Resilience, Recovery & Art Therapy

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The cover picture:
This art-work was made during an Art therapy group as part of my Art Therapy training at Kutenai Art Therapy Institute. It is made on a large black paper with soft pastels. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by the two big mountains that look big and difficult to climb, but there is always a crack underground where that can lead to a safe space at the top of the mountain where I can see the horizon.

Sylvia Calatayud Art therapist, Nova Scotia.
Hypnosis and Art Therapy

Tzafi Weinberg BFA, DKATI, RCAT
And I want you to choose some time in the past when you were a very, very little girl. And my voice will change into that of your parents, your neighbors, your friends, your schoolmates, your playmates, your teachers. And I want you to find yourself sitting in the school room, a little girl feeling happy about something, something that happened a long time ago, that you forgot a long time ago.

Erickson (Erickson, Rosen, 1982, p.91)

In February 2015 the writer had participated in a 6-day “Healing Through Hypnosis” workshop led by Mary Ellen Bluntzer MD, and Roxanna Erickson-Klein PhD, the daughter of Milton Erickson, a prominent revolutionary in therapeutic hypnosis. The knowledge instilled in the workshop offered new insights regarding therapy that can be applied to the art therapy profession. This includes the use of trance, the empowerment of clients, the placebo effect, and guided imagery.

The writer’s workshop, “Hypnotic art therapy”, is an experience-based workshop that involves interactive games and art making. Hypnosis is “a therapeutic tool that embraces the change of perspectives that comes about naturally through the trance state” (Erickson-Klein, 2015, p. 5). Some methods of hypnosis share common elements with art making. When one is in the process of creating art they enter a hypnotic state. Focus is gained as they work on their artwork, breathing slows down, allowing a deep state of relaxation to be achieved, and even perception of time becomes temporarily distorted. Creating art and undergoing hypnosis are effective tools used to access the unconscious mind, stimulate creativity and remove stress (Goedhart, 2015).

Hypnosis

In her lecture Erickson-Klein (2015) stated that when clients come to professionals for therapy and listen and accept the treatment with a trusting attitude they are in a ‘trance state’. A ‘trance state’ is the stage between the conscious and the unconscious. Milton Erickson as described in Grattan, defined therapeutic trance as “a period during which the limitations of one’s usual frames of reference and beliefs are temporarily altered so one can be receptive to other patterns of association and modes of mental functioning” (Grattan, 2013, p.17)
All of the therapist’s words and actions can possibly suggest something to the client and such suggestions can have a powerful effect. Hence, it is important to recognize this approach as something to be applied with careful intention (Short, Erickson, & Erickson-Klein, 2005), considering all the other factors in the overall situation. Milton Erickson said that the client must be persuaded that it is what he does, not what the therapist does, which results in him being cured. In this way, the client is the controller of his own behaviour. This sense of personal ability allows clients to employ inner capacities and experiential learning to achieve their objectives. The goal of the therapist is to promote the health oriented goals of the client. Therefore, therapy is a process of reciprocated learning and discovery (Short, Erickson, & Erickson-Klein, 2005).

Erickson-Klein (2015) in her lecture mentioned some successful stories about the placebo effect. A placebo as described in Short & Erickson-Klein, “can be any medical treatment that contains no active ingredients or certifiable remedial action” (2005, Chapter 10, section 1, para 16). Erickson-Klein stated that it even works when both the physician and the client are unaware that the treatment they are giving/getting is a placebo. The physician needs to believe or be convinced that what they are giving is the right treatment, and the client needs to believe and accept what they are getting is the right treatment (consciously or unconsciously). Erickson-Klein suggested that hypnosis itself may capture both a placebo effect and further enhance it with the stimulation of other elements of thinking (2015).

In the process of therapy using guided imagery, Erickson-Klein suggests specific ideas and insights relating to the client’s issues, which tends to empower the client. This phase is where the client starts the process of healing. According to Short, Erickson, & Erickson-Klein (2005), Milton Erickson believed that in each of us, in our unconscious there is a power to be healed.

