client's communication. I taught about right-brain to right-brain intuition and how so much information is gained about the state of the client by paying attention to our own
bodies and our own inner wisdom. The workshop component encouraged the focus of connection to *self* and many of the comments in the interview component reflected this. This experience culminated in a sense of self-love, peace and acceptance for the participants and how this level of attachment to self meets our universal yearnings and can be seen as soul work (Dirkx, 2012).

This theme had 90 codes attached to it:

acceptance of self, appreciate, appreciation, at ease, aware, awe and grief, be compassionate, beautiful, beautiful moments, better care of self, calmer, centre of my own universe, clarity, complete, connected to God, deep, deep down, deserve better, fairy godmother, feel the presence of others, focused, freedom, full of light, full of possibilities, getting out of my brain, gift, grounded, hard to find the words, heal, heart first, important, information from mind and body, insightful, intuition, keep learning, jewels, joy, keep learning, less scared, light, light (shine), lighter (weight), listen to my body, listening to myself, love others, love *self*, magic, mindful, new lens, nurturing, open, opening, opportunities, peace, playfulness, powerful, precious, proud, quieter, released, sacred, self-worth, senses awakening, soothing, stand along side self, strength, stronger, taken out of the shadows, taking care of *self*, taller, telepathic communication, to be lighter, to enjoy me, to feel at peace, treasure, trust ideas to appear, trust yourself, trusting instincts, uncovering things that got lost, welcoming, wholeness, wisdom, wizard, wonder.

These 90 codes were placed into five clusters:

- Intuition
- Soul work
- Self-love
- Imagination and magic
- Peace and freedom

6.2.1. **Intuition**

I am not sure if I can actually teach intuition but I certainly encouraged the participants to find and use their own intuition, which, for some, was contrary to the way they had been trained (practicing counsellors) or were being trained (student counsellors). There were a number of participants who were surprised, delighted and relieved to have been able to recognise and be given permission to use their own intuition. This cluster had 16 codes within it:
beautiful moments, clarity, getting out of brain, gift, heart first, information from mind and body, insightful, intuition, listen to my body, listening to myself, new lens, sacred, telepathic communication, trust yourself, trusting instincts, wisdom.

Ellie was taking away from the weekend “the reminder of the gift it is to do this kind of work and how sacred it is.” She had placed a wizard in the sand tray somewhat hesitantly as she felt he was too strong of a claim for her own wisdom. She said that it was too arrogant to place him in the tray but, over the weekend, she had realised that she had gained over the years skills and insight and that she could/should trust her instinct and the information gleaned from her body and right brain.

For Martha, the experience of getting out of her head and into her heart indicated that she was listening to her intuition more than following a preordained method of counselling.

The recognition and the trusting of her own intuitive process profoundly impacted Frances. She had had a triad session with Martha the day before and Frances had commented on the alligator figurine, “He’s got your back.” In the interview, Frances said:

So, I thought why would I say that, it wasn’t really part of the process. I just felt I had to trust that, in that moment to say, you know . . . . They are beautiful moments because you don’t know where they come from, but it’s just the perfect thing to say and that’s like sort of this inner wisdom coming out, the intuition coming out. . . . So this felt to me like the personal piece, just taking a more relaxed stance, resting into being and not, not having everything right and proper, insightful.

In her interview component, Frances placed a blue stone to represent her newly-found trust of her intuition which she described as a “new lens.”

Naomi spoke of her use of intuition as a star when she said, “I think it’s the clarity of picking pieces and expressing where you are and instinctively knowing what you need to do.” Naomi wished to put her intuition and her heart first. Naomi was taking away a great deal from the training but specifically, “Instinctively knowing what you need to do.”

Soleil also placed a blue stone in the sand tray like Frances (although they had no idea of the others’ sand trays) to represent her “intuitive communication, telepathic communication” by which she said she could pick up nonverbal cues from others.
Initially Kate had described the penguins as plodding along, but somewhere in her processing during the 20-minute interview, they became symbols of wisdom, as they physically “grew closer.” She said:

I wanted to put the wisdom besides, besides her [the girl figurine]. But is that wisdom for her? Is that for her or for me?

It was clear for both of us that the wisdom was hers.

For Laura, a turtle figurine, which was now able to see the playful and the stronger parts of her that had been buried, had now come to the fore to represent her wisdom.

Chris said that now she trusted what she had been taught at university and now trusted her own intuition because, “I knew I had all of these things [and now] they are not so buried [because of the weekend].”

In the experiential triad work of this training, the participants were able to connect with their intuition, both when they were a therapist and when they were a star. By turning inward and listening to their body wisdom, they could gather information to help guide them in their work as a therapist and as a star. This intuitive process or “listening with the third ear” (Reik, 1948), helped these participants become more aware and connected to their own internal world, giving them more personal confidence to make decisions for their star and for themselves.

6.2.2. Soul work

I use the term soul work (Dirkx, 2012) to mean worthy of reverence and respect. Sometimes, the participant would actually use the term sacred. Other times I extrapolated that what they were experiencing was worthy of reverence or respect.

This cluster had 17 codes:

aware, awe and grief, connected to God, deep down, feel the presence of others, full of light, full of possibilities, grounded, hard to find the words, heart first, light (shine), lighter (weight), mindful, open, powerful, sacred.

Ally’s work over the training weekend was particularly focused on her excitement around being able to use her imagination to help others. Her before-and after-picture (Figure 3) shows how she was really able to place herself and her love of God (the lion)
as a central part of her tableau. It was as if she had lost touch with her faith and through this ah-ha moment of moving from her head to her heart, there was now room for the sacred. As she looked at her final picture with the image of her God and herself placed up high and being lit up by the candles, she cried. I asked her where in her body she was experiencing this picture and she could barely say the words. She said, “Deep down . . . . It’s deep down, it’s just, yeah, just right here” (pointing to her solar plexus). I commented that her picture was full of light and possibilities and she enthusiastically agreed.

Figure 3. Ally explained that being able to use her imagination gave her more possibilities. Photo by J. Edmondson.

Anne had a life changing experience during the training and at the end of the session she said simply, “It’s hard to find the words”. Anne also felt lighter. She also had done a demonstration with me during the training and realized how small she had been and how she had been hiding behind fear and had now come out from behind the symbolic rock which had kept her safe. She described how she felt clearheaded now that her dark, negative feelings were not present anymore. She asked for a candle, which she lit herself and said, “Okay . . . so I feel lighter. I feel clearer, lighter and just more open. So to me this is sort of shining a light on things that were getting covered.”
Martin experienced something very deep during the training when he spoke of having a mixture of awe and grief. His reference to Buddha suggests that his experience was a spiritual one when he talked about being grounded and mindful and aware all at the same time. His reflection on what he was experiencing was that, “It’s that sense of power and stability that the tree has and at the same time the depth and that it’s stable and it’s living but it’s not moving too fast. It’s just there.”

When I was interviewing Martin, he talked about how he was able to bring together the mysterious “Master of the Dark Arts” and his gift of helping people. He used the term dark and mysterious saying, “But at the same time it’s powerful and it needs to be there.” He agreed with me that the light had been shone on the shadow.

The term light was used several times by the participants to denote a shift in a physical body sense, in giving more energy and in feeling less heavy. Kaila experienced some sense of light even though it was connected to loneliness. She used an eagle as her source of strength from God, which initially was high up on the roof of the well, but was gradually able to be integrated with her other parts.

Laura described her elephant as being full of light and how this gave her more clarity, “like there’s more energy.”

Frances said that she would use, “The light of the knowledge I’ve learned and the light of who I am.”

At the end of every interview the participants made a wish on a candle. As Zarah held her candle she referred to the candle and to the picture of her transformed sense of herself and said, “I wish to remain very connected to this light” (Figure 4).
Cheryl used the term light to denote how she was no longer invisible. The previous day, in a demonstration she did with me, I reflected that she was now the centre of her own universe. This was a huge revelation for her as she saw how she had previously placed everyone else’s needs before her in her life. In the interview component, the next day she said:

It’s almost like you’re stepping into your light. It almost feels like the light was here and I was just slightly to the left of it. And because I felt if I stepped into the light that I somehow wasn’t taking care of some other part of my life or somebody else in my life . . . . So it’s almost like I feel now I can step into the light and if I’m fully in the light then I can fully feel the presence of all those around me but if I’m not in the light I can’t feel it . . . . It’s really lovely and you know, I understand why, I fully understand why I never was in the light, I get it and it didn’t have anything to do with me so it feels right to step in now.

For Sandra, the light came in the form of a candelabra which she said was full of light and, “It’s soothing and welcoming and opening, all of this is opening and it’s all opening, right, opening your heart.”

Susie’s sense of being responsible, that is, to “carry others” had been lifted and she felt lighter because she felt less burdened and she likened the feeling to a fairy that could just flit around.
Ellie was taking away from the weekend the reminder that it is a gift to do this sacred kind of work and she saw the candle light as a protector.

The participants made reference to something that was beyond the physical or emotional and they made the connection with something higher and/or deeper within themselves. They were able to experience this deeper/higher sense of being because the NSST approach enabled the participants to appreciate how important their defences were in the past and keep the parts of their defences that had helped them and then choose to let go of other parts of their defences which had burdened them.

The participants experienced “non conscious ways of change” (Taylor, 2001, p. 234) through the emotionally charged images (Dirkx, 2001, p. 66) of the figurines. This was brought about by drawing upon unconscious images of the implicit right hemisphere resulting in a spiritual or numinous (Reitan, 2010, para. 8) and sometimes a “soul-full” experience (De Little, 2015b).

6.2.3. **Self-love**

Gaining a sense of *self* is about getting to know one’s own beautiful essence in its simplest form and seeing, accepting, appreciating and loving that part of *self*. Various degrees of self-love were described in the interviews.

This cluster has 20 codes:

- acceptance of *self*, appreciation, be compassionate, beautiful, better care of self, deep, deserve better, gift, important, light, love *self*, love others, precious, self-worth, taken out of the shadows, stand along side self, stronger, taken out of the shadows, taking care of *self*, uncovering things that got lost, wholeness.

Ally’s wish was to enjoy herself, as she had taken herself from out of the shadows. As she looked at the newly-found image of herself she said, “It feels precious I mean, that’s me . . . . Uncovering of things that got lost, they were always there . . . . It’s like a wholeness with me.”

Kaila referred to a figurine that had “taken her mask down.” Referring indirectly to her sense of *self*, Kaila looked at the figurine intently, saying that the figurine was important and that, “Maybe it’s okay that other people don’t see her as valuable. I don’t need to have other people to say that she’s okay.”
Anne said in her three-month questionnaire that she was going to take better care of herself and Naomi said that she felt like her old self.

Laura appreciated herself indirectly through the eyes of the wise turtle. She also referred to a tree and flowers as beautiful and how her self (the elephant) needed self-love in life. At the end of the interview, she said that her wish was to make sure to love herself and others fully.

Talking through the assertive figurine, Soleil was able to set gentle limits for herself and then she spoke in the first person and said, “I don’t deserve to be treated this way.” Soleil became stronger in her claim of looking after herself when she referred to a rock with the word trust on it, which, she said stood for:

Self-love . . . because I think I have to be loving myself and knowing that I am doing in a place of love with children and if it happens with adults too; that I do it from a place of love that I won’t mess them up.

Cheryl’s demonstration with me the day before the interview suggested that she had not put herself first and yet she said the following day in the interview component, “It’s something I’ve recently learned to do for myself, to come along side myself and be compassionate, to be actively there for myself.” This suggested that she had begun to pay attention and care for herself before the workshop component and she was just realising it. Ultimately Cheryl felt proud of herself for being vulnerable in the workshop component and how she was able to put herself into the light.

Martin was in touch with something very deep within him and he said, “I’ve got something that’s valuable.”

Naomi talked in the third person of how the Russian doll felt complete, stronger and had a lot of resources. She said, “There is clarity”.

Loving, caring and appreciating themselves was a deep experience for many of the participants during their sand tray interviews. They used a variety of words like precious, acceptance, centre of my own universe, complete and taking care of self, to describe how they felt about themselves. I believe that this kind of self-love experience for counsellors in a training workshop is at the heart of this thesis. When you are able to accept who you are and love yourself then you are able to help others from a genuine authentic place of self-love and compassion (De Little, 2015b).
6.2.4. **Imagination and magic**

In my experience treasure and jewels are widely utilized as symbols for beauty of *self* and others and for potential for growth. There are 10 codes in this cluster:

- fairy godmother, gift, jewels (*self*), opportunities, playfulness, proud, sacred, treasure (*self*), trust ideas to appear, wizard.

Sandra described how the figurines all know what’s inside the treasure chest and how beautiful that is. However, the curious fairy was unable to see it for herself. Sandra then used the plural and said:

> We can see stuff spilling out of it and we know it’s beautiful. We know we want to go towards it but we don’t know all of it but that’s the appeal.

Sandra was referring to herself as the treasure and her final wish was, “To continue to learn and grow, there is more treasure to be discovered.”

Anne, in a separate interview from Sandra placed the same treasure chest into the tray saying:

> This is the treasures [sic] in my life, my family, my work, things that you know, I care about and there is so much of it and they’re not being covered by this [referring to the dead tree].

Ellie’s experience was affirming over the training weekend. She used the same treasure chest as Sandra and Anne without knowing that they had used it. When I asked her about it, she replied:

> I guess it just kind of represents the gift, you know, of when I, when I do feel like I don’t know what I’m doing or doubting myself or you know, just the reminder of what like a gift it is to do this kind of work and how sacred it is.

In her interview Kate, had initially used jewels to denote her sense of trusting the process even when she would dissociate. By the end of the interview she had seen them from a different perspective saying it’s more about looking at the jewels as opportunities, “Instead of looking at them as obstructions.”

Chris also referred to her own resources when she said, “I can see the treasure.”

The sand tray affords the expression of playfulness and imagination. Susie picked out a fairy for her new sense of being saying, “It’s almost like a fairy godmother.”
Kate used a fairy godmother to denote her newfound sense of playfulness. The figurine she chose was of an older woman smiling and waving a wand around. Kate put a Gandalf-type wizard in the tray. She then said that it represented her trust that ideas would appear.

Kaila placed a wizard in the sand tray and talked about it representing her father.

My belief in planning this project was that the sand tray, specifically, would allow counsellors in training to experience self-awareness through the creativity of their right hemisphere. The participants used their imagination to move beyond the present to a deeper level of self, because the use of imagination and metaphor awakens the “ordinarily unseen, unheard and unexpected” (Greene, 1995, p. 28).

6.2.5. Peace and freedom

It appears that when the participants had freed themselves of their fears and ways of protecting themselves during the workshop component, as we have seen above, they were able to see themselves and appreciate their own beautiful essence. The result of this personal transformation was for many participants a sense of experiencing being calm, open, peaceful, which in turn gave them a sense of freedom.

This cluster had 27 codes:

appreciate, at ease, calmer, centre of universe, complete, focused, freedom, heal, heart first, joy, keep learning, less scared, light, magic, nurturing, open, opening, peace, proud, quieter, released, senses awakening, soothing, stand along side self, strength, taller, to be lighter, to enjoy me, to feel at peace, welcoming, wonder.

Three participants expressed how they felt calmer. Ally placed figurines on her right to denote how she currently felt as a result of the training. As she looked at this part of the sand tray she said, “I just ha-ha-ha . . . I don’t know this side as more, it’s just calm.”

Ellie also expressed a “calm presence.”

During the interview Anne said, “Everything just feels kind of quiet, quiet and calm right now.”
Anne also said “Things feel much more open. When the participants talk of ‘open, I assume that they are experiencing more optimism and hope and clearer perspective of life. Sandra placed a figurine in the sand tray which she said was her and “My arms are always open.” She then referred to a candelabra figurine, which she said is:

Full of light and it’s soothing and welcoming and opening, all of this is opening, it’s all opening, right, opening your heart, opening your feelings and your senses, awakening. And the light is opening too.

Several participants experienced a sense of peace. They would sometimes use a stone with the words peace on it or they created an image of quiet beauty and peace. Cheryl found peace when she experienced herself in the middle of her own universe because she was then able to be fully present and not worry about all the other people that she would normally feel responsible for. She said, “It’s lovely; it’s very peaceful.”

Susie had experienced a transformational change from feeling hugely responsible and burdened to feeling more playful and light. She said that her newly-found self brought her peace, because:

I don’t have to hold it, it frees me to just be with and to attune to and to walk along side right, as opposed to leading the way . . . . So my wish for myself is the acceptance of peace because that’s not super comfortable for me and to trust that, to trust that peace is what, peace is what I need. . . .

She went on to explain how it was hard for her to do things differently and let go of the control “and to just to be at peace with whatever, is a hard place. It hasn’t happened very often in my life.”

Chris also experienced a sense of peace having realised that this way of doing therapy is hands on and not requiring excessive theory and reading.

Kate experienced peace and joy, while Kaila gained peace from God, which was connected to the strength of the eagle. Laura felt that the elephant needed peace in its life so she placed another tree with flowers and butterflies close by.

Eight of the participants used the term freedom in their description of their experience of the weekend. In Ally’s sand tray, we saw her picture divided into two (see Figure 3). She had a number of rocks and one that had the word imagine written on it.
She explained that being able to use her imagination gave her more possibilities, which in turn she described as having more freedom.

Martha said in her interview that she had experienced a sense of freedom through the nurturing during the weekend and through the triad experience the day before. Kate described how having discovered her playful side, the butterfly figurine had been released as a metaphor for her new-found sense of self. Anne gained a sense of freedom as she described her experience of moving from an image of a dead tree to one of growth and beauty turning towards the light. Susie, made a before and after picture where the whole part of the after picture was her sense of freedom. Freedom from responsibility and freedom from following the rules. She likened herself to a fairy that “flits in and flits out.” Susie felt much freer to trust that others will know what they need.

Susie recalled one her friends saying to her, “You know Susie you’re such a supportive person but you’re like one of those heavy-duty ultra-supporting pantyhose . . . . It does the job but it doesn’t feel good sometimes.” Susie then said that now, “there is no pantyhose, there is freedom and bare legs.”

Cheryl placed a treasure box and a trophy in the right-hand corner and said:

I think part of the work that we did on Saturday helped me sort of free up my ability to kind of stand along myself and just be proud of myself for hard work and to say it’s okay to say that and not to feel like I have to be, you know . . . Yeah, like I have to make myself smaller.

Sandra described how she was less scared of her family as she had found love and compassion for them. To be able speak that out loud and know that it was okay even if no one noticed, for Sandra was, “very freeing.”

All my clients make a wish for themselves at the end of a counselling session. I see this as part of the spiritual theme data coming out of the interview component as the wishes generally touch on the deepest yearnings to be loved, accepted, to have peace and freedom in our lives.

At the end of the triad and demonstration sessions in the workshop component, the research participants would make a wish. I continued this practice at the end of the interview session, saying first of all my wish out loud for them and then asking for theirs. The wishes in the interview by the participants were all positively directional, with words like “to enjoy me”, wonder, peace, open, appreciate, “to look at the magic”, nurturing,
strength, heal, “to stand straight and tall”, “to be lighter”, “to hold on to this sense of freedom” “to put my intuition and my heart first”, “to keep moving and to keep the curiosity and to keep discovering and knowing”, “to remain very connected to this light,” “to feel at peace . . . I’m going to feel at peace and that [sic] I’m going to continue to grow and to help children that are hurt.”

The participants said that they had felt more peaceful and free as they transformed old ways of being, using the NSST approach. The participants had placed figurines in the sand tray during the workshop component, to show how they had kept themselves safe. They then typically separated this into what was useful and what was no longer useful. Once transformed like this, there was a flow of energy, which created a sense of peace, a sense of being more alive, open and free.

6.2.6. Comment

This experience of learning about, experiencing and practicing using the NSST approach, created profound changes for the participants in terms of their personal growth. When all their defences were revealed in the sand tray and only the helpful and positive elements were kept, that allowed for a feeling of connection to something bigger, which in turn had the potential for the participants to experience a greater sense of peace, self-love and freedom (De Little, 2015b). The use of images like blossoming trees, jewels, candles, peace signs and transparent figurines, speak to growth, lightness, internal peace, the soul, the spirit, radiant inner beauty and liberation of self. All of these experiences led to greater acceptance, appreciation and love for self and ultimately personal growth. While the training in NSST is not specifically a spiritually centred counselling approach it does focus on “being with being” (Lines, 2006, p. 2) and with some of the participants, the experience really did feel like a “spiritually bonding relationship of mutual self-growth” (p. 2).

6.3. Theme 3:
Richer Choice of Feelings, Perceptions, and Expectations for Self

This theme had 46 codes attached to it:
adventure, another way of being, authentic, awe and grief, celebration, childlike, choice, choice to be playful and light, clarity, clearheaded, colleagues noticed, competent, confident, complete, curious, delighted, direction, emotional, enjoy (me), excited, family noticed (more calm), fascinating, feeling of wonder, future positive, growth, happier, heal, I am the sand tray, learning, living freely, looked at differently, more fun, more positive, new direction, playful, possibilities, relaxed, rested, responsible, rule follower, see myself, seeing self and others differently, seeing the world differently, should be better, stronger, transparent, wholeness.

