




**College of Education**  
**Announcement of Dissertation Defense**

Student Name Mindy A. Parson	Date of Defense 09/23/2013	Time 1:00 pm	Room Number 280	Building COE
Major Advisor Dr. Paul R. Peluso	Signature 			
Dissertation Committee Member Dr. Len Sperry, Counselor Education, College of Education	Department		College	
Dissertation Committee Member Dr. Jon Sperry, Counselor Education, College of Education				
Dissertation Committee Member Dr. Elizabeth Villares, Counselor Education, College of Education		Department		College
Department Chair Dr. Paul R. Peluso				
<b>Title:</b> Using the Symbolic Expression of Sand Tray to Kinesthetically Connect to the Inner Cognitions of Individuals Diagnosed with a Dementing Illness				

**ABSTRACT**

This qualitative case study investigated the impact of sand tray on individuals diagnosed with Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia. Four participants successfully completed the creation of sand trays while the researcher observed, interviewed, and documented the individual sand trays. The intervention sought to establish that sand tray allows the dementia patient to kinesthetically connect to their inner cognitions through the intentional symbolic expression offered by this unique therapeutic medium. Using a series of eight sand trays of varying thematic concepts, the participants were offered a modality to facilitate a synthesization of their continued individuation, presenting a possible neural pathway to connect and express thoughts, feelings, emotions, concerns, challenges, and fears. The findings of this study include the fact that all trays were classified as “empty” and that the majority of the participants placed objects almost exclusively on the right side of the tray, which is commonly associated with the concrete or conscious side. Also, the use of sand tray allowed each individual the opportunity to navigate through time – past, present, and future, confronting fears, expressing hope and possibilities. The results of the research study offer insight into the psychotherapeutic effects of using sand tray with dementia patients as well as a better understanding of the cognitive and expressive abilities and limitations of an individual with impaired memory. The results also offer insight into the difficulties with short-term memory in this population and possibly indicate a potential means for monitoring cognitive decline based on the sector of placement and number of objects in the sand tray.