CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: THE CASE STUDY AND BILATERAL ART PROTOCOLS

This chapter provides descriptions of the case study as a research methodology as well as details of the protocols for using bilateral art in clinical practice.

The Case Study

The case study as a qualitative research methodology is well described (Stake, 1994; Patton, 2002; Creswell, 1998). Stake (1994) addressed the nature of case study, what can be learned from a case study, the distinctions between intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case studies, the narrative discourse, and a brief description of case study methodology including selection and ethical issues. Patton (2002) extended Stake’s (1994) description with a discussion of the layering that is intrinsic to the construction of “case units.” The application of Patton’s layering to this study is shown Figure 3.1. At the top layer, the case study of the bilateral art intervention is a function of case studies of bilateral art with individuals and bilateral art with dyads. At the next layer, each case study with an individual is composed of case units reflecting a single application of the bilateral art protocol with the individual. Similarly, a case study on the use of bilateral art with dyads is composed of two case studies: one on the use of bilateral art to increases openness and empathy and a second to examine self and the relationship. This layering extends downward until case studies of a single application of a specific bilateral art protocol become the case unit.
Figure 3.1 Case study layers contributing to the case study of bilateral art as a therapeutic intervention.

While many clinicians find effectiveness and outcomes research irrelevant to their clinical practice, the case study has emerged as a research methodology that is of value to clinicians. Case studies provide clinical insight as well as an opportunity to share clinical insights with others. Moon & Trepper (1996) described the use of the case study by clinicians
“who wish to think more systematically about their cases and disseminate their clinical innovations to a wider audience … (p 393). This dissertation is such a case study. It chronicles experiences using bilateral art in clinical practice and the intertwining evolution of the intervention with clinical experience. It is a retrospective case study using data (including artwork) from case notes spanning a year and a half of clinical work at The Family Center of Virginia Tech.

Sample Selection

The following criteria were used to identify cases for this retrospective study. The first criterion was that the bilateral art intervention was used with the individual, couple, or supervisor/supervisee dyad at some time between April 2002 and October 2003, a period of approximately eighteen months. The second criterion was that the individual case record included a signed Agreement to Use Art Products for Educational/Research Purposes Release (Appendix A). The third criterion was that supervisees and supervisors had signed an Informed Consent (Appendix B) authorizing use of their data for research purposes. A review of case records yielded one individual whose treatment using bilateral art spanned nine months, seven additional individuals, and one couple that met the above criteria. In addition, two supervisor/supervisee dyads met the criteria.

Case Study Limitations

One of the criticisms of the retrospective case study is that it relies on the narrative summaries of a therapist’s impressions and observations providing for a multiplicity of distortions: within observations and as observations are translated to narrative summaries. The data used in this retrospective case study include both clinician case notes and client artwork. Client artwork can and should be viewed as “session content” providing direct rather than
reported evidence of client process. This is more compelling than the triangulation of data typically recommended for qualitative research efforts. In addition, for one of the individual cases a video tape of the session was available and client responses to the bilateral art intervention were transcribed and an excerpt appears in Chapter 4.

Bilateral Art Intervention Methodologies

This section provides details of the three bilateral art protocols: the first for use with individuals, and the second two for use with dyads. The first protocol originated with Cartwright (1999). Enhancement of the protocol with scaling is described. The second two protocols prescribe the use of bilateral art with couples/dyads: the first protocol is designed to have an impact on relationships by increasing awareness and empathy of the individual members of a couple, and the second protocol is designed to explore relational issues through artistic expression of the relationship and the conflicts and/or concerns identified by each member of the dyad.

Using Bilateral Art with Individuals

Clients engaged in bilateral art activities use both hands in an effort to stimulate the memories and experiences that reside in both sides of the brain. Cartwright (1999) posited that exploration (or tracing) of the art drawn by one hand with the opposite hand facilitates integration of these experiences. Supplies typically include 14x17 inch white paper used in landscape mode and felt-tipped marking pens. Available pen colors were red, orange, yellow, green, blue, light blue, purple, brown, black, gray, pink, and flesh. Before beginning the process, I draw a vertical line down the center of the paper. Usually, the left hand side of the paper is used for the expressions of the left hand and the right hand side of the paper for the expressions of the right.
Cartwright (1999) provided a detailed protocol for the use of bilateral art or “neurologically based art work.” The following steps describe my use of his protocol.

1. Determine a focus for exploration. I often wait until the client provides a natural focus. It typically resembles a situation where the client is struggling with a choice between two options, how he/she feels versus how he/she would like to feel, where he/she is currently versus where he/she would like to be, two conflicting needs, two conflicting beliefs, or two conflicting emotions, e.g., I am good enough versus I am not good enough.