These codes were placed into three clusters:

- Choice in feelings about self
- Choice of perceptions of self and others
- Choice of expectations of self and others

6.3.1. **Choice in feelings about self**

There were 23 different codes that I placed in this theme:

adventure, authentic, awe and grief, celebration, childlike, clarity, clearheaded, complete, curious, delighted, emotional, enjoy (me), excited, fascinating, feeling of wonder, happier, heal, learning, more fun, more positive, playful, seeing the world differently, stronger, wholeness, wonder.

There were lots of references to being excited with phrases from Ally like:

I’m curious. And I’m excited to explore and it feels more like an adventure than just this scary forest that I’m going to just trench through and little old me is not going to know what to do.

This was a departure from her sense of being overwhelmed before the workshop component. As she said this, tears fell down her cheeks and I asked her what the tears were about. She replied “Excitement? And something else . . . It’s like a wholeness with me.” At the end of the interview she said that her wish was that “I enjoy me . . . and the adventure yeah. My wish is that I see it [counselling] as an adventure.”

Martin was moved to tears as he described the feeling that he had about his experience. He said:

There is a sense of excitement, there is a sense of clarity and there is uh, I mean, there is, I don’t know if it’s a sense of awe or grief or mostly mixed together. It’s like it’s stirring up something in me that’s sort of, can bring up tears and at the same time it’s like wow, yeah, it’s fascinating. I just feel very clearheaded and I don’t know what the word is. It’s like this negative, like the
darkness or whatever, the dark feelings or the negative feelings they’re not even there, they don’t want to come in and then if they try it’s like they, you know, they just don’t belong there.

After the training, Naomi was clear about her direction in life (Figure 5). She experienced this clarity physically and she said that she felt like smiling and she was emotional “in a good way.” She described herself in the third person when she said, “The doll feels complete and stronger.”

Soleil was excited about returning to her work:

I’m going to be more exciting in supporting a child making the transformation that I’ve lived now. Now that I’ve felt it and now that I know more what to do with this new modality, this new way of looking and training that I know how to do it that way.

![Figure 5. Naomi, “The doll feels complete and stronger.”](Photo by J. Edmondson.)

Martha was also excited about the learning that she had experienced over the weekend. Her two words to describe this were “delighted” and “celebration” and she said that her wish was to “continue to heal and stand straight and tall and be lighter and get out of that other stuff that clutters up I can do that I am so curious and excited about. That I can share with others.”
Anne was excited to have learned this particular use of the sand tray. Even though she was not fully confident she said, “But it’s a process and I’m really excited about it.” I asked Anne to find a figurine to represent her newfound sense of excitement. She picked out a figurine of a girl dressed in man’s clothes and with a knife in her hand. Anne described the figurine thinking it was a male saying, “He’s got a smile on his face, his arms are open and looks like he’s getting ready to go . . . (he’s) happier, more open, more positive.” She was describing her self as being all of these things and her wish was:

To keep this feeling of wonder inside me as to how this all happened and to appreciate it and just live with it in that sense, like, to make it a part of me, a part of my life.

Kate said that she would feel more playful and “childlike” by using her playfulness in her personal life as well as professionally. To represent her playful figurine, she picked a fairy godmother with a magic wand. [I always use a magic wand when I am training play therapists]. She said, “I like this feeling.” For her wish Kate said that, “Instead of looking at obstructions, is just to look at the magic.”

Laura rediscovered her playful panda part that belonged to her newly-found authentic self.

Many participants felt changes of feelings. They felt excited, child like, stronger, transparent and whole. When we just play, dopamine is released which lifts up the energy and allows us to feel happier (A. Schore, personal communication, March 4, 2017). The NSST approach is about playing. By using the imagination and being creative with alternative possibilities we see others and ourselves differently (Satir et al., 1991). As we experience different feelings there is space for changing perceptions as well.

6.3.2. Choice of perceptions of self and others

Perceptions of self and others is how we see ourselves in the world and how others see us. There were 16 codes for perceptions:

colleagues noticed, competent, confident, family noticed (more calm), future positive, growth, happier, I am the sand tray, living freely, looked at differently, new direction, relaxed, rested, see myself, seeing self and others differently, seeing the world differently, transparent.
Kate saw the jewels at the end of her interview as different. She saw that they had changed from being a way of dissociating to being a gift that kept her safe. She was alluding to her earlier trauma and the jewels referred to how she was seeing herself differently. She said, “This [the dissociation] doesn’t have to be so strong; it’s more about looking at the jewels now.”

Frances saw herself as the sand tray itself holding her experiences of the weekend.

Laura experienced herself differently. In particular, she said, “just about the way I see myself too.” Laura saw herself as a transparent glass elephant living freely, freely up in the tree for the entire world to see (Figure 6). She spoke about it having a, “Better view of the world. He can see far, maybe a better understanding from being up so high.”

Figure 6. Laura was comfortable in her vulnerability as a glass elephant. Photo by J. Edmondson.

Martin saw that other people could see that he knew what he was doing, that they would see him as competent and confident. He said that he had experienced a lasting transformative shift. He was able to see his Master of the Dark Arts part of him as unique and a gift, whereas before the weekend training he had been ashamed of it. He
said, “I’m more sort of, yeah not beating around the bush or beating around the bush a lot less in personal work and personal relationships and professionally.”

Martha said that she was profoundly affected by the training and she said that she had gone home and looked around at her house and looked at it differently. She continued:

I thought about the future and I looked at it differently and I was standing differently when I did that and I um. I kept bending over to tie my shoes in case to see what was going on . . . I can look at things around me differently.

At the interview, Kaila saw her father as a “softer wizard”. As she worked through all her other parts, her perception of him changed and in so doing, she chose a different figurine for him.

Naomi knew that her son would notice her being different because “he’s really good at noticing.” And her husband would see that she was different by her face. She said,” I just look more rested and relaxed and happier.”

Sandra found a new way of looking at her brother who had recently died:

Yeah, my brother wasn’t there for me for a long time in my life and I’m not angry at him at all but this is beautiful to think that he can be there for me now. Who knew? Ha-ha-ha—Who knew?—That a weekend at Madeleine’s could a ha-ha-ha could bring my brother back to where I need him to be and maybe he’s been there all along.

The perceptions of the participants changed for themselves as a result of the workshop component. As each level of their iceberg changed they experienced a shift in a positive direction with an increase in choice of feelings and perceptions. As a result, their self-esteem rose (Satir et al., 1991). They had more choice about how they were in the world.

6.3.3. **Choice of expectations of self and others**

Some participants described how the expectations that they had of others had changed. There were 7 codes in this cluster:

another way of being, choice to be playful, responsible, rule follower, burden, should be better,
Cheryl talked about how she had so many expectations of herself before she came to the training. In particular, she had been hard on herself saying that she should be a better counsellor. She had some revelations and small shifts during the workshop component that allowed her to be more fully present and to gradually place herself in the centre of her world instead of everyone else’s.

Susie came to the workshop component with firm expectations for herself. She placed the policewoman as the one with the rules and the “woman with the buggy” as her sense of responsibility and duty. She said:

Okay, so when I think about this weekend or maybe prior to the weekend this figurine represents my, maybe sense of self, both professionally and personally that I feel very responsible, a caregiver, having the responsibility of taking care of and organizing and all of that stuff right. So even as a counsellor I felt some duty to obviously help and take care of and make things better.

Susie described her feeling about this as “a burden.” She saw her attachment to being so responsible as a negative experience because she had experienced over the weekend another way of being.

Figure 7. Susie’s image of herself as responsible (mother pushing a pram) a rule follower (police officer). Photo by J. Edmondson.
Her transformation was when she was able to let go of those expectations and be more playful and light in her attitude (Figure 7).

Expectations of ourselves have often been learned from an early age and they can be very limiting. Here we see two of the participants who explored how their expectations of themselves had been useful to some extent but had become too strongly entrenched. These two participants were able to relax their expectations of themselves, which allowed them to be more present, enjoy themselves more and again experience personal growth.

6.3.4. Comment

When we feel different, our perceptions of others and ourselves then change (Satir et al., 1991). In the case of these NSST demonstrations and triad work, participants were able to find more happiness for themselves when they freed themselves of their old defences. This in turn allowed them more freedom to choose how they felt, how they saw themselves and others and what they could expect of themselves and others. As each level of the iceberg changes in a positive direction, so our self-esteem rises and we have more choice about how we are in the world (Satir et al., 1991).

6.4. Theme 4: Body Awareness and Freedom from Physical Pain

In the workshop component awareness of the body of the therapist and the star was an important aspect of the NSST approach. Somatic referencing can reveal more than the words.

There were 27 codes in this theme:

- awareness of blanking out, awareness of dissociation, awareness of sadness behind the eyes, awareness of tightness in her chest, awareness of voice barely audible, change in heart, clear-headed, deep breaths, different (experiencing self), excitement in chest, felt like smiling, good on the back, lighter, no longer anxious, peace in the body, plodding, protected, relaxed, relief, softer (face), spine no longer hurting, stirring in the body, taller, voice clearer, voice softer, warm, whole.
These codes were divided into two clusters.

- Positive physical change
- Negative physical change

6.4.1. Positive physical changes

There were 24 codes in this cluster:

awareness of blanking out, awareness of dissociation, change in heart, clear-headed, deep breaths, different (experiencing self), excitement in chest, felt like smiling, good on the back, lighter, no longer anxious, peace in the body, plodding, relaxed, relief, softer (face), spine no longer hurting, stirring in the body, taller, voice clearer, voice softer, warm, whole.

Frances said that she felt more relaxed. She had not commented but I noticed and mentioned it, that her face was softer. The same applied to Laura whose face also looked different as she felt a sense of relief in her heart. When I commented on the softness of her face she said, “I feel different yes.” She continued to say that she would be taller as she felt more confident and she felt a change in her body and specifically in her heart.

Martin could not pinpoint a specific area of his body, but he could feel something “stirring up.”

Ally had a physical sense of excitement in her chest as she contemplated her future at work and personally. She experienced the changes in her body as she felt “more peace.” And she also felt that she would be “just kind of taller.” As she said this she placed the brooch figurine of her “precious self” and the lion higher up (Figure 8).

Martha had a profound physical transformation with her spine no longer hurting. She said she literally came out of her head and into her body and felt much lighter. Her wish was for her to be able to stand up taller. She said, “I am experiencing myself differently.” Martha said that she no longer had need of the heavy armour (of a batman figurine) and as a result she said her spine felt lighter, the pain had lifted, and she felt taller.

Ellie felt lighter as she became calmer and she said, “literally a weight has lifted.”
Kaila experienced warmth and lightness and she described how well she had slept the previous night. In addition, her voice changed from being gravelly to being softer. She was quite surprised at these changes and she said, “I’m amazed at how much my mind has to catch up to my body”.

Figure 8. Ally placed the lion higher up as she herself felt taller. Photo by J. Edmondson.

Anne also experienced a lighter feeling in her body, more open and clear headed as the negative energy was released.

Initially Naomi experienced tightness in her chest area a little bit, which she found hard to admit. She had tears in her eyes and her voice was quiet when looking at the scattered Russian dolls. Then, when she looked at the Russian doll being whole and complete, she experienced warmth in her stomach and chest and she said she felt like smiling, which she did.

Susie described how she was able to take in a lot of deep breaths and as she breathed out she said she was “breathing out something” which I took to mean were her old default ways of being so responsible. As she took deep breaths, she let go of her old patterns of being so rule abiding and experienced herself more like the figurine fairy, “flitting about.”
Chris said that she had an anxious feeling before coming to the workshop component around having to read and read for University. She gestured to her stomach and chest with her hand saying that the experience of anxiety was now gone and she had become more relaxed. She said, “I feel like I have more time to be me with the people and the things around me and just by being I will learn.” She said that her tears were saying “Yeah you could do it. I do have the ability to help people. There's relief.” Chris wished to not forget the experience. She said, “My wish is that I won't forget this. I won't get sucked back. To feel this and remember I want this. So to not forget.”

Having placed herself in the center of her own universe, Cheryl said that she experienced a sense of complete peacefulness in her body.

Zara did not specifically say anything about her body but several times during the interview she would place an open hand gently around the base of her neck. I didn't ask what this gesture meant but I experienced it as her finding her voice.

One participant had the beginnings of being aware of shifts in her body state. Kate is a mature woman who is a social worker and a current foster parent. She came to the training not really knowing what to expect other than to learn a theory of how to use the sand tray. She did not expect to be a star, nor to be asked to place her own struggles with fear into the tray. She described how she sometimes would even “dissociate”. By dissociation Kate meant she sometimes blanks out, not fainting completely but simply not being present in the room. She placed two penguins in the tray to symbolize her “plodding on” during the training. She described how there had been “blocks that would come in” to her during the training and she signified this by placing a round rock in the centre of the sand tray. Then she placed three jewels in a row to one side of the figurines. She said:

I am yeah, I didn’t really expect much changes. I thought it was more of more teaching versus experiential where I’d actually experience it on an experiential basis just in how I see things or how I experience things.

She alluded to something that happened to her as a child and not being willing to let go of this protective dissociative state because it had served her well keeping her calm, going into a numb state “when things are really going bad”. She continued, “So I’m not exactly authentic but I’m not doing anything weird.” Later in the interview, she
registered a change in her stomach area. She also referred to her back saying, it’s “good on the back, it’s kind of weird.”

I believe that this subset of findings of the theme of body awareness and freedom from physical pain is the most palpable and clear expression of shifts in emotional state and subsequent personal growth. The changes in body state were profound for many participants, with, for example, being able to breathe more easily and being free of back pain. Patterns of coping for protection had developed for the participants and when their defences were unlocked and released, they were able to make contact with their own life-energy (Satir, et al. 1991). When this occurred for the participants, the pain was released and new proteins were created through epigenesis (Lipton, 2015). These changes in the participants’ body states were an indication of a release of the panic system allowing the participants to breathe more fully afterwards and to relax and, in some cases, to be free of pain.

6.4.2. **Negative physical changes**

There were 3 codes in this cluster:

- awareness of sadness behind the eyes, awareness of tightness in her chest, awareness of voice barely audible

In one case, the physical change experience was actually more negative. Linda said she had physical symptoms of her “sadness behind her eyes” and in her chest as she described her frustration of not being able to do be successful during the workshop component as a counsellor. She implied that the training had in fact increased that pain. Her negative energy charged belief (Tolle, 2010) about herself had been reinforced. Her voice was also impacted, as it was barely audible. Linda was despondent about her potential as a counsellor. My view is that Linda was on a path, which would further personal growth work on herself and take her into being a counsellor or direct her to an alternative career.

6.4.3. **Comment**

The experience of the NSST training for the participants was felt in their bodies and they reflected on the tensions and releases that they were feeling in their bodies. This was expressed through tears that arose, large breaths, smiles and sighs that
created a sense of humanness (Freiler, 2009). The positive changes in the body for the participants were a result of the release of negative emotions that had been stored for many years (Tolle, 2010). This awareness of bodily sensations was critical as a precursor in changing emotional states (Levine, 2010). This finding was of particular interest to me because my experience was that the release of bodily tension would have a profound impact on personal growth. When their pain and tension was released, then their energy was able to flow freely (Siegel, 2016b).

6.5. Theme 5: Powerful New Insights about Past Self

The participants were able to offer up powerful new insights about past self on the third day during the interview component, once they had experienced themselves differently as a result of the workshop component over the first 2 days.

Altogether there were 35 codes in this theme:

- accepting, aggressive, becoming more balanced, burden, capacity, confused, content, curious, disorganized, fearful, fiery, frustrated, good foundation, hibernation, hopeless, imagine, less buried, logical, lonely, naïve, negativity, open, overwhelmed, playful, potential, protected, reserved, sad, scared, shame, spread out, strong, struggle, stuck, trust, unresolved issues, yearning for freedom.

These codes were then subdivided into three clusters.

- Clarity about negative feeling and perceptions
- Clarity about potential
- Clarity about unmet expectations.

6.5.1. Clarity about negative feelings and perceptions

There were a total of 10 codes in this cluster:

aggressive, disorganized, fearful, fiery, frustrated, grief, hopeless, naïve, negativity, overwhelmed, protected, sad, shame, spread out, struggle, stuck.

As a star, early on in the workshop component Martin put a “dark shadow” character in the sand tray, which he called the Master of the Dark Arts. Talking about it in the interview component (a re-run interview 6 weeks after the workshop component),
he described it as his feeling of shame about how he had felt since his childhood. He realised that he had presented to the world an image of weirdness that worked as a protection. Martin expressed a sense of grief around having perceived and felt, as a child, his uniqueness as shameful. He had held onto this feeling of shame. He said that now as a result of this one session he no longer needed it. His grief around this new clarity about his self-image from childhood to present was gone and it had no place in the interview component sand tray 2 days later.

Anne in her interview component used a dead tree to symbolize how she had felt and perceived herself before the workshop component. She described the dead tree as her negativity branching out into a lot of areas of her life: Of the tree she said, “Just kind of creeping through and you know, just affecting everything.”

Naomi placed the Russian doll in the tray all separated and facing different directions (Figure 9). Of this picture she said, “Um, this doll is spread out in many, many pieces in many directions and has been for a while.” She was clear that she was having difficulty acknowledging this and described tightness in her chest as she looked at the disparate dolls. Naomi had created an image that showed how she felt before the training—disorganized and spread out thinly. She then placed red hearts in the tray. Naomi said that, in order to cope, she had been aggressive and the red hearts suggested this fiery aspect of herself.

Figure 9. Naomi, “The doll is spread out in many directions and has been for a while.” Photo by J. Edmondson.
During the workshop component, Ally experienced feelings of being scared and overwhelmed. In the interview component, she placed a number of rocks in the top-left corner of her sand tray along with a “goofy” character and a mammoth (Figure 10). She said, “I don’t know, he’s very do-da-do, like, doesn’t know what he’s doing. He’s just kind of like I don’t know what’s happening.”

![Figure 10. Ally, “Everything looks so big.” Photo by J. Edmondson.](image)

Of the woolly mammoth in the same corner, she said, “Everything looks so big.” A student just beginning her career, Ally felt that the theory that she had learned at University was overwhelming and scary. Using the third person of the figurines she went on to talk about the mammoth and said, “He’s not mean or anything he’s just big and he doesn’t know what to do with it.” This was a clear picture for her of her feelings and self-perceptions in the past.

In the sand tray in the interview component, Linda was clear about her negative feelings and perceptions She put several figurines into the sand tray. When asked to talk about these she said they were her fear, frustration, stickiness, sadness and hopelessness about herself from the past and in the present. She was struggling with this during the workshop component. Referring to becoming a counsellor she said, “There was this hopeless of, like, well maybe I just shouldn’t do this.” Linda was losing her confidence in her expectation of becoming a counsellor and yet committed to
finishing her counsellor education. She had not been aware nor had she mentioned in the pre-training questionnaire that she had any personal goals (see her thick description). The workshop component had clarified her negative feelings and perceptions.

Often we are not aware of the personal growth work we need to do to be able to work with our clients. It is only when we experience new insights as the participants did with others in this NSST training in a group, that we have the clarity about our human journey towards having an authentic, securely attached and confident sense of self. Linda was at the beginning of this journey.

6.5.2. **Clarity of potential**

There were indicators in their interviews that the research participants had come to the training feeling that they had potential which for some reason had not come to the fore. They had caring and they had ability but it’s as if they were saying that something had been missing.

There were 14 codes in this cluster:

- accepting, capacity, becoming more balanced, content, curious, good foundation, hibernation, imagine, less buried, open, playful, potential, reserved, trust.

For example, Martha was clear when she made a picture on her right (Figure 11) about her potential. She said:

I hope, my tent, my home, my capacity for the work that I do. I consider myself open as a therapist, I consider myself that this might have been the way that I was before.

Martha placed a tent in the tray to symbolize her “capacity”, a princess, for being “all-together yet reserved”, the raccoon for being “playful and curious” and the wishing well for her wishes for the weekend. She had been content and accepting of the way she had been prior to the weekend. But she now saw she had more potential.

Cheryl’s picture also depicted potential for herself when she included a dormant tree. She said, “It was almost like the tree hadn’t borne the fruit yet . . . it was in hibernation . . . the tree didn’t have what it needed.”
Figure 11. For Martha, the red and white tent, the well, the raccoon the princess are all symbols of her potential. Photo by J. Edmondson.

Zarah described her before image as a base from which she would be able to grow. She said that the rabbit was on the beginning of his journey and the rocks are a little bit drier (Figure 12). She continued, “There is not a lot, there is not a lot [sic] going on this area but there is some good kind of foundations.” She continued on to say that, because there was uncertainty and a place to fall off (being on the rock), that it “was quite an uncomfortable place to be at.”

Chris made a whole picture initially of her before-self. On her left, she placed a fairy and a human figure surrounded by jewels with a question-mark on a signpost (Figure 13). On her right, she placed a treasure box and some rocks with the words “imagine” and “trust”. Between the two she placed a book upside down, a chalkboard (Figure 14) and a nun figure with her habit covering her face, depicting her professors who she said, “were not letting me know everything” (Figure 15). She described herself as the fairy that was on one knee and “unbalanced” but surrounded by the jewels that were “wonderful beautiful things” in her life, which had been left behind during her University courses. The stones on the other side of the book and chalkboard were things, “to see, especially the trust and gratitude for the learning opportunity of being at a
university.” The treasure chest was intentionally kept closed as she could see that there was so much there. She said, “I know I am where I am supposed to be [in counselling] but they [the rocks] are a little bit buried but not so much now” because of the weekend.

