**Mapping the Self. How does Walk and Talk therapy support self-exploration? A trainee counsellor’s client experience as autoethnography.**

Sally Morrison

A trainee counsellor student asks ‘Why does it feel so good?’, explores a moment from personal therapy and uses it to reflect on the powerful dynamics of working outside, getting lost in theory and creative process on the way.

DESIGN METHODOLOGY Using sketches and notes from a personal journal, research about Ecotherapy, Person-centred theory, Gestalt therapy, integrative therapy and attachment theory, I moved between writing, making, reading, drawing, in the process of trying to capture the experience and set it in a frame.

EXPLICIT RESULTS / FINDINGS

A moment in a journal – reflections on:

* Trusting relationship – safety to explore.
* Core conditions and ‘moment of meeting’.
* A portable flexible frame.
* Coming and going – rhythm and pattern.
* Relationship to nature.
* Power dynamics – shared experience / territory.
* Nature as anchor.
* Grounding in self on the earth.
* Boundaries – held by embodied therapist.
* Play – the ‘as if’, humour, experimentation.
* Space and openness – freedom.
* Two bodies in motion – relational.
* Body and Mind connection.
* Change as bedrock – impermanence.
* Vitality and the body – oxygen, breath.
* Creativity – abundant metaphors, objects, tools.

RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

Walk and Talk seems to integrate the mind and body in an active, rhythmic process of growth and self-actualisation as well as supporting mentalising and mindful awareness, within the crucible of a consistently changing landscape of other-than-human elements. This vibrant container seems to induce creative approaches to therapy, and support play, openness and self-reflection. The integration of right-brain and left-brain through walking and talking, feeling and sensing, within a flexible portable frame supports personal growth and processing, spontaneous moments of shared experience in the here and now and a mental and physical oxygenating. Having an attuned therapist walking alongside me enables me to feel myself in motion, to accept myself and change.

In the reflective process, creativity has been a valuable way to balance thinking and verbalising, in giving form to feelings thoughts and images in my own internal landscape, through drawing, printing and making.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS / FUTURE STUDY

One experience is presented here. It would be interesting to collect the experiences of a range of clients working outdoors.

* How can therapists integrate an ecological awareness into self-care and client work in the current climate crisis?
* Could Walk and Talk be useful for those who cannot work in a room?
* Do lasting attachments to natural spaces and personal symbolism sustain clients after therapy ends?
* Creative process as a way to reflect on the experience of therapy.