

Abstract

The aim of this study was to capture the essence of the experience of integrative psychotherapist working creatively with non-verbal trauma. The study arose from the researchers own personal experiences and that of her client's experiences, of not having the words to express the psychological impact of past relational traumas. In her own therapy and training as a social worker the researcher had experienced creative methods to be a way to access and express trauma without the need for words. The aim of the research was to explore the phenomena of experienced integrative psychotherapist who were able to use creative methods with clients who did not have words to express and heal from their past trauma. The researcher hoped that the findings would provide valuable insights in the use of creative methods within the integrative psychotherapy field. Research articles are presented which support the view that creative methods enhance traditional verbal therapy, to help clients to heal from traumatic experiences. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview with five participants who were experienced integrative psychotherapist who used creative methods. Phenomenological Analysis of the material provided several themes which emerged from the horizontalization process of each interview which created an overall understanding of their experiences. Following this extensive exploration, a process of reduction, organising invariant qualities and themes, and constructing textural description was completed (Moustakas, 1994). The main nine themes that emerged from the study were; Shame, Where there are no words, Positive emotional gain for the therapist, working with the inner child, Touch, Therapists comfort, Instinctive/Organic, Creativity as a coping strategy, Therapists view they cannot

work without creative methods. This study aims to contribute to the field of integrative psychotherapy and provide insight to enhance practice by using creative methods with non-verbal trauma.

Introduction

Sometimes there are no words for things that we have experienced especially if these experiences happened prior to language or if dissociation was used as a way to survive the experience. In my previous profession as a therapeutic social worker, I noticed that many of the children and young people, found using creative methods helpful in the healing process, where words seemed to be a barrier. Similarly, in my personal therapy I have found it challenging and frustrating, trying to express how I feel using words, especially in relation to traumatic experiences. In contrast, whilst undertaking experiential creative and play therapy training in the past, I seemed to be able to get to a deeper unconscious place with more ease, through use of creative methods. I have recently changed to a therapist who works creatively and is specialised in regression work, which reflects my need to heal from experiences that may have occurred prior to language. Although I am comfortable in this way of receiving therapy, I am aware that not all adults would. Therefore, I am interested in the experiences of other integrative practitioners when helping adults to heal when there are no words. Do they utilise creative methods and if so, what is their experience of how this emerges within an integrative psychotherapy session? There seemed to be limited creative techniques explored during the Integrative Psychotherapy training, although I am aware that other processes such as regression work, have been utilised and explored to work with trauma which places less emphasis on the use of words. This gap