Figure 12. Zara, “The rabbit has potential but it’s scary.”
Photo by J. Edmondson.

Figure 13. Chris, here is her picture of potential with a fairy and a human figure. Photo by J. Edmondson.
Figure 14  Chris, “The stones are the things to see, especially the trust and gratitude for the learning opportunity of being at a university.” Photo by J. Edmondson.

Figure 15  Chris, “My professors don't let me know everything.” Photo by J. Edmondson.
As they looked back at their past, these four participants did not see themselves in a negative way as Martin, Anne, Ally and Linda did. Instead they framed their perceptions as having potential. Only in hindsight did they see how much further they could now be in terms of their confidence and their presence in the world. Of these four participants two did not recognise that they had had any personal growth goals in the pre-training questionnaire. It is important to this study that they became aware of these personal growth goals by having insights about their past and about their potential.

6.5.3. Clarity about unmet expectations

There were 11 codes in this cluster:

burden, confused, fearful, logical, lonely, sad, scared, strong, unresolved issues, yearning for freedom.

“Unmet expectations” is the term used when we want some response from someone who means a great deal to us, but they are unwilling or unable to meet those expectations. This was Kaila’s work that she worked on throughout the weekend and into the interview component.

Kaila’s work in the sand tray was atypical in that her work was unresolved through a full demonstration as a star with me, working as a star in a triad and in the interview. She was a recently graduated counsellor and was employed as a therapist. She had been trying to come to one of my workshops for several years since she saw me present at an International Family Therapy Conference in Vancouver in 2012. Kaila presented as quite complicated and very much in her head and would take a long time placing objects and processing them in the tray. Kaila’s interview was one of the longest.

During the analysis of the interview I felt I needed to go back and watch Kaila’s demonstration video (Figure 16) which was 1 hour and 16 minutes long, in order to understand what she had showed me in her interview sand tray.

I didn’t do this with any of the other participants. I was clear about all their demonstrations in the workshop components and I remembered all the figurines that had been used.
Figure 16. Kaila was overwhelmed during the demonstration in the workshop component. Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission.

Kaila’s inner story was complicated. Looking back on the interview video I did wind it up at 42 minutes, but there was really no natural place to stop. Throughout the demonstration, she had been scared and cried intermittently. I was gleaning information about her that she had unmet expectations in her relationship with her father. Like some clients who can’t let go of unmet expectations, it would take more than one or two sessions to un-peel all the layers of grief around her father.

I feel obliged to comment on this situation where a participant was stuck and unable to experience personal growth. It was evident to me that she was strong logically in her thoughts and trying to work things out but her connection to her own body and her intuition about herself in the world was not as strong. I was curious to know how successful a play therapist she could be and how authentic and congruent she could be for her clients. I was clear she would need further supervision after the training for her to be fully present for her clients.

Unmet expectations can take a hold of us and cripple us or prevent us from living freely. The disappointment, anger and sadness that are attached to unmet expectations can stay with us for a long time (J. Banmen, personal communication, April 2016).
Making decisions about what to do with unmet expectations is central to personal growth.

6.5.4. **Comment**

The focus for the work that I asked the research participants to explore during the triad work and the demonstrations was how they had kept themselves safe and if they still wanted to keep those defences which had helped them keep safe. This involved, through the metaphor in the sand tray, going into their past to see where these defences originated and how they had been helpful at the time. They put figurines in the tray of their defences and subsequently placed other figurines to show how these defences had helped. This experience was profound for many of the participants who initially had no sense that they had underlying emotional personal issues that needed addressing. All of the participants uncovered areas of stuckness and all except for one transformed them during the workshop component.

Before the workshop component many of the participants didn’t think that they had any concerns about their past selves. During the workshop component, they realised that they did and that these concerns could be addressed and dealt with. Again, in their interviews on the third day all but one said that they experienced profound changes during the 2-day workshop component in their feelings, perceptions and expectations of their past and present selves.

6.6. **Theme 6:**

**Being Effective, Competent, and Confident Personally and Professionally**

Theme six is the summary of comments made by the participants about being different personally and in their professional lives after the workshop component. It was also about what others would notice about how they were different.

There were 49 codes in this theme:

- accept feedback, assertive, authentic, brave, clarity, concrete, confidence, courage, empowered, excited, forward movement, grounded, less stressed, light, more easy going, more energy, more effective, more loving, more honest, movement, plans for the future, playful, powerful, powerful sense of self, solid,
relaxed, resources, return to counselling, seen differently, skills, speaking out, special abilities, strength, strong, stronger affirmation, take more risks, taller, trust, trusting, trusting the silence, unique, vulnerable (less), vulnerable (more), wise.

These were placed into two clusters:

- Personal confidence in their private lives
- Personal confidence in their professional lives

6.6.1. **Personal confidence in their private lives**

There were 25 codes in this cluster:

- accept feedback, authentic, brave, confidence, concrete, forward movement, grounded, light, more energy, more loving, more honest, plans for the future, playful, powerful, powerful professional transformation, relaxed, sense of *self*, seen differently, solid, special abilities, strength, support myself, strong, stronger affirmation, take more risks, vulnerable (less), vulnerable (more), wise.

Sometimes the research participants talked about themselves directly and other times they would refer to the figurines and be talking about themselves. Laura described how she felt comfortable in her vulnerability and she showed this by using a glass elephant up high on a tree (see Figure 6). When I asked her how she would be different she replied:

> A stronger affirmation of who, like, the elephant is and that is put outwards. So maybe they act different in relation to others and voice their feeling or what their thinking more often and then just how they interact or how it interacts with people. Even clients too, like, the way the practice is going knowing that it has all these skills they’re there and they’re very powerful.

When I reflected that this sounded like there was more confidence, she said, “Yeah, definitely a lot more confidence.”

Martha looked specifically for a symbol for more confidence. She found a prince figurine and she said, “I found this at the beginning [of the weekend] and I found that he was too, too much or not humble enough or something, but I like him.” How interesting that she had been drawn to him but she did not resonate with his strong stature. But after the training with her new-found enlarged “capacity” she was able to place him in the sand tray saying, “Although he’s straight and tall, he’s brave and he’s strong and it’s through love not through this all brain.” The prince figurine encapsulates her relief from
pain in her back and her newly-found sense of confidence from being able to be free of fear and subsequently be open to loving herself.

Cheryl experienced a huge transformation during the training when she came to the revelation that she was the centre of her own universe. Knowing that she said, “It helps me support myself.” Three months later she described how it had translated to:

More confidence socially, being more aware of how my needs are being (or not being) met and how I came to this feeling of not wanting to take the spotlight in my own life, metaphorically speaking.

Anne’s experience allowed her to take more risks and be vulnerable.

Ellie was also impressed about how she was able to be vulnerable during the training. She realized that she had the confidence and the trust in herself to be vulnerable. Ellie’s point about vulnerability explains the codes mentioned above. More vulnerable or less vulnerable can be a good state depending on your perspective.

Martin (again this re-run interview was 6 weeks after the workshop component) described moving between being personally more solid and confident and simultaneously experiencing something spiritual and powerful. He used the word concrete as if to mean confident and grounded in who he is and yet he spoke of a forward movement in this grounded space. Martin’s confidence came up from a deep place of how he saw and felt his very being. His sense of shame had been transformed into a powerful sense of himself having special abilities, which he could freely share with others. Martin was able to say how he could accept feedback from others more readily and others had noticed this change.

Soleil described herself as she spoke of the phoenix, “This guy he’s happy, he’s a happy guy, he’s very strong, he’s very nice, he’s powerful.” I asked her if the phoenix was a part of her to which she replied, “Yes, that’s a part of me, he sheds a lot of strength and light and change and beautiful change.”

Laura had a transformational experience as she saw herself more authentic (elephant) playful (panda) having wisdom (turtle) stronger (tiger) talked about how the people at work would see her differently:

Um, maybe just by me being more honest about who I am . . . . Yeah and just clarity and light; like there’s more energy.
Zarah described how after 2 days of the training her mum had seen her differently. She initially had chosen a rabbit for herself, which she placed on the dry rocks (see Figure 12). Then she chose a small deer because it was, “Gentle and very welcoming . . . but also stronger and takes up more space than this little guy [the rabbit] . . . it is less vulnerable but also yeah; it is a place to grow.” As she experienced herself in connection with others as less vulnerable, she said she would grow in her confidence.

Chris experienced herself differently and wished to have more confidence. She said; “I want to have more of a trust in me and confidence in myself.”

Kate’s confidence came in the form of wanting to be more playful in her personal life. She placed a fairy godmother in the sand tray to represent her newfound self.

Sandra said that she was no longer scared around her family and she was more relaxed. She said, “I’m not feeling the fear as intensely so just to hold on and knowing that the love is helping.”

These participants had gained a greater sense of confidence. With that came acceptance of themselves, more energy, empowerment, uniqueness and playfulness. They had changed at a deep level of being and in what they could do.

### 6.6.2. Personal confidence in their professional lives

There are 24 codes in this cluster (some are repeated from personal confidence):

affirmation, assertive, better equipped, brave, clarity, confidence, courage, directive, empowered, excited, less stressed, more effective, more skills, movement, plans for the future, professional transformation, relaxed, return to counselling, stronger, resources, stronger, take more risks, taller, trust, trusting, trusting the silence, unique.

Scattered through the interviews there were direct references to how the participants would be different at work. Anne experienced herself significantly different and in addition she felt that her professional part had also been affected as a result of the training. She thought that she would be different at work the following Monday and she said:

I already have sort of plans in my head for, you know, to finish off some projects, projects that I’m working that have sort of the—and then to try and work with more individual students (as opposed to teaching personal safety programs in the classrooms).
During the interview, Anne used a miniature chalkboard as her symbol for the learning of the skills during the weekend. She said:

I’m learning and I still have lots to go before I feel confident with doing this but it’s a process and I’m really excited about it. And so here, this here will be something that I use for school or for work trying to learn, listen and make decisions about how I’m going to be in my role as a counsellor at school.

Soleil had known before coming to the research training weekend that kids in her office were drawn to the sand tray but she did not want to interpret their work. She appreciated having the skills to take away from the training weekend.

Frances used the word empowered to describe her new sense of confidence because the training gave her guidelines. She said:

I feel empowered that there is things I can use. That there is ways of questioning, ways of looking for a hotspot, like, that seems really empowering to be able to look at a sand tray and not just think of, oh well let’s just talk about everything.

Having a framework allowed Frances to feel empowered and subsequently she said that she would be more assertive with her clients in future, by inviting clients to use the sand tray and being more directive in the process.

Ellie was reassured by the training because it affirmed a lot of what she already knew. Working with the younger less experienced participants helped her to realize just how much she did know.

Chris felt she would be able to go back to her clients (she was on a practicum) “with a confidence that they will get something out of this [sand tray work].”

Martha explained how the practice sessions really helped her to overcome her fears and how important she felt it was to have been through the process that she is asking of her clients. Martha illustrated bravery with her prince when she was talking about her newfound confidence.

Clarity seemed to fit in the confidence cluster because it allowed the participant to feel more confident about what to do.

Ally said she had gained more confidence. “I was going to be just kind of taller and more sure of myself and like, there’s, yeah, courage, courage to still be creative and
not know sometimes.” Ally commented on how she had had a sense of urgency to get through her University reading list. But because of the weekend training, she now realized there was so much more than what the books could tell her. I understood her suggestion that while the University training had been important, the weekend training had given her a new perspective on her life. Ally was experiencing her world with greater clarity when she said, “Instead of just everything just being so big and in front of me, it’s just like a little more, a little more clear, I can see all-even. And this is kind of this now.”

Anne also referred to taking more risks, which implied that she had more courage.

Martin also experienced a sense of being clearer as to what to do but also at a deep level of being when he said:

It’s about I have my clarity around my movement, my going from what I’ve been thinking about and wishing for and longing for to actually enacting it out in the world. So bringing what I want, transforming my practice and believing that I have this, I have this power, I have this culture that I can bring into my work and be effective and it’s of great value.

He said too, that he noticed in his professional work how unique he is now and how his work is his own and how he can now be confident that this is his “fit for others.”

Several participants used the word trust in relation to their own ability. This sense of trust developed over the 2 days from within themselves, suggesting that they had doubts about their ability before, but now they were more confident.

Martha was able to feel different about her professional work so that she could believe, trust and know what to do for her clients.

Ally used a stone with the word trust on it to denote her new sense of being.

Ellie’s experience was transformational. The training affirmed that she could trust her right-brain intuition in her professional work.

Zarah said that trust was a “big word” for her. Trusting herself and others and the process was an important aspect of the weekend. By experiencing the trust in herself and others she said, that in her work as a therapist she would be less likely to leap in
and take over. In particular, she said that she had learned to trust the silence in the process. The silence, she said:

> Allows the person to go where she needs to go without me leaping in. And it’s in a lot of things that I do where I leap in before I need to per say, right. Like, I leap in to remind. I leap in to, because I anticipate potential issues . . . the trust is in knowing that people have their resources I don’t need to save them, I don’t need to fix them and I need to just let it be. You know, I could still be there but I don’t have to feel that responsibility of doing it before it all falls apart, right?

Zarah’s wish at the end of the interview was the, “Acceptance of peace . . . to trust that peace is what, peace is what I need.”

Soleil chose a rock for self-love. She said, “It’s love for trusting that I can do this and it’s valuing what I’m doing with kids. I’ve experienced it, how transformational it is.”

Sandra felt more confident professionally, especially around the theory of the brain and the neuroscience of fear.

After 3 days of learning, practicing and experiencing a therapeutic technique, there was a 2-fold result. By exploring their own defences while learning the NSST approach, their personal awareness of self and their sense of how they would be more confident in their work and in the world changed profoundly. In the workshop component triad-sessions, they had already improved in their professional confidence to work with their clients.

6.6.3. **Comment**

The findings of this research regarding the gains in personal growth were expressed by the participants in the above six themes. The majority of the participants claimed that, because of the learning of the techniques of NSST and the subsequent gain in personal confidence, they would be personally different in at home with friends and family and professionally in their work.

These findings coming out of the interview component on the third day show that the gains in personal growth were also because this training was set within the paradigm of a transformative pedagogy with the explicit intention of helping the participants change in how they saw themselves and others (Greene, 1995). This transformative pedagogy allowed for critical thinking, deep soul work, spiritual connection and
embodied learning, within a genuine authentic nurturing safe environment, which Theme 7 encapsulates.

6.7. **Theme 7:**

**Feelings of Being Nurtured and Safe**

As described in Chapter 5, I intentionally used transformative pedagogy to create an atmosphere that provided genuine safety for the participants to be vulnerable and learn. While there were fewer codes for this theme, for some of the participants it was essential to their personal and professional growth.

There was on cluster of 29 codes in this theme:

- accepting, caring, comfort, context, empathy, energy, felt love, gentleness, gift, group of genuine people, inspiration, intimacy, keep me safe, making music together, nurturing, safe enough to experience, safe enough to get into heart, safe enough to get out of head, safe enough to play, softness, soothing, protection (before), protective, richness, relationship, supporting, thankful, warmth of others.

Sandra had a wonderful revelation over the weekend when she experienced for herself the love emanating from her triad therapist and also from the nurturing of the weekend. She said, “I felt like everything has been done with love so if that wasn’t there I don’t think that I would have experienced the training in the same way.” Sandra used the figurine of the kangaroo to represent how the presence of my assistant and I was essential and how we had “bounced around . . . teaching, supporting and accepting.” Sandra was clear that “none of this could happen without the kangaroos” She noted this in the sand tray by using some flowers for how my playhouse and my garden gave her inspiration, energy and comfort. Sandra placed a harp in the sand tray as a symbol for the nurturing and soothing experience she had throughout the weekend. There was classical music that was playing on arrival and during the breaks that I sensed influenced her experience. She said:

That’s really what it is because it’s the relationship and I’m not just saying with the sand tray but that relationship is like making music together and you can’t recreate it. Every time you make music with someone it’s different every time it’s never going to be the same . . . . And it’s beautiful and it leaves you with the sensation afterwards that stays with you, you know, a piece of music can speak to you for the rest of the day.
Sandra experienced inspiration and energy from the special and cozy environment of the playroom and she said that she was “Very thankful that it was here.”

Zarah said, “This weekend has been such a gift.”

In the interview component, Cheryl expressed how she felt nurtured over the weekend. She described how she saw me as a kangaroo with her in my pouch (Figure 17). She did not know Sandra had also used a kangaroo in the same way. She felt supported by me as she learned the skills and made herself vulnerable in the demonstration. She connected the kangaroo to the trophy on the right-hand side of the sand tray specifically using baby animals because she said:

They need protecting and they need caring for and nurturing and lots of um, lots of care. . . . And then this is the process and this, I don’t know, just kind of represents . . . . Being well cared for and then from there I’m making baby steps . . . . Towards, just towards the richness that I think the process has brought to me and will continue to bring to me and clients. (Figure 18)

Figure 17. Cheryl showed the researcher as the kangaroo-nurturing the joey. Photo by J. Edmondson.

In her interview sand tray, Kaila was able to place an eagle, which she said represented nurturing.

Kate incorporated the effect of the woodstove in the house and playroom into her new sense of her more playful self. When asked how will she be different she made
reference to putting on her (gas) fire in the evening when she planned to have a “drawing party” with her foster daughter.

Martha used deer, drinking out of teacups, near an armchair and a violin to identify her experience of feeling the “intimate and nurturing environment.” She expressed how the context was really important because it made her feel “Safe enough to experience enough, to get out of her head and into heart [sic].”

Figure 18. Cheryl showed rabbits making baby steps towards the richness. Photo by J. Edmondson.

6.8. Post-Training Questionnaire

The 3-month post-training questionnaire (Appendix E) was sent via email 3 months after the weekend components. Eight participants responded to this post-training questionnaire immediately. It took several emails and phone calls over a 20-month period for five more people to respond. This made a total of 13 responses after the training. Out of 17 participants, four did not complete the post-training form. One of these was unreachable via phone or email and two did not reply after five attempts of contacting them. Another was interviewed using the sand tray six weeks after the weekend training and did not complete the questionnaire. An email has been included from him that he wrote two years after the workshop.
Not everyone had responses to all of the seven themes (see Chapter 6). However, 12 out of the 13 who did respond to the post-training questionnaire indicated that they had experienced lasting personal change. The responses to the post-training questionnaire are recorded here by person and according to when they responded. These findings are limited compared with the findings from the interview component in the sand tray as this data was compiled from a written questionnaire.

6.8.1. **Post-Training Questionnaire returned after three months**

Cheryl said that she wanted to pursue therapy for herself. She had discovered through her triad practices and a demonstration with me, that she could be, “The centre of my own universe.” Three months later she described how it had translated to:

- more confidence socially, being more aware of how my needs are being (or not being) met and how I came to this feeling of not wanting to take the spotlight in my own life, metaphorically speaking.

Cheryl talked about how much more confident she was using the sand tray and how she really enjoyed using NSST in her work.

Anne described how some of her colleagues had noticed that she was speaking out more and she was clearer with them about how she saw her role as a school counsellor evolving. Her family had also noticed that she was calmer and easier going. She was also taking “better care of herself.” Her personal growth had impacted her professional work as well. She said:

At this point, it has had more of an impact professionally, as a school counsellor. I spent the remainder of the [current] school year preparing for the changes I’m making for the [next] new school year. Personally, I am still struggling with some anxiety, but I am beginning to take better care of myself . . . the strong sense of calm and inner peace [from the workshop component] lasted for the remainder of the school year. I had more focus on what was important and was able to put aside or let go of things that were minor or I had no control over. It’s still busy and chaotic at the end of the school year, but I was less stressed than usual.

Anne was feeling revitalized even after 3 months and said, “I had found my focus again.” She also spoke of a deep sense of inner calmness that was, “unexpected and most welcome.”
Although Linda described herself as stuck during the interview, 3 months later she realized that she needed more supervision from her supervisor at University and contacted her immediately to start the process. This in itself was an awareness of her challenges and I believe was an indication of the beginnings of her personal growth.

Linda did not experience any personal transformations in the workshop component and her interview suggested that she was stuck. In her follow-up questionnaire 3 months later, although she did not particularly like the Satir method, it did make her “more comfortable with some of the tenets underlying play therapy and sand tray therapy as a whole (right-brain/right-brain connection, inviting the client to lead and tracking, exploration of themes/feelings/memories indirectly through the use of symbols).” After this training, she chose to do additional reading in using “humanistic sand tray”.

Chris said that she was deeply moved by the training and believed that transformation is “the result of a higher power lovingly allowing us a deeper awareness of ourselves and delighting in the peace we find amidst the chaos.” Chris went on to describe how she experienced profound freedom from physical pain:

I can breathe fully and deeply and I can direct my breath to the places that need air because I am now aware of those places. Before Madeleine’s training I had been having lower-back pain almost constantly for about 6 months and before then back pain was not foreign to me. Around the time of the training it was to the point where as soon as I got up in the morning I was looking forward to night and bedtime because that meant I could lay flat and relieve some of the pain. I had been going to the chiropractor regularly for almost 2 years. After my sand tray session on the Sunday with Madeleine, my back pain was gone. Completely. I did not tell anyone for about a week for fear I would jinx it. My back pain has not yet returned to the extent of me yearning for bed. When it has come back, I am able to go to back to my sand tray session and back to the place where I felt grounded in that moment and the back pain lessens. I am learning that my lower back is where I hold my stress and because of my training and session with Madeleine I know how to help myself in those moments. This has been an indescribably huge transformational experience.

