

SPANNING THE GREAT DIVIDE
STA NATIONAL CONFERENCE
Boulder, 2010

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The conference had the quality of a barn-raising. The hands of many STA members worked together from the ground-up to provide a friendly, thoughtful, and abundant community experience. International presenters traveled long distances from Italy, Taiwan, Brazil and South Korea, along with presenters from across the United States, to share their work.

Reflecting the conference theme, workshop titles included words such as “divide, bridge, join, transform, split, embodied, battle, descent, containment, and edge.” Presenters shared how the process of sandplay bridges and transcends. Sessions explored the application of sandplay therapy across the life cycle, and with a variety of populations. Keeping with the hands-on quality of the conference, it was notable that experiential workshops integrating sandplay with art, dance, and movement, were also on the program.

At the Members meeting on Thursday, there was a viewing of excerpts from a videotaped interview Audrey Punnett did with STA/ISST founding member Kay Bradway. Kay provided a warm welcome, and some good perspective on the history of sandplay therapy. Having retired from practice for some time, Kay, now in her 90s, stated she now “collects friends.” Her words set a warm and collegial tone.

Friday morning Gita Morena provided an inspirational opening keynote: “Marking Moments of Connection in Sandplay.” In an archetypal image-filled presentation connecting nature, brain research, and the ego-self axis, she explored how sandplay helps span or bridge great divides within the psyche. Moments of bridging connect newly discovered aspects of oneself. She described “spanning” as an action which “requires intense concentration, flexibility, and agility,” along with presence of mind, body and spirit.

Aside from a rich palette of workshop choices from national and international presenters, there were several plenary sessions in which the entire community gathered to learn together. The journey of individuation and movement towards the Self through sandplay was explored through many lenses, including Tibetan Buddhism, alchemy, symbolic and thematic approaches, and relationship with the natural world

Creating connections and spanning geographical divides between the membership was another theme, as regional groups met for lunch and networking on Saturday. David Capitulo provided a map of the United States in which he outlined where sandplay therapists lived, worked and trained. This meeting provided the opportunity for participants to meet and share resources with one another and support continued regional growth so more people can experience and learn about sandplay therapy.

As connections and collaborations strengthen in the sandplay community, so it seems that sandplay therapy itself continues to be building a firm foundation of training and education. This Boulder conference seemed to reflect the continuing growth and evolution in all these areas.

Laura Soble is a member of Sandplay Therapists of America, the International Society for Sandplay Therapy and vice-president of NCRSS.