Moreover, Milton Erickson believed that change occurs on an unconscious level. He encouraged his clients to trust the unconscious mind. This suggestion assists clients to rediscover intuitive knowledge and engage parts of the mind that cannot be consciously understood (Short & Erickson-Klein, 2015). The following is an example of a hypnotic suggestion in an interview that is done through a combination of direct and indirect
suggestions. The therapist is seeking details of pain as it recedes, then the therapist questions the prospect of separation of pain from fear, and asking about times when pain is not an issue. Thus, Hypnotic suggestion offers an opportunity of broadening of perspective (Erickson-Klein & Bluntzer, 2015). Milton Erickson said, “All problem solving begins with the idea that change is possible” (Chapter 6, section 1, para 1). When you try to make a person change, you encourage reaction; therefore you need to offer an opportunity. One idea is to look and think about something else. For example, if a person who experiences a fear of heights must cross a high bridge, a suggestion to say to the person would be to look somewhere else other than down. In this case it is not (only) the distraction of vision; but it is a distraction of the mind from overwhelming thoughts (Short, Erickson, Erickson-Klein, 2005). According to Erickson, “Hope…contains the implicit suggestion that things can get better” (Short, Erickson, Erickson-Klein, 2005, Chapter 10, section 1, para 17). The client gets empowered when he feels that he can solve the problem, when he has a tool to work with, and instead of a problem he has a challenge.

The Workshop

The following activity was taken from Erickson-Klien’s (2015) workshop:

The group will divide into small groups of four participants. Each participant needs to bring an issue to work on. In this group of four, each of the participants will give some advice to the “client” for his presented issue, from three points of view: one will relate to the client’s past, the second will relate to the client’s present and the third to the future. This activity will demonstrate the interaction between a therapist and a client relating to a suggestion. It is also related to the idea of empowering the client by mentioning abilities from his past and present or looking for his abilities regarding his future that could assist him.

Art Making: Resiliency - Finding Your Inner Strength

Free writing: What are your positive experiences from the past? What are your areas of strength? Focus on the healthy parts of your body. Think about your goals, dreams or wishes.
Art materials used: dry branches, dry flower petals (prepare them two weeks prior to the workshop), different colored wool and string, small stones, beads, paper and acrylic paint. The materials used represent strength.

The idea is to create an artwork out of materials from nature, in order to stimulate and maintain a sense of belonging in nature and in the world within the individual. Creating with materials from nature as a process of change in art therapy is similar to the ‘environmental restoration work’ of individuals that bond with the earth. This connection to the earth includes a sense of dignity and belonging, a tolerance for diversity, and an ecological sensibility. On the other hand, part of the process of healing involves a releasing of emotions of guilt and shame, grief and despair, loneliness and powerlessness. The work of restoration involves collaborative relationships between people and the natural world, of giving back as well as receiving, a pattern of reciprocity (Weinberg, 2011, p.73).

Finding our inner strength
Elements of hypnosis in an art therapy practice

All of these methods of hypnosis are seen in art therapy practices. Firstly, the process of creating art is similar to the trance state, which is the stage between the conscious and unconscious. Secondly, in art therapy, guided imagery is followed by art making. This process externalizes the visualized images into an art product. “Art therapy practices actively seek to integrate sensory experiences probably contributing to neural integration, strengthening mental imagery” (Hass-Cohen & Loya, 2008, in Hass-Cohen & Cerr 2008, p 92) and “providing concrete and therapeutic visual feedback” (Riley, 1999, in Hass-Cohen & Cerr, 2008, p 92). Thirdly, the art therapist empowers the client when suggesting specific ideas and insights relating to the client’s issues. For example: when a child decides to create a home for her stuffed animal, the therapist provides soft fabric as a metaphor for a feeling of comfort and indulging. The metaphors in the process of hypnosis, as well as in art therapy are implicit suggestions. Lastly, the insights found in therapeutic hypnosis are significant to the work of the art therapist especially when looking at suggestions relating to the hope instilled towards resiliency and recovery for the clients.

References


**Author’s Biography**

Tzafi Weinberg is a registered art therapist. She has a BA in Fine Art and has presented the following workshops in the past CATA conferences: “Drawing with Objects”, “Art Journal-a Space to Grow” and “Connection Games”. Currently, she works mainly with First Nations foster children and teens in Winnipeg. She has many years of experience guiding people in “The Society of Nature Protection” in Israel. This experience has given her great ecological awareness, which she incorporates in her practice. The workshop in this article was inspired by the ideas of Roxanna Erikson-Klein PhD who has extensive training in therapeutic hypnosis.