Chris’s transformation in her body was delayed. It was not part of the findings of the interview component on the third day.

Frances described how she was “at ease” with her difficult past and “less burdened” even with her current personal limitations. She said that she had a “greater appreciation for the sand tray work and she would try to regularly incorporate it into the therapy.”
Martha said that she could still recall the warmth of the other participants in the group and she appreciated, “the chance to have interacted with such a genuine group of people.” Martha described also how she found herself becoming a more confident counsellor. She said, “I came out of the weekend feeling like I could use the [Neuroscience and] Satir in the Sand Tray method with my clients and future clients. She also described how other people had noticed her being different. She said:

Others know I am different now, because I am more confident, excited about my counselling role and have had success in helping my clients. My school Principal has renewed my contract and designated me as the personal/mental health counsellor at the school (something that was not in the cards before). I now have two offices in private practice and have started getting referrals for kids, teens and through my church. In a nutshell, I am growing in my profession and my confidence is growing also. The actual issues I dealt with in the sand tray made immediate differences in my job and relations as a part time administrator also.

Martha described how coming out of her master’s degree training very recently, she had been scared and not feeling confident about being an effective counsellor. She described how she felt so much more confident after the workshop component in particular with working with imagery, play and the sand tray. She continued:

I found I grew the most in learning this method of counselling in such a supportive, safe and hands-on way. It was intimate and impactful. I watched others, saw Madeleine demonstrate, but the most impactful thing was the actual time I was counselled in the sand tray. There was my issue with a co-worker and that in itself has been miraculously transformed by my new perspective and lens that I saw things. But the most incredible thing to me was the issue I didn’t know I had that was brought forth in the sand tray about my fear . . . and even where I hold my stress, anxiety and pain—in my back. The image that transformed me in the sand tray and I painted a picture of it, was this alligator gently placing his hand on the small of my back. Wow! Still feel grateful for this. It really was my Mom, dead for 39 years who showed up in that sand tray that weekend [emphasis added]. I would have never even imagined that. It was a transformative realization that she would always and still has “my back” and would not want me to be living my life less than it could be—in fear. Thank you so much for selecting me to be part of this research and your incredible teaching. I left feeling like I was part of something that will grow and transform counselling in this arena of sand tray work. I look forward to any and all opportunities to have you as a mentor and to learn from you. I am grateful and in an indirect way, my clients are grateful.
Naomi described how she herself had an ah-ha moment and experienced the power of the use of the sand tray. She had become deeply committed to the process. In turn, she felt more confident in her counselling and was using the sand tray in her work with children at her school counselling office. She said that she had gained more confidence to continue to learn new techniques.

Before the training, Susie described herself as rule bound, controlling and feeling responsible for each counselling outcome. Three months after the training, Susie saw herself more relaxed about her work and trusting that things would work out.

6.8.2. Post-Training Questionnaire returned after 20 months

Sandra was able to process her grief and felt more peace and a spiritual connection to her family member who died. She said she felt she was deeply impacted personally and more confident at work.

Ally said that she felt much more confident, passionate and excited about using the NSST approach with children. She said that she could speak up more to her classmates at University. They see her as different.

Ellie said that her confidence in sand tray work had increased to the point that she was using it about 75% of the time within a school setting. She said:

This was a wonderful experience. The experience and information gained from the workshop will stay with me throughout the rest of my career as a therapist. There are not many workshops that I can say that about, so thank you for letting me be a part of this!

Ellie, worked through her relationship with her father during the training, which in turn she said had led to a deeper understanding of that issue. She said, “I have experienced growth in my personal life as a result of this personal issue that I brought up in my own sand tray work during the workshop. This has led to a deeper “felt” understanding of the issue (i.e., getting to the lower parts of the iceberg).”

Kaila struggled in the workshop component and in the interview component. However, 20 months later she described how “peace is a work-in-progress relating to my dad and security/safety, although I have been able to add in a greater level of compassion with my dad”. Kaila said that since the training she had had “heaps of peace” and she was softer to her Dad. She described how she had an increase of
patience and grace for herself and an increase in self-confidence. She continued by saying she had “experienced strengthening in my dependence on God, my resource.” Kaila described how “the structured, intimate environment of the workshop truly enabled a comfortable and safe working environment in which we could move towards wholeness and challenge ourselves, as we ask the same of our clients.” In retrospect, it seems that Kaila did experience personal growth as a result of the workshop, but it wasn’t immediate. Her personal growth was delayed.

Zarah was a student in a master’s in counselling program at the time of the workshop component and 6 months later she gained her first position as a school counsellor. Zarah commented on the importance of the nurturing and accepting environment of the training. Zara said that she felt so much more confident in her work and she described how she was currently training 12 counsellors in her district about sand tray specifically “De Little’s model!” She described the experience as deeply transformational. She had become more spirituality connected and more playful. She said, “It felt like all the pieces were coming together.”

Martin did not fill out the post-training questionnaire, but I believe there is rich material evidence of lasting personal growth because, out of the blue, 2 years later he wrote an email to me:

I am a lot happier in my skin than when I saw you. And seeing you and doing that work contributed to getting to where I am now. I feel that I have found my real talent and skill and that I am moving more and more into being a much bigger and better version of my old self. Isn’t life exciting?!

6.8.3. Summary

This chapter has looked at the seven themes that came from the 17 interviews in the sand tray on the third day after the 2-day workshop component and that came from the follow-up questionnaire.

The first six themes answered the first thesis question “How is personal growth experienced by counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray (NSST)—a new experiential play-based therapy?” Sixteen out of 17 participants experienced meaningful, personal growth and 13 out of 17 experienced lasting, meaningful, personal growth. They experienced personal growth by becoming aware of their personal issues, by gaining a deeper sense
of themselves, by having a richer choice of being in the world, by becoming more aware of their body, by gaining new insights about their past and by gaining confidence in themselves and in their professional work.

All seven themes provided some answers to the second thesis question “How might transformative pedagogy foreground understanding in ways that foster personal growth opportunities among counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning NSST?” The seventh theme was particularly focused on this second thesis question. Six out of 17 talked specifically about the nurturing, safe and emancipatory environment of the workshop component. Sixteen out of 17 participants experienced one or more of the many other aspects of the transformative pedagogy that promoted their personal growth. They experienced mutual respect, empathy, authenticity, being genuine, gentleness, softness, intimacy, warmth, understanding, empowerment and a fundamentally secure environment. Once this environment was established then the self-reflection and challenging work of personal growth could proceed and the feelings of emancipation and the integration of personal and professional learning could happen. The personal growth findings in all 7 themes but particularly the seventh theme, indicates the appropriateness of adopting a transformative pedagogy model in counsellor education in order to promote personal growth.

Chapter 7 provides a thick description of six of these participants.
Chapter 7.

Thick Descriptions

The influential cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz borrowed the term “thick description” from the philosopher Gilbert Ryle and subsequently introduced the practice into qualitative research (as cited in Freeman, 2014). Qualitative researchers often use thick description as a form of representation, after coding and analysis has been completed (Freeman, 2014). A thick description can be seen as a rich, contextualized description of an event to increase truth and generalization (Creswell, 2012). Schwandt (2007) adds that when a description of social phenomena is given, then it is the interpretation that makes it thick (p. 296). Freeman argues that thick description can be seen as an “aesthetic encounter” (p. 1) while Denzin (2001) suggests that thick description is seeing how people are connected in similar ways and involves “capturing and representing the meanings a particular action or sequence of actions has for the individuals in question” (p. 116). Holliday (2007) uses thick description to analyse social phenomenon and Stake (2010) sees it as offering “direct connection to cultural theory and scientific knowledge” (p. 49). This research uses a hermeneutic approach to the six thick descriptions to make what is conveyed “immediately intelligible” (Gadamer, 1977, p. 98) by drilling down to the essence of the subject to imagine what the workshop component, the expression of internal transformational change and what the subsequent behavior might mean to them. I am aware that this description is filtered through my own subjective experiences and it is therefore inherently thickly interpretive (Denzin, 2001).

The researcher chose to do a thick description of six participants. The overall reason for choosing these six participants was to achieve a demographic that was as wide and varied as possible. The demographic criteria were: different levels of education and counsellor education; different levels of experience using play therapy and sand tray therapy; different ages, gender, and personal growth experiences from the workshop.

The value of the thick description for this study is that it gives us a whole picture of the subtlety and complexity of transformational change when using metaphor in therapy. In the same way as using the sand tray in the interview component was
congruent with the NSST workshop component, the thick description is congruent with the humanistic and holistic principals of NSST and transformative pedagogy.

7.1. Frances: Thick Description

7.1.1. Background

Frances is a mature woman who has a diploma in Art Therapy. In the workshop component, she was somewhat shy about having only a diploma and was self-effacing about her credibility. She works at an agency with foster children who have serious behavior problems and with their families. She also works with seniors in a care home. She uses an attachment-based approach with her clients as well as cognitive behavioral therapy. Frances had had some training in play therapy. At her work, she is particularly aware of her own relationship with her clients and the impact it has on the therapeutic process. She is a gentle, soft-spoken individual and by her own admission an introvert. Frances had been to my playroom with a cohort of students from the Vancouver Art Therapy Institute a few years earlier and she said she was determined to return one day to learn from me. She was delighted to have been invited to do this research training.

During a triad session on the previous day, Frances had been in the role of a therapist. She had noticed the tiniest of gestures on the part of one of the star’s figurines, an alligator and, following her intuition, she had spontaneously said, “The alligators got your back.” This was a transformational moment for the star, who suddenly saw the alligator, placed in the sand tray as a form of protection, as the felt presence and protection of her own mother who had died 39 years ago. When questioned later, Frances was unable to say where the knowledge had come from, other than just having an observation and then following her intuition.

Frances had also been a client in a demonstration that I did for everyone on the first day of the workshop component. The work that she did that day had been transformational for her as she explored her vulnerability (Figure 19).
7.1.2. Personal growth goals

In the pre-training questionnaire Frances saw her personal goals as all to do with being a better counsellor at work. She said that she was interested in becoming a “more effective therapist” for children and parents. She wished in particular to improve her ability to identify, “The underlying issue a client is struggling with and what intervention would be most helpful.” She wanted to be able to increase her ability to be helpful to her clients so that they could “express a more fulfilling life.”

7.1.3. The interview component

Frances placed a cabana (coded: relaxed, insightful, transformative) in the right-hand corner of the sand tray (Figure 20) while describing it as her, “Personal piece, just taking a more relaxed stance, resting into being and not, not having everything right and proper, insightful.”

She was saying that she had become more relaxed after the 2-day training and was able to be more reflective. Frances held a little blackboard (coded: empowered, professional transformation, confidence) (Figure 21) in her hand and looked at it and said:
I feel empowered that there is things I can use. That there is ways of questioning, ways of looking for a hotspot, like, that seems really empowering to be able to look at a sand tray and not just think of, oh well let’s just talk about everything.

Figure 20. Frances placed a cabana to represent her personal space. Photo by J. Edmondson.

Figure 21. Frances with all her parts separated. Photo by J. Edmondson.

This sense of empowerment gave her more confidence in her perception of herself professionally and this was transformational for her. As a star in the practice
triads in the training, Frances had used an Inukshuk (coded: passage, transformational) (see Figure 21) “as a marker of a passage”. She felt that she had come to a place where she’d gained some knowledge, some experience and some affirmation. She said, “I feel like this is a turning point of some kind or a new opening.” The Inukshuk was the coming together of the cabana metaphor (relaxed) and the blackboard metaphor (map) because she could now relax, as she felt more confident about what she was doing. Of the Inukshuk she said:

I think it’s just an acknowledgement that something is different and coming to these places maybe these two would have been enough. But it feels like I needed and wanted another marker to say something is different. (see Figure 21)

Frances described how the weekend experience had been affirming in terms of leading her to trust her intuition, which she had always had, but had not always been confident about following. She placed the blue stone (coded: intuition, new lens) (see Figure 21) to represent her intuition. When I asked how would she be different, she said:

It’s sometimes a stretch for me because I am an introverted person and to do actually do that [use my intuition] feels like okay, but to trust it (pause), so I think that will be one difference.

She was touching the blue rock in the centre of the sand tray as she spoke.

As I observed the making of the sand tray I was conscious of each of the disparate elements spread throughout the tray. The goal for Frances (in my head at this time) was to bring them together so that there would be an integration of all the experiences of her mind and body. I commented on how these elements were all separated. Frances felt that she herself was in a way the sand tray, holding all of the elements.

I asked Frances if anything needed to be added, changed or moved. After some deliberation, Frances said that she was curious and found the ceramic hands (coded: Integration) into which she placed the blue stone (intuition). As she did this, she moved all the elements together into the centre of the picture (see Figure 22) saying that they all “work together”. This was for her an important step in the development of her sand tray picture. When formerly separated figurines are brought together, there is a bilateral
integration of left and right hemispheres as well as a vertical integration of mind and body (De Little, 2015a).

Figure 22. Frances said that all the parts work together. Photo by J. Edmondson.

Frances’s wish for herself at the end of the session was to:

Hold on to the light of want and the light of the knowledge I’ve learned and the light of who I am. I think I’ve come here with all the experiences, all the shortcomings and strengths and I’ve come here; it’s for a reason and to rest in that and love it and do the work; it’s good now.

Frances also said that she would be different because she will be more directive by having the sand tray more centred in her therapy room and invite clients to use it more fully and with more confidence. She said “There is always clients [sic] where I have sort of that freedom and say how about today we do the sand tray? . . . Um, so I think that intentional piece will be different.”

7.1.4. Post-training questionnaire

In her post-training questionnaire 3 months later, Frances reported that she has a great appreciation for the sand tray and uses it regularly in her therapy with clients. She noted how she had experienced personal growth because she is currently at ease with her difficult past and her current personal limitations. She described how she was less burdened by the “expectation to have insight into all my clients’ difficulties”.

175
7.1.5. **Corroboration**

Frances did not reply to my request to meet with me to corroborate this thick description.

7.1.6. **Researchers reflections**

Frances had not expressed any personal growth goals and yet the personal work that she did in her triads and the demonstration with me had a profound effect on her ease with her difficult past and her current personal limitations.

Frances did not create a before and after picture in the interview component. She created a simple picture of how she had changed using four figurines. The Inukshuk was her symbol of everything coming together including her skill improvement, her personal growth and the reaffirming of her own intuition. The Inukshuk marked her journey.

The nurturing environment of the workshop component had also impacted Frances. I commented near the end that she looked different. She asked how she looked different and I replied that her face looked softer and she was smiling. She replied, “Yes I’ve been very nurtured this weekend”.

7.2. **Naomi: Thick Description**

7.2.1. **Background**

Naomi is a young music teacher and a new school counsellor. She was thrilled to be a part of the research, having heard so much about the “healing power of the sand tray.” A student at City University (Vancouver Campus), studying for her master’s degree, Naomi had taken an introductory play therapy class and had watched play therapy videos on the university database. She uses music in her counselling practice which is, she said, “generally strength-based and person-centred”. She uses play in her music sessions. Naomi is a gentle soul.

7.2.2. **Personal growth goals**

Naomi wrote in her pre-training questionnaire that she wanted “openness to working with and learning from others.” Naomi’s personal goal was professional in
nature. She said that she wanted to try something new, to ask questions and to “fully commit to the experience. She said that she wanted to deepen her understanding of sand tray therapy and work toward “incorporating the method into her counselling repertoire.”

7.2.3. The interview component

Naomi was very keen to get started in the interview. She had already picked out her figurines before I signalled that I was ready to begin. Naomi had picked up a set of Russian dolls (coded: transformational, clarity, competent, confident, focused). She opened each one up, leaving the big one undone and then put the other four together and put them into the sand tray, lying on their sides separately (Figure 23).

![Figure 23](image)

Figure 23. Naomi, “The doll is spread out in many, many pieces in many directions and has been for a while.” Photo by J. Edmondson.

She said, “The doll is spread out in many, many pieces in many directions and has been for a while.” I asked her to describe to me the feeling she had in her body as she looked at the Russian Doll. She described how tight she felt in her throat area as she looked at the image and how hard it was to acknowledge. She had tears in her eyes and her voice was quiet. I reflected that although the dolls were all lying down, they were the same, which was a statement of fact rather than anything deeper. I then asked
Naomi if anything had changed for her over the research-training weekend. She started slowly to put the Russian dolls back together and placed the finished complete doll standing up. She looked at the finished doll and said, “The doll feels complete. The doll feels complete and stronger. The doll has a lot of resources. There is clarity.”

She was referring here to herself and this suggested to me that she was feeling more confident, focused, competent and clear about who she was. Then she placed four more objects around the Russian doll: a heart (coded: fire, aggression) a stone with the word “love” on it (coded: self-love) a stone with the word “trust” on it (coded: trust in self) and a gnome (coded: wisdom) (Figure 24).

Naomi said that she was really drawn to the gnome because he represented wisdom, which she had found over the weekend. (She had used him before in the triads.)

We swapped seats so she could look directly at the doll and the gnome (a technique of NSST) and as she looked, she experienced her body differently. She said that she experienced warmth in her stomach and in her chest and motioned with her
hand where in her body she felt it. As she said this she began to smile. She continued, “I feel like smiling—it's amazing. And it's emotional in a good way.”

She referred to experiencing a sense of peace and as she said this she inadvertently hugged herself. We tried to find a symbol for the peace but couldn’t. She spent sometime just looking at the picture in the sand tray, as if she was looking at her newly-transformed self and experiencing it for the first time. The love and the trust—I assumed they were self-explanatory. She described the process she experienced in the sand tray as:

The clarity of picking pieces and expressing where you are and instinctively knowing what you need to do . . . . I couldn’t have done that on my own; I couldn’t have described that—I wouldn’t have described that.

She went on to describe how spread-out she felt, with her responsibilities as a music teacher, to her husband and son, to her schooling and being new to counselling. She said:

I can make changes and I wasn’t giving myself permission to move that in my own life until I saw it and that was really big and my picture became very bright so that was huge . . . I feel like my old self. I feel good, yeah.

At the end of the interview component, she observed that being aggressive was a way of coping; she acknowledged that it had helped her to appear fearless, but recognized that it was a mask she had donned in order to achieve much-needed space. She indicated that the hearts in the sand tray were her aggression, her fire (coded: fire, aggression). She could see that now, as she was about to let go of some things, she did have space. She was deciding to keep the fire in the tray perhaps because she had learned over the weekend that keeping a smaller version of the way we cope could then serve as a resource to call upon when really necessary rather than access in a reactive way.

I asked her how others would notice that she is different. She replied that her husband would be able to tell by her face because she said, “I just look more rested and relaxed and happier.” She also said that her son would notice the difference in her because, “He’s really good at noticing.” Her wish for herself was to put her intuition and her heart first.
7.2.4. **Post-training questionnaire**

In the post-training questionnaire 3 months later, Naomi said that she had an ah-ha moment (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009) and she was “sold, as it were” on using the sand tray with clients. She explained that she was more confident in her counselling approach and therefore more willing to use this sand tray approach. She had had a personal transformation that she said was helping her to be more confident and take more risks with her clients.

7.2.5. **Corroboration**

A year later when corroborating my interpretation of this thick description, Naomi said that everything was correct and added that the wisdom, self-love and the peace are all on her side. She finished by saying that they were there all the time, she just hadn’t seen them. She is now pregnant with her second child and only working 3 days per week as a school counsellor. She says that she will need a refresher on using the sand tray after the baby is born.

7.2.6. **Researchers reflections**

The thrust of the research participants’ triad work in the sand tray was to look at how they had protected themselves and to see how that protection might have got in the way. Naomi’s insight began on our first day of the workshop component as she described how she had to carve out time for herself. She commented later in the interview component that the heart in the sand tray was an aggressive image. She now recognised that aggression had been a way to carve out that time for herself. She recognised that it was a way to keep herself safe. Her personal growth was to see how she could reduce the size of the image in the sand tray to reflect how she needed aggression less now.

I was moved by this interview. It seemed such a tender image of change. Subtle and yet so powerful, she was so clear about her experience of personal growth and she had not detoured from it 3 months later when she sent in the follow-up questionnaire. She knew exactly what she needed to put into the tray; she neither moved anything, added anything nor took anything away. It was so clear for her how she was different.
and just what she wanted for herself. Her personal transformations, becoming more integrated and using aggression less were able to help her professionally.

I suggest that as she found completeness in the Russian doll, so could she begin to trust her own wisdom and have self-love.

7.3. Martha: Thick Description

7.3.1. Background

I had met Martha before the research weekend briefly at a workshop at the British Columbia School Counsellors Conference in October of 2014. Apparently, she had wanted to get into the workshop and had been turned away. Undeterred, she snuck in without me noticing after the session had begun. Later she emailed me asking to be part of the research. Fortunately for her I had a spot left and Martha signed up.

Martha works in two arenas. Her day-job is in a private Christian school and by night she works from a converted recreational vehicle, counselling street youth in Surrey, BC and in a small private practice. At the time of writing she was a mature student in a master’s program taking leadership and counselling at City University.