2. Have the client determine which hand is most connected to which of the two conflicting elements of experience. I then have the client decide which of the two elements “wants” to be “drawn” first.

3. Drawing supplies are placed next to the hand that “wants” to draw first. Have the client “connect” with the “feeling” associated with the element being drawn. And then with an imagined or real line down the middle of the paper, draw in response to the feeling on the side of the paper corresponding to the hand that is drawing. For example, if the left hand wants to draw first in response to “I am good enough”, the supplies are placed on the client’s left hand side and the client is asked to use his/her left hand to draw in response to feelings associated with “I am good enough.”

4. Once the first element is drawn, the drawing supplies are placed on the opposite side of the client, and the client is instructed to focus on feeling(s) associated with the second or oppositional element of experience. Once the client is fully connected to that element, he/she is instructed to respond to the feeling on the other side of the paper with the other hand. For the example above, the client would use his/her right hand to draw on the right side of the paper in response to “I am not good enough.”
5. Once both elements of the experience have been expressed, I have the client determine which element “wants” to be explored first with the hand that did not draw it, e.g., the left hand is used to explore the drawing made with the right hand and vice versa. The client is directed to just let his/her hand rest on the drawing made by the opposite hand, and then to explore the drawing using any amount of pressure that feels appropriate. In the case of the example above, if “I am good enough” wants to be explored first, the client uses his/her right hand to reach over to the left side of the paper to explore the drawing of the left hand. This process is then repeated with the opposite element and hand.

6. I ask the client to use both hands together and have the client explore both drawings in any order with any movements that seem appropriate.

7. I then ask the client to reflect upon his/her experience.

Cartwright (1999) provided numerous variations to this protocol including tactile creations for use with visually impaired clients. He also recommended the use of pencils, crayons, and marking pens rather than pastels or paints, which tend to blend when the images are traced over or explored.

*Extensions to the Protocol with Individuals*

My experiences with this protocol led to several adaptations. The most significant is the use of scaling or self-rating. Self-rating is a commonly used technique used to assess the extent or severity of a client’s experience including symptoms, beliefs, and feelings. Shapiro (2001) described a process of rating the validity of a cognition for EMDR and I have extended the bilateral art procedure to include a similar scaling of the strength of a client’s belief in the truth of the identified positive and negative elements. Both before and after the bilateral art procedure, I ask clients to indicate how true the positive and negative elements are for them on a
scale of 1 to 7, where one represents completely false and seven represents completely true. Another adaptation relates to the clients’ exploration of drawings with the opposite hand. I typically will ask the client to “trace over” the drawing in any manner that they wish. The distinction between explore and trace is subtle and lends itself to experimentation.

Using Bilateral Art with Relationships

This section provides details of two protocols for the use of bilateral art with couples and/or dyads. Embedded within these protocols is the protocol for use with individuals. The first protocol is intended to affect relationships indirectly through facilitation of openness and empathy. While initially intended to deal with relationships more directly, experience indicates that the second protocol may in fact reflect what each individual brings to a relationship.

A Bilateral Art Protocol for Increasing Openness and Empathy

1. One member of the couple/dyad selects an element of the relationship that he/she wishes to change or explore, identifying both positive and negative thoughts or feelings associated with the element.
2. The other member of the couple/dyad is given paper and pencil with instructions to witness their partner and to record their own thoughts or feelings in response to this witnessing of their partner’s experience with the bilateral art intervention.
3. The first member of the couple/dyad is asked to engage in the bilateral art protocol for individuals outlined in the previous section.
4. Upon completion of the bilateral art protocol by the first member of the couple/dyad, the second member is asked to share and reflect upon their experience as witness.

A Bilateral Art Protocol for Exploring the Self in Relationship
1. Members of the couple/dyad each draw an image that reflects some aspect of their own view of their relationship.

2. Reflecting upon their drawings from step 1, members of the couple/dyad each select an element of the relationship that they wish to change or explore, identifying both positive and negative thoughts or feelings associated with the element.

3. Members of the couple/dyad each execute the bilateral art protocol for individuals using the polarized thoughts or feelings identified in step 2.

4. Members of the couple/dyad each draw their relationship reflecting upon the same aspect of the relationship identified in step 1.

5. Members of the couple/dyad each share reflections on their sequence of drawings and the process.

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the case study as a method of inquiry, the application of case study conceptualizations to this study, and the specific protocols for the bilateral art intervention with both individuals and couples/dyads. The next chapter provides results of the study of clinical records that record the use of bilateral art with eight different individuals, one couple, and two marriage and family therapy supervisor/supervisee pairs.