7.3.2. Personal growth goals

Martha came to the workshop component with personal goals, which were actually professional goals. In her pre-training questionnaire, she said that she wanted to learn how to interpret sand tray work, to be able to use the sand tray with her clients, to add tools to her counselling tool kit and to “take advantage of this opportunity in order to grow as a counsellor.”

7.3.3. The research workshop component

On the first day of the workshop component, Martha arrived already keen and bubbling with anticipation. Martha especially wanted to learn more about sand tray therapy because it was something she was fascinated with and could see herself using it in her practice both as a school counsellor and in private practice. Martha hung on to every word during the morning, asking questions, reflecting and integrating her previous knowledge with the NSST approach.
On the second day I witnessed, Martha being a star in her triad work. I had no idea of the context, but I gathered quickly from the figurines that it was about her fears and how protected she had been. She had placed a hear-no-evil monkey to represent herself in the sand tray and then put an armoured Batman in front of the monkey. She described how the Batman represented her hardened, protective way of being in the world. As Martha spoke she replaced the Batman with an alligator, which she said provided more gentle protection. When it was pointed out by her triad therapist (Frances), that the alligator had his hand on the monkey’s back, Martha was moved to tears. The therapist had said, “The alligator has your back.” Martha saw the alligator as her mother being there for her. I suggest that Martha symbolically let go of the old armour that she had used to keep herself safe and replaced it with what she subsequently realized was the loving hand of her mother. Martha said that she no longer had need of the heavy armour. Her triad therapist asked her if she experienced herself differently and Martha responded by noticing that her spine was feeling different. Martha said her spine felt lighter, the pain had lifted, and she felt taller.

7.3.4. The interview component

Martha was keen to join me in the playroom and share her experience of the weekend. She found what she needed for her picture in the tray and began with images to her right and to her left in the tray, to show how she had been before the research weekend and where she was currently. Martha would move backwards and forwards from right (before) to the left (after) adding and moving the figurines as she went (Figure 25). She did not remove anything from the sand tray throughout the interview component which suggests that everything she put in there fit for her, but she did add a number of figurines as she spoke about her experience during the workshop component.
Figure 25. Martha with her sense of herself before the workshop component on her right side of the sand tray. Photo by J. Edmondson.

Each figurine on the right side of the sand tray represented a part of her the way she was before the weekend. I coded each aspect of each figurine (see Figure 25). Martha described the female princess in a purple dress figurine (coded: Before-competent; Before -reserved) as being “all together” while being reserved. Martha even looked at the female straight in the face and said, “To me this is, she looks good, she’s all-together. Right. Her appearance is all-together. Right. And she looks a bit reserved to me.” Martha is referring to herself as the princess in retrospect as being competent and but not fulfilling her potential of who she would like to be. The raccoon (coded: Before–playful; Before-experiential) on the right side of the tray in her before picture, seemed to illustrate a side of her that was, “Playful, mischievous and loves to manipulate things.” I learned later that she was a kinesthetic learner. Referring to the raccoon Martha said:

This guy looks like he is just looking out of the corner, he is just peeking, in fact he would probably be up here, I think he would be up here, he would be up here, he’d be here ([places him on the well](https://example.com)). That’s a part of me that I am not sure what to do. So, there is this organized part ([referring to the female in purple dress](https://example.com)) whoops, he’s so curious. He’s just going to be there. That’s a good one. He’s peeking up out of the wishing well because all my hopes and wishes were that this would help me to be a good therapist and help me grow.
The raccoon for her appears to be playful and curious and a part of her that she does not know well yet. Later the raccoon would go over to the other side of the sand tray suggesting that she had come to know him better and wanted to include him more in this present and future picture of her life.

Martha placed a wishing well (coded: Before-hopes; Before-wishes) between the raccoon and the female in the purple dress. Because she said, “I came in with a whole load of wishes and hopes. Like wishing and hoping that the whole thing, that this was going to be valuable.” Later Martha placed the raccoon on the well, “Because all my hopes and wishes were that this would help me to be a good therapist and help me grow.”

Martha spent some time with the smaller red and white tent (coded: Before-capacity) and placed her hand on the tent and said:

My hope my tent, my home, my capacity for the work that I do. I consider myself open as a therapist, I consider myself that this might have been the way that I was before.

The red and white tent was smaller than the one on her left, by which she signalled that her competence and confidence had grown over the weekend (Figure 26).

The whole weekend Martha said had been about getting out of her head and so she found the figurine of a brain (coded: before-Being in my head) and placed it by the well saying:

This whole weekend has been the experience about getting out of my head. Originally I was looking for a brain. Brain to a heart . . . so this is all about me being in my brain . . . what I know, how I organize in my life, this is all very organized, very neat.
Figure 26. Martha, “My hope my tent, my home, my capacity for the work that I do. I consider myself open as a therapist, I consider myself that this might have been the way that I was before.” Photo by J. Edmondson.

The training had allowed her raccoon part to come to the fore: to play, to be intuitive, to “learn by doing.” In this way, Martha had experienced herself differently as illustrated on the other side of the bridge (Figure 26).

A bridge (coded: transformation) is usually used as an expression of liminality, or of progression away from something and towards something else. The bridge for Martha symbolized her journey of the transformation of her personal growth.

Martha pointed to the bridge (Figure 27) and said:

I really, everything lined, I really wanted to be here [at the training] and I am not even sure why I wanted to be here. I knew that somehow this is what I am going to need to help and I think that’s what this symbolizes, going across this little bridge which symbolizes the difference of the journey and then the absolute delight. I think tea and little tea pots means delight for me. I am delighted.
In the left-hand side of the sand tray, Martha put in an image for how she had experienced the workshop component. Martha chose an image of two Musketeer figurines (coded: mutual support.) that seemed to refer to the support of the group. She referred to the larger tepee (coded: competence, confidence.) in terms of “expanding her tent pegs,” her capacity as compared with the smaller red and white tent. It seemed to be about unleashing her true potential—becoming the best she could be—and she was thrilled at the prospect.

Martha put the teacups (coded: freedom, enjoyment, happiness, intimacy and celebration) on the left-hand side of the tray alluding to the nurturing environment of the weekend where tea (in a tea pot) and coffee were always available. The nurturing was enhanced by the offering of tea and coffee by my assistant. She said:

And I find through the process, I have thoroughly enjoyed it and the best symbol and enjoyment for me. I looked at the tea party and I am absolutely drawn to tiny teacups and tea pots because it not only reminds me of my childhood but of a happy time in my childhood so it is um it's like a celebration, a freeing, a freeing like, I am all organized, reserved in my head, yet curious.

The context of the nurturing weekend including the support of the group, which had been symbolized by the teacups, the armchair with the violin and the two
musketeers. They became symbols of freedom, enjoyment, happiness, intimacy and celebration.

Martha did not say what the armchair with the violin (coded: nurturing) meant to her. My hypothesis was that it represented the big comfy armchairs in the workshop room and the classical music that I played during the breaks, which added to her feeling of being nurtured.

Martha found the prince (coded: confidence). As she placed it in the sand tray (Figure 28) she said, “I found this at the beginning and I found that he was too, too much or not humble enough or something, but I like him.”

![Figure 28](image)

**Figure 28.** Martha, “The prince (with the red cape). I found that he was too, too much or not humble enough or something, but I like him.” Photo by J. Edmondson.

This figurine was significant for her as the Prince was standing up straight with his hands on his hips. Martha had experienced a significant change in her own spine the day before. Choosing this erect figurine indicated she was feeling less humble about herself and becoming more confident. Later Martha returned to discussing the prince, describing how she had back problems and that when she had gone home the previous night she had felt different. She had seen things differently and saw her future in a different way. Martha said:
It’s funny that I should say that but it is the view, it’s the view . . . it’s the confidence . . . I felt all of a sudden . . . I felt, freer, I felt looser. I feel less tired in my back. There’s a lot less of the fatigue.

The deer figurines (coded: intimacy, gentleness, softness, empathy, celebration, safety) indicated the importance of the context for Martha as she described the safety of the weekend, the intimacy and the overall nurturing. Martha placed deer sipping out of the cups and said, “The deer for me are my symbol for the intimacy that happened here.” Martha referred to them also in the context of, “The empathy, just enough people—not too many, not too few, the um. The softness, the gentleness [of the weekend training].”

Martha continued, “The baby deer and the mother deer—to me there is nothing more beautiful and intimate than that look. I love that I love that about the nature.” I suggest that the deer for her were an important representation of her internal sense of self-love that had been realized through the high level of nurturing and attachment that I had intentionally created throughout the training.

Martha put a red heart (coded: self-love, intuition) into a pair of tiny hands and then put it between the two Musketeers (Figure 29). She said that she had moved out of her head and into her heart. The personal growth for Martha was about self-love and appreciating her newfound freedom to use all her own resources (like the raccoon) that emerged as a result of the nurturing and safety of the weekend.

Martha described the alligator (coded: protective, physical changes, courage, transformational) as a “loving piece” that was protective by being close. Martha referred to the work that she had done in the sand tray the day before. She described realizing that she had been carrying heavy armour and that by replacing the safety of the heavy armour with the supportive alligator, she could protect herself in a different way, one that wasn’t lonely. As she said this, Martha moved the alligator closer to the chair. With the sense of the alligator protecting her, Martha said she was able to be straighter and to be free of pain in her back.
Figure 29.  Martha, said that she had moved out of her head and into her heart. Photo by J. Edmondson.

The transformational change was about loving and appreciating her newfound freedom to use all her own resources (like the raccoon) that emerged as a result of the nurturing and safety of the weekend.

After placing jewels (coded: transformational) and another heart between the two tents, Martha described how she had experienced herself differently as a result of the weekend (Figure 30). She described how in the past she had been afraid and had stayed safe and small but now, referring to the two different sized tents and using the metaphor of tent pegs, she implied that she could expand. Martha said, pointing to the tea party and the Musketeers that the courage found there allowed her to be “more engaged, more animated, encouraging”. Martha believed that other people would notice that she had changed because of the way she would be carrying herself; that is, she would be standing taller.
What was significant for Martha was the safety and nurturing of the weekend, which in turn created safety amongst the group in their triad practices. This seemed to pull from her a greater sense of who she was, leading her to be more confident at a deep level. She described overcoming her initial fearfulness:

There’s some fear along this way because there are little dots of fear every time we had to go and observe or be the star or be the therapist. It was a very safe place to do that. And I think it is really important to have that experience for me to go out there and be a better therapist for my kids and the folks that I deal with.

7.3.5. Post-training questionnaire

Three months later Martha was able to describe her professional changes as surprising because she found herself becoming, “A more confident counsellor . . . as I have been able to help clients in the sand tray and have the confidence to do so.”

Martha reported that others knew that she was different because of her confidence, her excitement about her counselling role, her success in helping her clients and that she was standing taller. Her school principal renewed her contract and, in a new development, designated her as the personal/mental health counsellor at the school. She had expanded her private practice to two offices and started getting
referrals for kids, teens and people from her church. She said, “In a nutshell, am growing in my profession and my confidence is growing also.”

The work she did on her own barriers to healthy connections with her past and future really helped her. She said that this had made, “Immediate differences in my job and relations as a part time administrator also.” Martha said:

I am more confident in the craft of counselling and I am eager to learn more through my excitement and success in my practice. To use one example, through the sand tray I was able to see a totally different perspective in a problem I was having with a teacher in my department. I immediately saw her through this new lens. It’s quite transformative that I can honestly say that not only is our relationship better, but she asked to stay on my team.

In Martha’s words:

I came out of my training as a counsellor through my master’s degree fired up and excited and yet scared and feeling less than confident about being effective for my clients. I particularly like working with imagery, play, sand and was fascinated by this, but had little knowledge or training in this area. I found I grew the most in learning this method of counselling in such a supportive, safe and hands-on way. It was intimate and impactful. I watched others, saw Madeleine demonstrate, but the most impactful thing was the actual time I was counselled in the sand tray. There was my issue with a co-worker and that in itself has been miraculously transformed by my new perspective and lens that I saw things. But the most incredible thing to me was the issue I didn’t know I had that was brought forth in the sand tray about my fear . . . and even where I hold my stress, anxiety and pain—in my back. The image that transformed me in the sand tray and I painted a picture of it, was this alligator gently placing his hand on the small of my back. Wow! Still feel grateful for this. It really was my Mom, dead for 39 years who showed up in that sand tray that weekend [emphasis added]. I would have never even imagined that. It was a transformative realization that she would always and still has “my back” and would not want me to be living my life less than it could be—in fear. Thank you so much for selecting me to be part of this research and your incredible teaching. I left feeling like I was part of something that will grow and transform counselling in this arena of sand tray work. I look forward to any and all opportunities to have you as a mentor and to learn from you. I am grateful and in an indirect way, my clients are grateful.

7.3.6. **Corroboration**

Martha came to my house to corroborate this thick description to check for accuracy. She said it was all correct and that she was still feeling the same way as she had felt the day of the interview. She has become successful in her private practice and still working on her master’s degree.
7.3.7. Researchers reflection

The personal growth for Martha was about self-love and appreciating her newfound freedom to use all her own resources, like her curiosity (the raccoon) that emerged as a result of her triad work and the nurturing and safety of the weekend.

Martha’s picture was clear. She used figurines for both the external and internal worlds: a raccoon for playfulness and curiosity, a prince for courage, a tea party that represented comfort and safety. In retrospect, I could have asked her to find something to represent how she saw the world differently, or her new perspective about herself. However, the contrast between reserved princess and courageous prince said so much.

7.4. Linda: Thick Description

7.4.1. Background

Linda was the only participant who said she did not experience any changes in personal growth during the workshop component. In fact, she said she felt even worse than when she arrived. Of note, her personal growth goals were more focused on being a better therapist. During the interview, she revealed that she was despondent about how she struggled with the process of learning the NSST approach. She had been a successful athlete and had gone into teaching, but she had not been successful as a teacher, which is why she was training as a counsellor now. She said, as a teacher, “It’s not that I cannot connect with kids; it’s just that it takes about three or four times of meeting [before I can connect with them].”

At the time of the interview she was near completion of her counselling master’s course and would go on to be a certified counsellor. During the training, she had not spoken much. She was in a group of six participants (Martin, Martha, Soleil, Susie, Frances). She was surrounded by a high-level of counselling confidence, competence, capability and experience. In that context, her self-awareness of her professional level would have been stark.
7.4.2. **Personal growth goals**

As an apprentice therapist with no training in play therapy, Linda’s personal growth goal was to, “Understand sand tray therapy as a play therapy technique, its philosophy and ways of interacting with a child through the sand tray.” Her personal growth goals from her pre-training questionnaire, like Martha’s, were professional in nature. They were to, “Understand how to initiate and maintain therapeutic sandplay, understand when to choose sand play as a therapeutic technique, understand how to evaluate what is happening”. The most important personal outcome for Linda of the training was, “Whether or not I felt comfortable initiating sand play with my students.”

7.4.3. **The interview component**

Linda placed a phoenix figurine (coded: yearning) in the sand tray. When asked she said, it represented her love for her son whose name was Phoenix and he gave her hope to become unstuck. She said that she was “incredibly stuck” and she wished she could say something positive about the weekend, or about how something had shifted, but instead she said, “I’m just kind of feeling more stuck.” As she said this she was smiling awkwardly.

I asked her to find something to represent stuckness and she found an Olympic podium (coded: stuckness, hopeless) (Figure 31) and on it she placed three small people. She said:

I don’t know I feel like, I feel like I’m, I’m putting a lot of effort in. Like, I’m doing my program right now and I feel like I’m putting a lot in. I’m feeling like everyone’s getting it and I’m not. . . . Just everything to do with like therapy. I had a sand tray today and I was just talking about the stuckness. This feeling of, it’s like an incongruence where I know that I’m with a client, I know I’m there, I know I’m trying to communicate that as best I can and it’s not coming through. I can see it in their—in their actions.

She said she had tried to be empathic and the empathy wasn’t “coming through” to her star with whom she practiced as the therapist. While she did not articulate this, I made the inference that the podium in the sand tray was her effort, but she was not up there on it. As she spoke, her voice became almost inaudible. She would place her hand over her mouth, so it was really hard to hear what she was saying. I had to ask her several times to take her hand away from her mouth and to speak up.
She put other figurines in the tray. Linda put in a scared-faced egg (coded: frustration) to show how she was feeling frustrated about being so stuck. Her feeling of hopelessness about feeling so frustrated was demonstrated by a small rabbit (coded: hopeless). I asked her how her body was feeling when she looked at the picture. She answered that there was something “behind her eyes”. She said she felt sad, but she shed no tears. She placed another egg with a sad face in the sand tray for her sadness (coded: sadness) (Figure 32).

Again, I asked her where in her body she experienced the sadness. She pointed to the top of her chest. I suggested that because her voice was so quiet, perhaps the feelings were almost stopping her from speaking. She disagreed and said it was lower and perhaps was affecting her breathing, a possible sign of being in an immobilised state of fear.

She was aware that her shell (coded: protection) had kept her safe since childhood and that it was “getting away” [from being useful] and was now making her “disconnected” and “cautious” (Figure 33). She said she was “very connected to the deer” (coded: fear) in the sense that she had been frightened all her life. However, she
then went on to describe how as a high-ranking athlete she had done very well, which she ascribed to the fact that there were rules and one knew what to expect.

Figure 32. Linda illustrated how she felt with the sad-faced and the scared-faced eggs and the rabbit (hopeless). Photo by J. Edmondson.

Figure 33. Linda became aware of how the shell had kept her safe, but was now making her “disconnected.” Photo by J. Edmondson.
Linda had been a golfer (Figure 34) and she said that she missed this part of her because, as a golfer she had anxiety but not overwhelming fear. She said that she had chosen to “embrace” her anxiety as a golfer because “it’s not something that’s wrong with me—it’s something that speaks to me.”

We talked about how the parts of her were all separate. I asked how the golfer part might be able to help one of the other parts (a technique used in NSST to bring together positive inner resources to support perceived negative parts). She thought that the golfer would tell her frustration part to keep practicing and to stay present, even when things were not working out. Finally, she placed a glass stone with the word “hope” on it. She removed the scared egg that was her frustration and said that she was okay with the rest of the picture. Her wish was to continue to experience the process of growth and to realize that it wouldn’t have to stop when her degree ends.

Figure 34. The golfer represents Linda’s time as a top golfer and athlete. Photo by J. Edmondson.

7.4.4. Post-training questionnaire

Linda’s reflection 3 months later in her post-training questionnaire appeared to be different from her experience during the training. She said:

Through the sand tray training, I became aware of the [Neuroscience and] Satir method of sand tray and, while it is was not congruent with my own
philosophical ways of viewing the client-counsellor relationship (I tend towards a more humanistic way of viewing a client and was uncomfortable with the perceived difference of power between client-counsellor in this structure), it did make me more comfortable with some of the tenets underlying play therapy and sand tray therapy as a whole (right-brain/right-brain connection, inviting the client to lead and tracking, exploration of themes/feelings/memories indirectly through the use of symbols). After this training, I chose to do additional reading in humanistic sand tray.

Three months after the training was completed, Linda said that she had increased her use of play-based techniques with clients and that she had become more comfortable in tracking the themes that emerged and using non-verbal techniques. She said she had become personally aware of the impact of using “symbols as ways of connecting with unacknowledged feelings, ideas and so forth”. She said that after the workshop component the most profound change was that she had become more aware of her own philosophical beliefs about human functioning and development and was more comfortable acting in congruence with that. She continued:

On a personal level, the act of creating a sand tray helped me to recognize how I had been minimizing an aspect of my training at university (not enough/sufficient supervision) and immediately contacted my supervisor to request additional supervision.

She has since become interested in play therapy and has continued to take further courses.

7.4.5. Researcher’s reflections

I was concerned that this participant was so stuck after 2 days of the intimate supportive experiential workshop component and, in particular, because she felt worse when it was over than when she came in. She was frustrated that she could not help others. She herself was unable to connect with her inner resources due to something getting in the way. Her affect was low, and I wonder in retrospect if she was unable to feel her emotions physically in her body because of some trauma.

She stated that she felt the star was not picking up her empathy. I wondered if she did not genuinely feel the other person’s struggle or unconsciously was sending non-verbal messages that were at odds with her words. It made a profound impression on me in the interview that she smiled when talking about her stuckness, when I would have
expected her to look sad or even to cry. She did not cry at all, although she said she felt “something behind her eyes.”

After she had talked about the stuckness and not being able to connect with people, I decided to do something different than I had done with the other participants. In the workshop component, I had been a researcher, a teacher and, in the demonstrations, a counsellor. I decided to treat her as a client and attempted to help her through this barrier to connect with other people in a deep transformational way. As her therapist now in the interview component, I helped her to move through the hopelessness and the frustration to the sadness. She found her protective shell that had kept her from being frightened of the world except when she played golf. In some ways, she appreciated her anxiety for helping her do well at the sport. Her desire however for an activity (golf) that spoke of rules and clear expectations, in retrospect should have been something I pursued. Counselling is not rule-bound nor does it have clear expectations. Working with people’s emotions is messy work that requires embracing ambivalence, intuition and discomfort as well as having healthy verbal and nonverbal communication skills.

In the post-training questionnaire Linda did not refer to any changes in her stuckness, but she appeared to be learning more about play therapy and she was using play therapy with clients. It is my assessment that during the workshop and interview component she appeared to be very much “in her head”, substituting technique for embodied intuition when attempting to empathize with the star. Intuition is hard to teach admittedly, but the majority of people I have taught celebrate the permission they give themselves to use their “in the moment instincts” (De Little, 2015b) along with their learning. Linda is a trained teacher and upon the completion of her counselling master’s degree she will be automatically allowed to become a counsellor and be able to have her own private practice. In some ways, she has taught me the most in this research.

She was the participant who, on the face of it had no experience of personal growth during the 3-day research study. However, in a sense she also taught me the value of the NSST approach and the importance of using transformative pedagogy throughout counsellor education. The first stage of personal growth is personal awareness. She had felt that she was not touched by a weekend of training in a powerful counselling technique using a powerful transformative pedagogy approach. That in itself
was really important information for her. This participant by Day 3 in the interview component was able to achieve a level of awareness where she could at least see that the lack of impact of the NSST approach on her personal growth might be in part due to something that needed to shift in her and could not be attributed to something missing or wrong with the NSST approach. In that sense, she did experience personal growth, that is, there was a shift in her personal awareness. It was a somewhat confusing picture for me and perhaps for her. In the post-training questionnaire, in a veiled way, she was dismissive saying that the problem was the NSST approach, saying it didn’t fit for her. However, she said that she had increased her use of play-based techniques with clients and that she had become more comfortable using non-verbal techniques. She said she had become personally aware of the impact of using “symbols as ways of connecting with unacknowledged feelings, ideas and so forth”.

She has taught me that counsellor education must involve personal growth work through a transformative pedagogy and transformative learning model. A student’s personal growth needs to be continually monitored, assessed and reviewed for authentic progress. When I heard from her in the 3-month follow-up that she had decided to ask for more supervision from her supervisor I was pleased.

7.4.6. Corroboration

Linda did not reply to my request to come and corroborate her thick description.

7.5. Laura: Thick Description

7.5.1. Background

Laura is an art therapy student at the Art Therapy Institute of Vancouver. At the time of the workshop component, she was doing her practicum at an elementary school. Laura has the persona of gentle-with-attitude. She has several piercings, brightly coloured hair and a reserved disposition.

7.5.2. Personal growth goals

Laura’s personal growth goals in her pre-training questionnaire were professional rather than personal. They were to expand her “knowledge of the therapies based in the
subconscious”, to learn new methods of healing, gain a broader understanding of “sand play” and learn new tools to aid in her practice.

7.5.3. The interview component

Laura had already picked up her figurines by the time I had sorted out a problem with the camera. I asked how the training had impacted her and she launched immediately into making a picture in the top right-hand corner of the sand tray. I told her what I saw: “I see a big tree with big, big branches and in that tree is an elephant that’s sort of a see-through or transparent elephant. And underneath there is a tiger creature, a panda sitting down and a tortoise/turtle character. And then, over here there is a tree with a butterfly on it and three mushrooms down below.” She was able to tell me that the tiger, panda and tortoise were all resources of the transparent elephant (Figure 35). She never actually said “I am the elephant” but the nature of the NSST approach is to often talk in the metaphor and I assumed that the elephant was her. She described the elephant (coded: change in perception, lighter, transparent) she said:

Figure 35. Laura placed the tiger, panda and the tortoise at the base of the tree saying that they were all parts of the elephant. Photo by J. Edmondson.
He has a better view of the world. He can see far, maybe a better understanding from being up so high and I really like, like the clearness of him, he just seems filled with light.

She placed three figurines below the tree to explain the parts of the elephant, which represented her inner resources. The tiger (coded: strength) was the part of the elephant that had gained newfound inner strength. She described the panda (coded: playful) as the elephant’s playfulness. Laura said that the tortoise (coded: wisdom) was the elephant’s wisdom, which was now able to see the other parts, which had been buried and now the turtle could appreciate them. Of these resources she said, “I’m reassured that those things have always been there and to have faith in those things.” She added the tree (coded: beauty, strength), with butterflies (coded: Freedom) and flowers (coded: beauty) because, “It’s quite beautiful to me it really spoke out like it seems quite peaceful and that’s something that I think maybe the elephant needs in its life.”

The transparent elephant was high up for all to see with its playful, strong, wise parts all connected. Laura had really worked hard on the training weekend to integrate her experiences. She had realised her own gifts, had worked to pull back her defences and allow herself to be authentic and transparent. When I asked her how she would be different she said that she would have a, “Stronger affirmation of who, like the elephant is and that is put outwards.” She obtusely described the tiger, the panda and the turtle saying, maybe they will:

Act different in relation to others and voice their feeling or what they’re thinking more often and then just how they interact or how it interacts with people. Even clients too, like, the way the practice is going knowing that it has all these skills—they’re there and they’re very powerful.

I summarised this statement by saying that it sounded like, “The elephant has confidence and I’m guessing that you will be more confident.” She laughed because this was the first time I had made the direct connection between her and the elephant. She agreed that she felt more confident after the workshop component. When I asked how others would notice this difference she replied, “Maybe just by me being more honest about who I am . . . . Yeah—and just clarity and light, like there’s more energy. “

This was a short interview compared with the others and after she had described all of the above I invited her to look again at the picture to see if she wanted to add, take
away or move anything. She placed four red hearts (coded: self-love, love for others) on top of the tree (Figure 36). She said that the hearts showed the elephant, was receiving more love and simultaneously more love was “coming out of the elephant.” I had made a hypothesis earlier in the training that Laura was fragile underneath all the piercings and harsh look. This protection served her well. During the weekend, in her triad work, she had had the confidence to look behind the protection to see what was there. She had kept herself emotionally distant because of hurt.

Figure 36. Laura, “Maybe just by me being more honest about who I am . . . . Yeah—and just clarity and light, like there’s more energy.” Photo by J. Edmondson.

7.5.4. Physical changes

When I asked Laura where in her body she felt the difference, she did not hesitate. Her hand immediately went to her chest and she said, “Oh, I really feel it in my heart . . . . The relief I think in a sense . . . . Yeah, like and realization too—like, a lot has changed for me this weekend just about the way I see myself too” (Figure 37).

I remarked that she looked different in her face. It seemed softer. Laura had become more playful, more confident about her own resources and in so doing was able to become more transparent in who she really was with less defences and as a result
saw the world differently. Her wish for herself was to remember all she had learned and to, “Make sure to love myself and love others fully.”

Figure 37. Laura, “Oh, I really feel it in my heart . . . a lot has changed for me this weekend just about the way I see myself too.”
Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission.

7.5.5. Post-training questionnaire

Laura did not fill out the post-training questionnaire.

7.5.6. Researcher’s reflections

I was struck by how Laura used and stayed in the metaphor to describe the changes that she experienced over the weekend. She did not refer to the elephant as being her until I introduced it in a question. She laughed as if I had somehow called her on her disguise. Her personal growth was symbolically communicated through the transparent elephant. She was open and vulnerable to her new sense of self and how she would be different in the world.

Unlike some of the other thick descriptions like Martha and Naomi, she did not make a picture of how she was before the training; she simply created a picture of the impact of the training on herself in the present.
It was an honour to work with such a lovely young woman who I know will go on to make a real difference in children’s lives.

7.5.7. Corroboration

Laura did not reply to my request to come and corroborate this thick description.

7.6. Martin: Thick Description

7.6.1. Background

Martin is a well-established play therapist. He has his own play therapy office, equipped with sand tray, figurines, puppets, art table and his own way of working, learned from various teachers. Martin was a star for one of the two demonstrations. In the first interview component, the recording apparatus failed to work, so I visited him six weeks later in his office to have another interview using his sand tray. In order to fully present the depth of transformation for this man over the research-training weekend, I will describe the demonstration that he did with me in front of the participants during the workshop component. I will then describe his first interview on the third day of the training (with the pictures only, not the transcript). Finally I will describe the second interview component (with pictures and codes) at his office six weeks later. Martin changed so dramatically and profoundly during the weekend that I am not sure if he recognised himself.

7.6.2. Personal growth goals

Martin’s personal growth goals in the pre-training questionnaire were to re-examine his own family system through the lens of the training. He said that this would solidify his learning in order to bring the approach into his professional practice.

7.6.3. The demonstration

In order to understand the interview component, I need to first describe Martin’s work in the sand tray with me as a star in the demonstration during the workshop component. He initially placed a Napoleon figurine on horseback into the tray and then a man standing precisely at the midline and then a whirling dervish, possibly a black magic looking character. I noticed the man standing and the whirling dervish were facing away
from Martin and he was looking at their backs (Figure 38). None of these figurines or expressions were coded, as they were not part of the interview component.

![Photo of Martin and his figurines](image)

**Figure 38.** Martin is looking at the backs of the figurines.
*Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission.*

Martin described the Napoleon figurine as the part of him that strategized on how to manipulate the world and keep safe. He said that the man standing up (directly in front of him in the sand tray) was how he wanted to be seen—as credible and believable. He called the whirling dervish figurine to his left in the sand tray, his Master of the Dark Arts. He believed that people saw him as almost a Master of the Dark Arts with extra powers and somehow not good at what he did because it was not legitimate. I had a sense that he was ashamed of this part of him. It was also a lonely part of him.

Martin placed a totem pole to his left in the corner. He described how this was the spiritual part of the Master of the Dark Arts (Figure 39). With questions from myself, about how this part of him had helped him growing up, Martin was able to see how it had kept him safe from bullying when he was a child at school because he appeared mystical to others and they kept away from him and did not bully him.

This shift in perception allowed Martin to experience himself differently. He placed a large tree in the sand tray for his new sense of being grounded and strong in who he was (Figure 40). I invited him to change places with me and look at the figurines
from a different angle. When we did that, he moved the Napoleon character into one corner drawing a line in the sand across the corner to keep it at bay. Without words, he was saying that he didn’t need to strategize to be safe anymore. He was safe, because he felt grounded (the tree). He felt secure in his new self-awareness (Master of the Dark Arts and the totem pole) and he was strong in how he saw himself (standing up man). Martin moved these four figurines together into the centre back of the tray.

Figure 39. For Martin, the totem pole is the spiritual part of the “Master of the Dark Arts.” Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission.
Figure 40. Martin now saw a part of himself as the tree being grounded. Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission.

It was after he had moved the four figurines that he shed a tear (Figure 41). His tears were about accepting himself, letting go of the shame of the Master of the Dark Arts and thanking it for its protective power and the gifts it had given him. He found some jewels to symbolize these gifts.

Figure 41. Martin moved the four figurines together and a tear came to his eyes. Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission.
He saw the jewels as the gifts from the role that the Master of the Dark Arts played in his life for many years. He had transformed the Master of the Dark Arts from something dark, mythical, shameful at times, into a gift of being able to work with clients, symbolized by beautiful jewels filled with light and beauty (Figure 42).

Figure 42. Martin saw the jewels as the gift of working with clients. Photo by J. Edmondson.

7.6.4. Researcher’s reflections on Martin’s demonstration

I included Martin’s demonstration in his thick description because I feel that, in this case, it is important to give the background to Martin’s interview component. As I reflect on this demonstration, I see that Martin did what many participants did during their triad work or demonstrations with me in this research study. He experienced a profound transformational change in the sand tray. What was especially significant was his moving from a sense of shame which, in my experience, is a very difficult state of being to transform, to not only a degree of congruency and self-acceptance but to a higher level of spirituality where he was experiencing “harmony with himself” (Satir et al., 1991, p. 171).
7.6.5. **First interview component**

Photographs are available from the first interview component but the video sound was not turned on so again there is no coding for this interview component. However, it is included as part of Martin’s thick description as it helps to drill down as to who he is and the transformational personal growth journey that he undertook.

In the first interview on the third day, Martin placed a school to his left and a lighthouse to his right, at opposite ends of the sand tray. In the centre of the tray, he placed a transparent human figure with a small black bird to its left and a small silver totem pole right behind it. The school he saw as being his learning over the weekend, the lighthouse was his own path, which was now much clearer and the transparent human figure was how Martin now saw himself (Figure 43). He felt he could now be transparent, as he experienced himself free of shame. This came directly from his acceptance the day before of a dark part of him and the choice he had made to see its gifts.

![Figure 43](image.png)

*Figure 43. In the first interview Martin saw himself as transparent. Photo by J. Edmondson.*

He moved the figurines closer together, placing the school behind the transparent figurine and the lighthouse at its right-hand side. Then he changed his
position to the end of the sand tray. In this picture (Figure 44) it’s clear that both of us are looking at the transparent human figure. We are looking at him in his newly-transformed way of being, seamless, open, no secrets of shame and nothing to hide.

Figure 44. We are looking at Martin’s depiction of himself in his newly-transformed way of being: seamless, open, no secrets of shame and nothing to hide. Photo by J. Edmondson; used with permission.

7.6.6. **Researcher’s reflections**

I need to reflect on this, as it was his original interview component on the third day of the workshop component. He solidified a new understanding of himself. The final picture, showing the personal growth gains he had made during the weekend, was integrated, powerful, transparent and showed deep self-love, self-respect and self-acceptance.

7.6.7. **Second interview component**

Because I lost the sound on the above interview component on the third day of the training weekend, I interviewed Martin again six weeks later, at his office. This time the sound was turned on and I was able to code his interview.
Martin used his own figurines. He found a bridge and placed a horse on it, in the centre of the sand tray. He placed a dragon creature with a silver ball on his left-top corner. He added an arrow sign but quickly took it out again. He placed a snake on one side of the bridge and on the other side a Buddha figure (Figure 45). Martin described how the bridge (coded: positive movement) was his sense of movement and the horse (coded: moving forward) was his symbol for moving forward on the bridge. He said, “So, it is definitely crossing the bridge and it’s a red bridge. I like the red bridge because it stands out. There is no hiding, it’s just it’s there and you are crossing it” (Figure 45).

Figure 45. Martin, said that the horse is going across the bridge, which stands out. “There is no hiding.” Photo by J. Edmondson.

Martin was addressing the transparency, which he had established in the first interview component when he said, “There’s no hiding”. While he initially wanted to use an older horse, he said that he liked the one he had finally chosen as it had “a sort of a spirit”. Martin said that the Buddha (coded: grounding, movement, awareness) had a “sense of grounding and observance and awareness while in that movement”. He said that 15 years prior in another workshop he had placed a Buddha and a horse together but at the time he had not understood the significance. Today he did. He said:

I have my clarity around my movement, my going from what I’ve been thinking about and wishing for and longing for, to actually enacting it out in the world. So bringing what I want, transforming my practice and believing that I have this, I have this power, I have this culture that I can bring into my work and be effective and it’s of great value—so it is that sensation.
Martin said that the snake (coded: energy) had “energy in the awareness”. Together, Martin saw the horse, the Buddha and the snake very much connected in their movement.

From the very, very grounded basic place to awareness and direction and doing, decision, decision, acting in the world. So it’s not an abstract place; it’s a very concrete movement coming from—sort of very grounded, powerful metaphor into reality and taking action.

After some time, Martin placed a dragon holding a pearl (coded: power, destination, hope, future, clarity of values) in the tray. He said, “It is there as a reminder of power and solidity and lack of fear and holding that pearl . . . it’s about hope, future, value, so moving towards that, moving towards those values.”

Martin was able to see the future more clearly and to see where he was going, guided by his own values. His vision was no longer hidden under the shame and guilt of the Master of the Dark Arts protective stance he had adopted when he was very young.

Martin sat a Griffin (coded: powerful) on the edge of the tray, looking at the horse on the bridge (Figure 46) and described it as having, a “special power of seeing and doing . . . but it’s more in a sort of a—I would say it sort of stands more in a background as a culture that feeds this. He said that he was noticing how unique he was and how what he brings to the work is his own. He continued:

I don’t have to be shy about it or sort of step away from it or apologize . . . . I’ve got something that’s valuable. Nobody else does it. And, I mean, different people have different valuable things to offer and this is mine.

In his process in the workshop component demonstration he had been able to accept the Master of the Dark Arts as positive instead of “shameful” or his “dark shadow side” and to embrace its powerfulness. That was a profound and transformational piece of personal growth for Martin. Six weeks later he now said that he felt “more straightforward”. He continued:

I feel I’ve become more effective for a variety of reasons. One is that I feel more confident and competent in doing the work, so I give that impression that I know what I’m doing, which is nice for people. . . . And also, for me to be more decisive in doing things that I know are effective and not wait around and doubt . . . . Oh, you know, what if?
Martin said that the griffin has a “special power”, referring to his unique abilities. Photo by J. Edmondson.

He then placed a fire (coded: power) in the bottom left-hand corner of the tray (Figure 47) and said, “So just going towards that fire and heat and that power and with confidence and positive, positive movement. “

Martin also commented that others had noticed that he was different, in the new way in which he was able to accept their feedback. He did not describe how it had been before, but presumably he had reacted negatively to feedback.

Martin described the physical sensations that he was experiencing in his body:

There is a sense of excitement, there is a sense of clarity and there is uh, I mean, there is, I don’t know if it’s a sense of awe or grief or mostly mixed together. It’s like it’s stirring up something in me that sort of can bring up tears and at the same time it’s like wow . . . yeah, it’s fascinating. Definitely it touches something really deep.

Although he didn’t find one to put in the sand tray he described this deep feeling as being like a tree. I commented on the fact that he had had a tree in his demonstration sand tray. (Later he would say that the whole second interview tray was the tree). Earlier Martin described how he felt a mixture of grief and awe and I brought him back to this for clarification. He said that the grief was a sense of, “Coming into contact with myself and really knowing that it’s always been there and why didn’t I see it before, why didn’t I touch it before?”
Grief was no longer needed in the sand tray. It was in the past. Martin’s wish was to “share more and more of this with everybody”, which I took to mean to share more of his newly-perceived sense of self.

7.6.8. Post-training questionnaire

Martin did not fill out the post-training questionnaire but having seen him 6 weeks after the first interview component and an email from him 2 years later I believe there is rich material evidence of lasting personal growth. Out of the blue, 2 years later he wrote an email to me:

I am a lot happier in my skin than when I saw you. And seeing you and doing that work contributed to getting to where I am now. I feel that I have found my real talent and skill and that I am moving more and more into being a much bigger and better version of my old self. Isn’t life exciting?!}

7.6.9. Researcher’s reflections on Martin’s second interview component

In the training weekend, Martin experienced a profound transformational change that took him from a deep and dark place of shame to a high level of self-awareness that was integrated, powerful, transparent and showed deep self-love, self-respect and self-
acceptance. This could be what Satir et al. (1991) describes as the third level of congruence, “being in harmony with Self and our life energy, spirituality or God” (p. 171).

7.6.10. Corroboration

Martin did not reply to my request for him to corroborate this thick description

7.7. Comment On All Six Thick Descriptions

We have seen thick descriptions of six research participants illustrating their detailed lived experience of the workshop and interview component and their comments about their personal growth. These accounts give a rich contextualized description of each participant’s experience of their personal growth and thereby increase the veracity of the study.

In counsellor education, transformative pedagogy provides the opportunity for participants to not only learn about strategies and techniques, but to have the opportunity to self-reflect in a group and experience transformational change so that they make gains in personal growth and move towards the authenticity, secure attachment and confidence that they need in order to be competent counsellors. There is a huge opportunity for personal growth in looking at ‘self’ in relation to other in the group.

One participant says she did not experience transformational growth or gain skills in using the NSST approach and could see her peers in the workshop component doing both. She could see all the others being personally, positively impacted by the triad work and demonstrations of the NSST approach. And she could see everyone being nurtured by the overall experience of the weekend. The fact that she didn’t experience those two impacts was an unpleasant revelation to her. She did experience personal growth in the sense that she had a growing awareness of her lack of transformational change. This shows how using transformative pedagogy in a group uses the power of the group to potentially bring about at least personal awareness, unpleasant or otherwise and at most, varying degrees of personal growth.

It is clear from the findings and the thick descriptions that these experiences of personal growth happened in part as a result of experiencing the NSST approach. It is
also clear that these experiences of personal growth occurred in part because the workshop component design embraced transformative pedagogy.

The final chapter brings together the main findings, the conclusions, the limitations of this research and a discussion of future directions.
Chapter 8.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter presents a summary of this study, the implications for counsellor education, limitations of this research, opposing viewpoints, suggestions for further research and concluding thoughts.

This study set out to show how personal growth is experienced by counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning “Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray” (NSST) and how an intentional, authentic, dialogical, safe and nurturing, emancipatory transformative pedagogy might contribute to that experience. The qualitative research methodology used in this study was congruent with the objectives of the study. This study places personal growth at the heart of counsellor education to deepen student counsellors’ sense of self in order for them to become more effective counsellors. As discussed in Chapter 1, this study defines personal growth as the human journey towards having an authentic, securely attached, integrated, regulated, mentally and physically healthy, socially engaged, confident and congruent sense of self.

The literature acknowledges that the self of the counsellor is the primary tool in counselling and opportunities for self-knowledge, understanding and acceptance of self and even self-forgiveness should be central to counsellor education. By knowing and accepting of self, the counsellor is then able to take risks, to trust the process and be confident that they will be able to handle all that the human condition presents within the therapeutic environment. The literature reviewed in this thesis supports the need for personal growth in counsellor education (Clark, 1986; Dryden & Feltham, 1994; Irving & Williams, 1999; Johns, 1996; Kumari, 2011; Mearns 1997; Norcross, 2005; Norcross & Connor, 2005; Norcross et al., 1992; Norcross & Guy, 2005; Norcross et al., 1988; Orlinsky et al., 2005; Rake & Paley, 2009; Rizq & Target, 2008; Rogers, 1961; Satir et al., 1991; Von Haenisch, 2010; Wigg et al., 2011).

What is not present in this literature is a study of counsellor education where there is an integrated, intentional framework combining transformative pedagogy,
personal growth promotion and the teaching of the skills of a counselling approach. This study addresses this significant lacuna in counsellor education.

The research in this study involves the teaching of skills of the NSST approach, (De Little, 2015a) and the use of transformative pedagogy (Clark, 1993; Cranton, 2005; Dirkkx, 2012; Freiler, 2009; Freire, 1972; Hoshmand, 2004; Lawrence, 2009; Marks-Tarlow, 2012; McGilchrist, 2009; Mezirow, 1991; Papastamatis & Panitsides, 2014; Schön, 1983; Taylor, 2001), in order to answer two questions: How is personal growth experienced by counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning Neuroscience and Satir in the Sand Tray (NSST)—a new experiential play-based therapy? How might transformative pedagogy foreground understanding in ways that foster personal growth opportunities among counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning NSST? The response to the first question was found in the first six themes that emerged from the coded findings. The response to the second question was found in all of the themes but predominately in the seventh theme. The main findings from the themes are discussed below.

This study involved a qualitative research methodology drawing on the author as a counsellor, designer, teacher, interviewer and researcher engaged in action research, reflexive practice and critical pedagogy (McKernan, 1991). This blending of the roles was intentional. The intention of this research was to have a maximum amount of continuity between the workshop component and the interview component by using the sand tray with each participant for the interview component.

The workshop component of this study involved three separate groups of participants, each group attending for 3 consecutive days. There were seven different teaching modalities arranged below according to the emphasis placed on them in the workshop component in order to encourage the most personal growth for the participants. The researcher: Modelled a securely attached, regulated and congruent state of mind and body; facilitated reflective practice by the participants throughout the workshop component; facilitated the experience of using the NSST approach in triads; demonstrated the NSST approach; led and encouraged discussions of the theory and practice of NSST; showed slides of examples of children and adult’s pictures in the sand tray; and taught the NSST approach didactically.
The research participants, on the third day, came to an individual interview with the researcher where they were invited to create a sand tray that showed the impact of the training on them and what had changed for them. As each participant engaged in using NSST in the interview, their experience of the workshop component was presented and articulated. Together we explored their sand tray pictures (Vilhauer, 2010). The questions asked were modified during each interview based on the participant’s choice and placement of figurines similar to a therapeutic sand tray session. All of the interviews had some elements of a regular counselling session, except that rather than projecting a problem into the sand tray, the majority of participants simply created images that showed the many gains they had made personally and professionally during the 2-day workshop component.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009) was used to explore the participants’ personal experience of the training in the NSST approach. IPA is informed by the theories, assumptions and practices underlying phenomenology, hermeneutics, idiography and social constructivism. The participants phenomenological accounts were generated from the pre-training questionnaire, the sand tray based interview component and a follow-up questionnaire. The data shared by each participant from each of their interviews was collected via videotape and photographs. They provided a rich source of material to gain insights into the participants’ personal growth experiences while learning the NSST approach within a transformative pedagogy. The data was coded and placed into clusters and ultimately seven themes emerged that form the basis of the findings. In addition, six thick descriptions were written to corroborate these findings (Denzin, 2001).

A follow-up questionnaire was sent out via email to assess if the changes that had occurred during the training were lasting. Of the 13 participants who replied, 12 said that the personal growth changes they had experienced at the end of the workshop component were still happening for them.
8.1. How Participants Experienced Personal Growth

8.1.1. Personal growth was experienced by participants becoming aware of their personal issues

This theme starts with the pre-training questionnaire (see Appendix C). Every participant was committed to learning and growing; however, for 11 participants, before the workshop component, they were singularly focused on learning skills and competencies to be a better therapist working in a play modality and didn’t mention personal growth.

It was only in the experiential parts of the workshop component, the practice triads and the demonstrations that they showed me and the other participants that they had become aware of personal issues. In many cases, they experienced the discomfort of facing themselves and reflected on the ways they had learned to keep safe. They were able to see themselves from a different perspective and bring their defences to conscious awareness, transform these defences and move through the metaphor of the figurines to a more integrated healthy sense of self. They changed their sense of themselves as needing to work on their personal growth when faced with a new way of looking at their self in the sand tray. This personal growth process is supported in the literature by: Mezirow, 1978; Mezirow, 1985; Porges, 2011; and Schön, 1983.

8.1.2. Personal growth was experienced by participants gaining a deep sense of connection to and freedom for self

In the interview component of the NSST training, many of the participants showed through their sand tray pictures how, in the workshop component of the previous 2 days, they had experienced profound dissonance. For 16 out of 17 this was followed by positive personal growth. They described their new sense of being in ways that showed they had found a new and deep connection to themselves and to their psyches and to something higher than normally experienced.

The majority of participants were able to access a mind/body implicit consciousness that they had not experienced before. Having the opportunity to encounter themselves through the metaphor of the figurines in the sand tray and within the safe, nurturing and emancipatory context of transformative pedagogy and learning,
they experienced images that were deeply emotionally charged. These encounters were described by the participants in many cases as sacred and spiritual. The integrated images at the end of the triads, demonstrations and interview component spoke to the participants experiencing themselves as more complete and whole.

The participants noted how the use of imagination and metaphor really helped them to move beyond the present and superficial to a deeper level because it awakened aspects of themselves that they hadn’t been aware of. Through the use of imagination with the figurines, other possibilities were explored. Working in the sand tray took the participants beyond the edge of themselves to take risks and try out more freely who they wanted to be. The participants had very moving transformational changes, shifts in their heart, their soul and their very being. Through the use of the figurines in the sand tray the participants were able to create new meanings of their worlds. Their spiritual lives were being nurtured through the use of their imagination.

The research training encouraged the participants to use their intuition at all times whether they were the therapist, star or observer. Using their intuition gave the participants permission to follow their gut and use the figurines in the sand tray which afforded them the ambiguity of trying, looking at and experiencing new ideas, new perspectives and new ways of being. They talked about having a new sense of confidence in themselves and they were excited about following their intuition in the future. Their intuition connected the understanding of their mind, their heart and their body. This finding of deep connection to self and freedom for self is supported in the literature by: Dirkx (2001, 2012); Dirkx and Mezirow (2006); English (2005); Greene (1995); Lawrence (2012); Marks-Tarlow (2012); Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007); Mezirow (1991); Mezirow and Taylor (2009); Reik (1948); Schore (2017); Siegel (2016b); Taylor (2001); and Tisdell (2003, 2012).

8.1.3. **Personal growth was experienced by participants finding a richer choice of feelings, perceptions and expectations for self**

The profound personal ah-ha moments which made the participants feel different about themselves and their work, allowed them to make new decisions for themselves.
Codes like awe, celebration and clarity, complete, delighted, more fun and more positive all suggest that the participants felt much better about themselves after the workshop component in terms of having a larger range of choice in how they felt and how they perceived themselves.

For example, one participant’s metaphor for herself was a transparent glass elephant up a tree. She said the elephant no longer needed to hide and was free to be vulnerable and also be open to innovation, creativity and change. Another participant saw himself differently for the first time when he saw a very old part of him, which he had always regarded as negative and shameful, transform to become a unique and a gift to him that freed him up to have more options.

Personal growth occurred for the participants when they brought previously unconscious right brain/body understandings of themselves to a conscious awareness. This gave them more choice about how they could be in the world. This transformational change process in counsellor education and transformative pedagogy and learning is supported in the literature by: Bratton et al., 1993; Brown, 2012; Mezirow and Taylor, 2009; Mitchell and Friedman, 1994; Paone et al., 2015; Schore, 2012; Stark et al., 2011.

8.1.4. Personal growth was experienced by participants becoming aware of their bodies and having freedom from physical pain

The research participants experienced changes in their bodies as they were pushed out of their comfort zones. There were ample opportunities for them to experience themselves differently in their bodies. Accessing what was going on in their bodies was a key element of the NSST workshop component and emerged clearly in the interview component as a significant result. The participants were encouraged to be in touch with their bodies directly but also indirectly through embracing the concepts of integration and the mind/body connection. These opportunities afforded some profound experiences of “embracing the spirit of human experiences and development, which are whole and integrated and not separatist” (Freiler, 2009, p. 456).

The participants were encouraged to reflect on the release of tensions in their bodies and on their tears, sighs, deep breaths and smiles. They were able to articulate profound physical and in some cases lasting transformations in their bodies.
None of the participants had hitherto made any connection between their emotional challenges and their somatic discomforts. In the training, the participants realised and embraced these connections in ah-ha moments, which further enhanced these physical changes.

These findings are now supported by an increasingly impressive range of disciplines, such as Carroll (n.d.), Churchill (1998), Diaz (2010a), Freiler (2009), Lipton (2015), Mathew (1998), Merleau-Ponty (1962), Merriam et al. (2007), Quillman (2011), Smith et al. (2009).

8.1.5. **Personal growth was experienced by participants discovering powerful new insights about their past self**

The research participants gained powerful insights about their past selves through their triad work and as stars in the demonstrations. These insights were represented through the metaphor of the figurines during the interview component. Their past experiences had been mostly in their implicit memory and had not been in their conscious awareness. Fifteen of them were unaware of their limitations personally until they had the opportunity to explore their defences to fear and their yearnings to be free of their defences. The NSST approach and the safe, nurturing and liberating context of a transformative pedagogy proved very helpful in bringing these implicit memories into conscious awareness where they could be unpacked. The positive parts of their defences could then be retained and embraced, and the negative aspects let go. This is supported by De Little (2015b) and by the work of Schore (personal communication, 2017).

8.1.6. **Personal growth was experienced by participants feeling more effective, competent, and confident personally and professionally**

This study illustrated how the research participants felt more confident in their personal lives and in their work. Many stated that they would be able to help their clients better. Months after the workshop component, those that replied to the follow-up questionnaire reported that they still felt more personally confident and how this had helped them professionally. Participants said, in various ways, that this NSST approach coupled with the safe and nurturing and liberating environment of the training,
transformational pedagogy was largely responsible for their personal and subsequently their professional growth.

This provided further confirmation of the findings of Manthei and Tuck (1980), Norcross et al. (1992), Norcross and Guy (2005), Norcross et al. (1988), and Orlinsky et al. (2005).

8.2. How Transformative Pedagogy Foregrounded Understanding

8.2.1. Participants said that they felt nurtured, safe, and free.

The second purpose of this study was to explore, “How might transformative pedagogy foreground understanding in ways that foster personal growth opportunities among counselling students and qualified counsellors engaged in learning NSST?” This theme addresses this question.

Throughout the workshop and interview component, all of the elements of transformational pedagogy and transformative learning theory were brought to bear on the participants learning; for example, positive communication (Moir-Bussy, 2010), critical reflection and reflective discourse (Mezirow, 1978, 1985, 1991, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2003), the experience of spirituality and soul work (Dirkx, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2012; Tisdell, 2003), the power of the emotions and the expression of implicit memory (Taylor, 2001), reflection in action and intuition (Hoshmand, 2004; Lawrence, 2009, 2012; Marks-Tarlow 2012; Schön, 1983), the use of the body to inform the impact of an experience (Freiler, 2009), the positive relationship between teacher and learner (Clark, 1993; Cranton, 2006; Daloz, 1986; Taylor, 2000a, 2000b), the importance of neuroscience in understanding how the two hemispheres learn and work together (McGilchrist, 2009), and a holistic approach to learning (Papastamatis & Panitsides, 2014).

Several participants stated how the nurturing and care provided a safe place for their personal and liberating journey of taking risks, being vulnerable and being able to self-reflect on their inner world and their relationship with others. The transformational pedagogy of this study allowed for the social engagement system to come on-line and for the work to begin of creating a securely attached relationship with self and other in
the therapy work of triads and demonstrations, which in turn encouraged transformational change and personal growth. At least six participants specifically talked about the safety of the workshop. The coming online of the social engagement system also enhanced the teacher/participant relationship. Transformative learning happened because the social engagement system allowed the participants to feel safe and nurtured enough and subsequently liberated enough to reflect on their experiences of the workshop component and be fully open to change and to integrating their new understandings about themselves and their newly-acquired skills. There were specific statements about the safe and nurturing atmosphere that was created in the workshop that allowed participants to be open to learning skills and learning about themselves. This theme of nurturing, creating safety and creating feelings of liberation is critical to learning and is supported by the work of: Clark 1993; Cozolino, n.d.; Dirkx, 2012; Fenwick, 2011; McGilchrist, 2009; Porges, 2011; Schore, 2003, 2009, 2012, 2015a, 2015b; Taylor, 2000b; Valliant, 2008.

The experience for 16 out of 17 of the participants was positive and moving, with tears of joy, hope and happiness as they experienced themselves differently. The seventeenth participant said that she had a negative experience in the workshop. This view provided the researcher with some valuable information (see Linda’s thick description).

### 8.3. Implications for Counsellor Education

8.3.1. **Implication 1:**

**Transformative pedagogy is an effective way to encourage personal growth in counsellor education students**

A key implication from this research is that transformative pedagogy appears to foster personal growth in counsellor education students. The personal growth of counsellors, which is needed to prepare them for the work of helping others with their personal growth, needs to be more front and centre. Throughout all the aspects of the counsellor education programming, transformative pedagogy can inform the teaching of counselling skills to encourage the personal growth of the counselling students. The impact of the counsellor education process on the student’s personal growth is as important, if not more important, than the learning of the theory and practicing of the
skills and approaches. This is supported by the work of Schore (personal communication, 2017). This focus would entail, for some counsellor education programs, a re-emphasising of teaching modalities in line with those used in this study, that is, a transformative pedagogy that is most likely to bring about transformational change and personal growth in the counselling students.

The teaching modalities emphasized in this study, which most promote personal growth, provide a good model for counsellor education planners to adopt. They are arranged here in the order that the researcher felt they most impacted the personal growth of the participants in this research:

1. Modeling congruency and secure attachment to self;
2. Facilitating group self-reflection by the students;
3. Facilitating experiential triad practice of the counselling approach to be learnt;
4. Demonstrating the approach to be learnt;
5. Showing, by video and photograph, examples of how the approach is used;
6. Facilitating discussion on the theory and practice of the approach;
7. Didactic teaching of the theory and practice of the approach.

8.3.2. Implication 2: Facilitating opportunities to develop the different aspects of personal growth in counsellor education

Counsellor education programmers might want to consider different aspects of personal growth when planning curricula and implementing transformative pedagogy. The themes of personal growth of the participants that emerged from this research might inform those considerations.

Facilitating a changing awareness of personal issues.

First, it might be helpful for counsellor educators to adopt the assumption that students coming into the program will be, to some extent, unaware of their personal issues. The transformative pedagogy modalities that are most emphasized should therefore be the ones most likely to highlight the students growing awareness of their personal issues, for example, the teacher facilitating self-reflection in the group throughout the training.
**Facilitating a deep connection to and freedom for self.**

The teaching modalities in counsellor education could usefully be set up so that the students may have a deeper awareness of their grounded and liberated connection to self. For example, the teaching modality of demonstration by the teacher, showing how this is achieved with a student as the client, could give that student and the observing students the experience of deep connection to self and freedom for self.

**Creating opportunities to gain a richer choice of feelings, perceptions, and expectations for self.**

The teaching modalities that could most encourage the students to embrace having more choice in their lives and more choice in how they can eventually work as counsellors could be emphasized. Demonstrations can promote this personal growth gain and so could the facilitation of triad work and the facilitation of self-reflection and discussion in the group.

**Focusing on body awareness.**

This aspect of personal growth would be promoted by the experiential teaching modalities, the triad work and the demonstrations by the teacher where the mind/body connection is being consistently emphasized. It would also be promoted by the teacher showing examples of therapy work where the client’s and therapist’s body awareness was particularly important and/or where notable freedom from body pain was achieved.

**Addressing the past.**

The powerful insights about the students’ past could be addressed most readily by using the teaching modalities that create safety and nurturing. Modeling by the teacher of a securely attached, congruent self would be central to promoting this aspect of personal growth. Also helpful would be the teacher facilitating self-reflection and discussions in the group that encouraged students to share the discomfort of their past challenges that emerge from their triad work and the demonstrations.

**Promoting the development of effectiveness, competence, and confidence personally and professionally.**

Another implication of this study is that counsellor education can achieve the goals of helping students to integrate new skills and approaches while actively encouraging their personal growth. The didactic teaching is only part of the work
(Teaching Modality 7). The integration of the skills and approaches by student counsellors comes about side by side with their personal growth. The integration is the result of the dialectical relationship between personal growth and the learning of counselling skills and approaches. This integration leads to effectiveness, competence and confidence, personally and professionally. This study suggests that Teaching Modalities 1 to 6 would best facilitate that necessary integration and would allow the students to graduate and to use their skills and approaches effectively in the personal and professional domains. For example, modeling by the teacher of the use of self, of personal confidence and professional competence throughout the course curricula would be critical here. Also important could be the teacher facilitating self-reflection in the group and facilitating experiential triad work, doing the demonstrations, showing videos of use of the skill and approach and facilitating discussion of the theory and practice of the skill and approach.

**Creating the context to feel nurtured and safe.**

Using transformative pedagogy in counsellor education would create an authentic safe and trusting context for the students to be able to take risks with their vulnerability. Through their experiences and self-reflection in the triad work, they would be more likely experience personal growth.

### 8.3.3. Implication 3:
**Right-brain to right-brain non-verbal strategies in counsellor education**

The recent neuroscience understandings about right brain/body non-verbal communication described by Schore (2012) and the polyvagal system described by Porges (2011) should be given greater emphasis in counsellor education. Further, the teaching of the counselling approaches that primarily use right-brain to right-brain, non-verbal communication should be prioritized in counsellor education in order to promote personal growth. Among these would be Transformational Systemic Therapy (Satir et al., 1991), art therapy, play therapy and sand tray therapy. This study has shown how the teaching of the NSST approach has been successful in promoting personal growth. The NSST approach could be used as a template for the teaching of sand tray therapy and other expressive, experiential counselling approaches.
8.3.4. **Implication 4:**
*A paradigm shift in counsellor education using full-day immersion sessions*

An implication from the findings of this study is that the emphasis on a right-brain to right-brain approach in therapy is best taught and learned through full immersion sessions, such as was used in this research study. The teaching, for example, of NSST would be best done by immersing the students in a series of full-day trainings. For this approach to training and for the transformative pedagogy being suggested by this study, in particular in order to experience the benefits of the group, cohorts would also be necessary.

8.3.5. **Implication 5:**
*Building upon current strategies in counsellor education for promoting personal growth*

There is a consensus in the literature that personal growth should be promoted in counsellor education. However, there are widely different opinions on how this is to be done. Some of the strategies currently used in counsellor education could be enhanced. For example, ongoing supervision could be used to explore and supervise the impact of the skills training on students' personal growth.

8.3.6. **Implication 6:**
*Existing strategies need to be adjuncts not alternatives*

Another implication about current strategies used in counsellor education programs for promoting personal growth, for example personal group work, supervision and personal therapy, is that they should be adjuncts to implications 1 to 4 above and should not be alternatives.

8.3.7. **Implication 7:**
*Modelling in counsellor education*

Teachers in counsellor education need to be effective and competent practicing counsellors, in order to do the modeling, the demonstrations and the facilitating of triad work and discussions that is required by the suggestions for counsellor education being promoted here.
8.3.8. **Implication 8:**

**A British Columbia and Canadian Counsellors Council**

There needs to be continued discussion with the Federation of Associations for Counselling Therapists in British Columbia about setting up basic counsellor education requirements with regard to personal growth. This would ensure consistency of counsellor education across Canada and British Columbia. These requirements would rule out any online counsellor education.

### 8.4. Limitations of The Research

- The study used a small sample size that enabled the researcher to explore the rich and diverse meanings of each participant but this does not afford generalizations beyond those who participated.
- This research quality is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher and more easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies.
- As a consequence of this dependency on the individual skills of the researcher, rigor is more difficult to maintain, assess and demonstrate.
- There was considerable amount of data and it made the analysis and interpretation extremely time consuming.
- The researcher's presence during data gathering in the interview component was unavoidable in this research and may have had an affect on the participants' responses.
- The participants agreed and signed off to having their faces photographed and used in this study. Whilst their names were changed, issues of anonymity and confidentiality and sensitive material were clearly associated with some of the participants.
- The presenting of the individual placement and choice of figurines made the findings more complex and time consuming to characterize in a visual way.
- Caution has to be taken when comparing the eight post-training questionnaires returned after three months with the five post-training questionnaires returned at 20 months.

### 8.5. Strengths of the Research

- The issues were examined in detail and in depth thematically and in the rich descriptions.
- The interviews used open questions using the sand tray and not restricted to specific questions and were guided by the researcher in real time.
- The data was based on the phenomenological account of the participants which proved powerful and compelling.
- The qualitative nature of this research afforded the subtleties and nuances of the participant’s changes in their experience.
- The data was collected from 17 participants and the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population. However, they are transferable to other similar settings.

8.6. Directions for Future Research

The findings of this research provide a useful starting point for further discussion in the area of personal growth, counsellor education, transformative pedagogy, transformative learning, transformational change and NSST.

- There needs to be further research about the personal growth opportunities that are afforded in undergraduate and graduate counsellor education as part of the theory and skills training.
- Research is required to develop an efficient, fair and appropriate screening process for applicants to counsellor education programs. There is a clear, resounding call for research into what is needed to screen applicants to ensure they have both academic ability and the openness to self-reflect, take risks and be vulnerable in their counsellor education program.
- Further research similar to this study is required to determine the effectiveness of using transformative pedagogy with the teaching of other counselling strategies in the promotion of personal growth.
- More research is needed into how transformative pedagogy can lead to release of pain.
- Longitudinal research is required into the efficacy of transformative pedagogy.
- Longitudinal research is needed into the efficacy of NSST with children and adults.
- There needs to be more research into the availability of programs at the master’s level in counselling for children. This would include play therapy, art therapy and NSST.
8.7. Concluding Thoughts

Finally, I’d like to return to how this thesis started and to continue my story.

All the work that has gone into the thesis, the literature review, the workshops, the data collection and the analysis has produced some affirmations of what I have known all along, some useful findings and also some new realizations. Just like the unearthing process of therapy where embodied memories are brought to consciousness, so these affirmations, findings and realizations have emerged.

Doing the research for this study has affirmed what I have been doing in therapy in the sand tray and in teaching NSST and has taught me about the importance of the context of therapy and training.

There were four main contributing factors to the outcomes of this study. Together they contributed to the personal growth of the participants that happened over 3 days: A transformative pedagogy, the application of neuroscience, the use of Satir’s TST and my particular sand tray approach.

I don’t know which of these factors contributed the most to the participants’ personal growth. There isn’t a clear line of cause and effect. This was fundamentally an exercise in the intersubjective relationship between teacher and student within a transformative pedagogy. I thought that this, in itself, would bring about personal growth of the participants. In addition, I had them learning in every possible way about a counselling approach that in my experience would be profoundly transformational. The research into this I knew was not going to be simple. It was going to be about a dynamic, reciprocal and mutual transformational process for the participants and myself.

The comments the participants made in the interview component in the six themes lead me to believe that these gains in personal growth happened in part, specifically, because of experiencing the deep and lasting impact of the NSST approach. Being trained in the NSST approach, being immersed in it as the receiver of therapy as a star, practicing being the therapist, observing demonstrations of sand tray work by myself and fellow students and learning about the theory of NSST were hugely impactful for all the participants.
Transformative pedagogy allowed me to get really close to the participants, to have a deep and close relationship with them and in so doing, see the process unfolding of their personal growth. I watched them struggling, wanting to be different but not knowing how. I witnessed ah-ha moments. I witnessed changes in whole body postures, facial expressions and voice tone. I could feel the changes of energy flow and I would say to the participant “Your face looks different.” I had to go into my right brain and into my own body to access this information about them, to see the participants this way, to feeling myself feeling their growth process. I had to be grounded, holding them as they moved through their disorienting dilemmas. This required extreme tenderness and sensitivity. They had default ways of coping, which I helped them transform through the power of the use of metaphor in the sand tray. This was in many cases extremely uncomfortable for them. I had to be sure of myself to deal with the ensuing chaos of transformational change. There was an understanding of the importance of observing the tiny nuanced transformational shifts.

All this made my role as teacher a delicate and privileged position. It was an honour.

I leave the reader with Martha’s words who continues to be free of back pain after her participation in this research, "I left feeling like I was part of something that will grow and transform counselling."
References


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243


Siegel, D. J. (2016b). *Dan Siegel: Me + We = MWe* (You Tube). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uo8Yo4UE6g0


van der Kolk, B. A. (2015, March 6-8). *Trauma’s devastating impact on imagination and its restoration with focused play, theater and rhythmical engagement*. Paper presented at the annual Interpersonal Neurobiology Conference “Play, Creativity, Mindfulness and Neuroscience in Psychotherapy” held at the UCLA Extension and the Lifespan Learning Institute, University of California (Los Angeles), Los Angeles, CA.


Appendix A. Participant Recruitment Invitation

Application #2014s0175
Office use only participant ID ______________________

Invitation to be part of my Ph.D. research at Simon Fraser University

Madeleine De Little

Transformative learning in the training of therapists:
Exploring the impacts of a multimodal, experiential, play-based therapeutic approach

Name of Principal Investigator: Madeleine De Little
Name of Supervisor: Dr Susan O’Neill
Department: Faculty of Education
Simon Fraser University
British Columbia, Canada

I wish to invite you to participate in my research on the impact of the training of using the sand tray with the Satir transformative systemic therapeutic model. This model combines the work of Virginia Satir and sand play. It is extremely helpful model as the solutions are found in images of the client’s internal world.

The research will be free to participants and will comprise two days of training and then a videoed session with each participant and myself on how the training has impacted you. This will be followed up three months later by a questionnaire. The initial data will be collected in the form of you illustrating your experience of the training in the sand tray. The training will be at my playroom in ______________________________. I will be offering six different weekends from February 2015 until June 2015 for you to choose from.

Part of the training will involve demonstrations like this.

If you are interested please feel free to contact me via email at ______________________ or by phone at ______________________.

December 26, 2014
Appendix B. Pre-Screening Questionnaire

Pre-Screening Questionnaire, Application #2014s0175

Transformative learning in the training of therapists: Exploring the impacts of a multimodal, experiential, play-based therapeutic approach of therapy?

Name of Principal Investigator: Madeleine De Little
Supervisor: Dr Susan O’Neill
Department: Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada

1. What is the title of your master’s degree that you are currently studying or have achieved?

2. What experience have you had with learning and or using the Satir transformational systemic therapeutic model? Please explain below.

3. What experience have you had learning and/ or using playtherapy? Please explain below.

Pre-Screening Questionnaire
4. What experience have you had learning and/or using sand tray techniques? Please explain below.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5. What *personal growth* opportunities have been afforded you during your training / since your training? Please explain below any changes or new decisions that you experienced during or after the session(s).

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________


________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Please bring this completed form to the first session.

Madeleine De Little

Pre-Screening Questionnaire
Appendix C. Pre-Training Questionnaire

Office use only participant ID__________________

Pre-Training Questionnaire

*What evidence is there of transformative learning in the training of therapists in a particular multi modal, experiential, play-based method of therapy?*

Name of Principal Investigator: Madeleine De Little
Name of Supervisor: Dr Susan O’Neill
Department: Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,
British Columbia, Canada

1. What do you need from the group?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. What do you need from the teacher?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. What are your personal growth goals during this training?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. What is the most important outcome for you personally in this workshop?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5. What are you able to contribute to the learning?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

6. Any other comments?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

258
Appendix D. Letter of Consent

2014s0485

Transformative learning in the training of therapists: Exploring the impacts of a multimodal, experiential, play-based therapeutic approach

Name of Principal Investigator: Madeleine De Little.
Supervisor: Dr. Susan O’Neill
Department: Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada

Informed Consent by Participants in a Research Study

The letter of consent will be signed and returned on the day of the first training.

Simon Fraser University and Madeleine De Little, the researcher conducting this research study, subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of participants. This research is being conducted under permission of the Simon Fraser Research Ethics Board. The chief concern of the board is for the health, safety and psychological well-being of research participants. Should you wish to obtain information about your rights as a participant in research, please contact the principal investigator Madeleine De Little by phone at [redacted] or email [redacted]. Please direct any concerns and / or complaints about the manner in which you were treated in this study, to the Director, Office of Research Ethics, Dr. Jeff Toward 778-782-6593, email [redacted].

Your signature on this form will signify that you have received this document which describes the procedures, that you have reviewed all five pages of this document, considered whether there are possible risks, and benefits of this research study, that you have received an adequate opportunity to consider the information in the documents describing the study, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

Name and Contact of Principal Investigator:
Madeleine De Little, Arts Education
Tel: [redacted], Email: [redacted]

Name and contact of director of program:
Dr. Susan O’Neill
Tel: 778 329 6375, Email: [redacted]

Collaborators:
There will be an assistant Jim Edmondson, who is a qualified counsellor and a student of past training in Satir in the sand tray, working with me to videotape the interviews and to assist with any concerns as they arise.

Investigator name:
Madeleine De Little, Arts Education
Purpose and goals of this study:
You are being invited to participate in this research project.

The purpose of this research project will provide the necessary evidence of transformative learning in therapist trained in a multi modal, experiential, play-based method of therapy.

The empirical objective is to find what evidence is there of transformative learning in the training of therapists in a multi modal, experiential, play-based method of therapy?

What the participants will be required to do:
Your participation in this study is being sought in your capacity as an already qualified or in training therapist to explore what evidence there is of transformative learning in the training of therapists in a multi modal, experiential, play-based method of therapy?

You have already received and completed the pre-screening survey to inform me of your qualifications, your current methods of practice and any previous knowledge you have of Satir transformational systemic therapeutic model (none is required), playtherapy or sand tray therapy.

You will be required to spend 2 days (12 hours) learning the theory and practice of the “Satir in the sand tray model” and how to ask questions of the images presented in the sand tray. You will be given a theoretical basis for the work, watch me demonstrate and for you to practice being a therapist with a ‘star and an observer’. In these ‘practice sessions’ you will be invited to work on your own personal concerns / issues. On the third day after completion of the training you will be asked to spend one hour with me making a sand tray to illustrate the impact the training has had on you personally. This session will be videoed. The post-training interview using the sand tray will be video recorded. Faces of the participants will be on the video. The researcher and the supervisor only will view these video recordings. The recordings will be saved under the assigned pseudonym. Once transcription has taken place of the video recordings all the data will be erased by a member of the university technical support team.

You will also be invited three months after your research workshop via email to fill out a questionnaire to follow up on your experience during the training.

Risks to the participant, third parties or society:
There are no risks to you physically. You may be impacted emotionally, by becoming aware of your fears, your personal weaknesses, low self-esteem, shame or guilt, but your triad group, my qualified assistant (who is trained in Satir in the sand tray) and/or myself will support you if necessary. No permission will be required from your organization of employment to participate in this study.

Benefits of study to the development of new knowledge:
The results of the research will inform potential future improvements of my training of therapists in the SST model. You will benefit from the research, as you will gain invaluable professional skills and more personal awareness of yourself.
Request to withdraw from the study:
You are under no obligation to participate in the research interview and you are free to withdraw at any time without any prejudice. You will be given information throughout the study information that may be important for you to know to decide whether to withdraw or continue. Refusal to participate or withdrawal/dropout after agreeing to participate will have no adverse effect or consequences on your employment or education.

The measures to be undertaken for dissemination of research results:
I will disseminate the outcomes of my research through scholarly publications and conference presentations, and to educators, program directors through a report that will be posted on our research project website. You will be given access to the results.

Statement of confidentiality:
You may request that your identity remain confidential to the extent allowed by the law.

Duty to disclose information:
If information shared in the training or the research interview discloses that you are considering danger to yourself or other the researcher has a duty to report this to the authorities.

Commercialization of findings:
The research findings may be used as a basis for a book written by the researcher.

Payments:
The 3-day workshop is free for all participants.

Conflict of interest:
There is no conflict of interest on the part of the researcher, the supervisor or Simon Fraser University.

Research related harm:
By consenting to participate in this study you have not waived any rights to legal recourse in the event of any research related harm.

Interview of employees about their company or agency:
You will not be asked questions of your company or agency.

Inclusion of names of participants in reports of the study:
Knowledge of your identity is not required.

Contact of participants at a future time or use of the data in other studies:
The information you have contributed may be used in future studies that may be similar (or dissimilar) and may require future contact with you. You can opt out of further contact below.

You may obtain copies of the results of this study upon its completion by contacting:
Madeleine De Little
Email: [Redacted], Phone number: [Redacted]
Having been asked to participate in the research study named above:
  o I certify that I have read the procedures specified in this document (pages 1-3) describing the study.
  o I understand that I will have my interview using the sand tray videoed taped and my face will be seen on the video.
  o I understand that the researcher will follow up via email with a written questionnaire after three months of my training.
  o I understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time.
  o I understand that I may register any complaint with the Director of the Office of Research Ethics.
  o I understand the procedures to be used in this study and the emotional risks to me in taking part in the study.
  o I understand that my email address and cell phone number will be required.

Please check one of the following:
☐ I do /don’t agree to further contact
☐ I consent /do not consent to my identity being used in this study.

Signature: ________________________________

Date: YY/MM/DD: __________________________

Participant Last Name: ______________________

Participant First Name: ______________________

Participant’s email: _________________________

Participants cell phone number: _________________________
Appendix E. Post-Training Questionnaire

Office use only participant ID______________

Post-Training Questionnaire, Application #2014s0175

What evidence is there of transformative learning in the training of therapists in a particular multi modal, experiential, play-based method of therapy?

Name of Principal Investigator: Madeleine De Little
Name of Supervisor: Dr Susan O’Neill
Department: Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University,
British Columbia, Canada

1. What personal growth goal(s) did you set for yourself before the training began?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. Describe what are the changes for you personally if you met these goals and if so how you are different now three months later.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. How do others know you are different now?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Post-Training Questionnaire 1 September 1, 2014
Office use only participant ID ______________

4. Explain any other personal growth changes you have experienced as a result of the training.

________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

5. What was one area specifically that changed for you during the workshop and how are you impacted now?

________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

6. Any other comments that you wish to share about the workshop?

________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

Thank you very much for your time and commitment to my research.
Madeleine De Little

Please scan and email it to ________________________________

or

Mail to:
Madeleine De Little

Post-Training Questionnaire 2 September 1, 2014
## Appendix F. Table of Themes, Clusters, and Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Themes</th>
<th>Clusters</th>
<th>Original codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Theme 1: Becoming aware of personal issues

#### Self-exploration shame, acceptance
- Be less of an Introvert
- Different level of shame
- Step outside comfort zone

#### Personal growth leads to being a better counsellor
- Awareness of self
- Impact on clients
- Personal growth improves me professionally

#### Family of Origin
- Deep loving acceptance

#### Professional growth goals
- Be a better therapist
- Bridging gap between theory and practice
- Expand knowledge
- Experiencing the sand tray from a child’s perspective

#### Feasible/experiential
- Feeling comfortable with the sand tray
- Grounded in Satir model
- Head knowledge
- Interpret sand tray work
- More confident
- More competent
- More effective

- Tap in to my internal world
- Personal growth improves me professionally
- Examining family system
- Reconnect
- Return to doing counselling
- Right-brain work
- Skills in sand tray therapy
- Understand play therapy
- Understand sand tray therapy
## Superordinate Themes
### Clusters
- Original codes

### Theme 2: Deep sense of connection to and freedom for self

#### Intuition
- Beautiful moments
- Clarity
- Getting out of brain
- Gift
- Heart first
- Information from mind and body
- Insightful
- Intuition
- Listen to my body
- Listening to myself
- New lens
- Sacred
- Telepathic communication
- Trust yourself
- Trusting instincts
- Wisdom

#### Soul Work
- Aware
- Awe and grief
- Connected to God
- Deep down
- Feel the presence of other
- Full of light
- Full of possibilities
- Gift
- Grounded
- Hard to find the words
- Heart first
- Light (shine)
- Lighter (weight)
- Mindful
- Open
- Powerful
- Sacred

#### Self-love
- Acceptance of self
- Appreciation
- Be compassionate
- Beautiful
- Better care of self, Deep
- Deserve better
- Gift
- Important
- Light
- Love self
- Love others
- Precious
- Self-worth
- Stand along side self
- Stronger
- Taken out of the shadows
- Taking care of self
- Uncovering things that got lost
- Wholeness

#### Imagination and magic
- Fairy godmother (self)
- Gift
- Jewels (self)
- Opportunities
- Playfulness
- Proud
- Treasure
- Trust ideas to appear
- Sacred
- Wizard
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Themes</th>
<th>Clusters</th>
<th>Original codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peace and freedom</td>
<td>• Appreciate • At ease • Calmer • Complete • Focused • Freedom • Heal • Heart first • Joy</td>
<td>• Keep learning • Less scared • Light • Magic • Nurturing • Open/opening • Peace • Quieter • Senses awakening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Soothing • Stand along side self • Strength • Taller • To be lighter • To enjoy me • To feel at peace • Welcoming • Wonder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 3: Richer choice of feelings, perceptions and expectations for self**

**Choice in feelings about self**
- Adventure
- Authentic
- Awe and grief
- Celebration
- Childlike
- Clarity
- Clearheaded
- Complete
- Curious
- Delighted
- Emotional
- Enjoy (me)
- Excited
- Fascinating
- Feeling of wonder
- Happier
- Heal
- Learning
- More fun
- More positive
- Playful
- Stronger
- Wholeness

**Choice of perceptions of self and others**
- Colleagues noticed
- Competent
- Confident
- Direction
- Family noticed (more calm)
- Future positive
- Growth
- Happier
- I am the sand tray
- Living freely
- Looked at differently
- New direction
- Relaxed
- Rested
- Seeing self and others differently
- Seeing the world differently
- Transparent

**Choice of expectations of self and others**
- Another way of being
- Burden
- Choice
- Choice to be playful and light
- Responsible
- Rule Follower
- Should be better
### Superordinate Themes

#### Clusters
- Original codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 4: Body awareness and freedom from physical pain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive physical changes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Awareness of blanking out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Awareness of dissociation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Change in heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clear headed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deep breaths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Different (experiencing self)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Excitement in chest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Felt like smiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Awareness of blanking out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lighter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No longer anxious,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Peace in body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Plodding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relaxation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Awareness of blanking out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Awareness of dissociation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Awareness of dissociation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Awareness of blanking out</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lighter</td>
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<tr>
<td>• No longer anxious,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Peace in body</td>
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<td>• Plodding</td>
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<td>• Protected</td>
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<td>• Relaxed</td>
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<td>• Awareness of blanking out</td>
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<td>• Awareness of dissociation</td>
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<td>• Awareness of blanking out</td>
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<td>• Lighter</td>
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<td>• No longer anxious,</td>
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<td>• Peace in body</td>
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<td>• Plodding</td>
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<td>• No longer anxious,</td>
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<td>• Peace in body</td>
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<td>• Plodding</td>
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<td>• Relaxed</td>
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<td>• Awareness of blanking out</td>
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<td>• Awareness of dissociation</td>
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<td>• Awareness of blanking out</td>
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<td>• Lighter</td>
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<td>• No longer anxious,</td>
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<td>• Peace in body</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Plodding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Protected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative physical changes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Awareness of sadness behind the eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Awareness of tightness in chest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Awareness of voice barely audible</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 5: Powerful new insights about past self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarity about negative feelings and perceptions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Aggressive</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Disorganized</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fearful</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fiery</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Frustrated</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Awareness of sadness behind the eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Awareness of tightness in chest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Awareness of voice barely audible</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Grief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hopeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Naive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Negativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overwhelmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Protected</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Spread out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Struggle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stuck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarity of potential</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Becoming more balanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Curious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Good foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hibernation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Imagine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Less buried</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Playful</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reserved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Clarity about unmet expectations</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Burden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confused</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fearful</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Logical</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lone</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Spread out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unresolved issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Yearning for freedom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Superordinate Themes

**Clusters**
- Original codes

### Theme 6: Being effective, competent, confident personally and professionally

#### Personal confidence in their private lives
- Accept feedback
- Authentic
- Brave
- Confidence
- Concrete
- Forward movement
- Grounded
- Light

#### Personal confidence in their professional lives
- Affirmation
- Assertive
- Brave
- Better equipped
- Clarity
- Confidence
- Courage
- Empowered

### Theme 7: Feelings of being nurtured and safe

(no cluster)
- Accepting
- Caring
- Comfort
- Context (importance of)
- Empathy
- Energy
- Felt love
- Free to be creative
- Gentleness
- Gift

- Group of genuine people
- Inspiration
- Intimacy
- Keep me safe
- Making music together
- Nurturing
- Safe enough to experience
- Safe enough to get into heart
- Safe enough to get out of head

- Safe enough to play
- Softness
- Soothing
- Protection (before)
- Protective
- Relationship
- Richness,
- Supporting
- Thankful
- Warmth of others
Appendix G. Frequency of Endorsement of Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Theme 1</th>
<th>Theme 2</th>
<th>Theme 3</th>
<th>Theme 4</th>
<th>Theme 5</th>
<th>Theme 6</th>
<th>Theme 7</th>
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Notes: Theme 1. Being aware of the need for personal growth (A=Self-exploration, shame acceptance; B=Personal growth leads to being a better counsellor; C=Family of origin; D=Professional goals); Theme 2. Deep sense of connection to and freedom for 'self' (E=Intuition; F=Soul work; G=Self-love; H=Imagination and magic; I=Peace and freedom); Theme 3. Richer choice of feelings, perceptions and expectations for self (J=Choice in feelings of 'self'; K=Choice in perceptions of 'self'; L=Choice in expectations of 'self'); Theme 4. Body awareness and freedom from physical pain (M=Positive physical Change; N=Negative physical changes); Theme 5. Powerful new insights about past self (O=Clarity about negative feelings and perceptions; P=Clarity of potential; Q=Clarity about unmet expectations); Theme 6. Being effective, competent, confident, personally and professionally (R=Personal confidence in their private lives; S=Professional confidence in their professional lives); Theme 7. Feelings of being nurtured, and safe (T=Feelings of being nurtured, and safe).