

Abstract

A qualitative study was conducted into person-centred trainee therapists' awareness of their own body language, with particular reference to its possible impact on the therapeutic relationship. For the purposes of this study, body language is defined as facial expression, gesture, posture and tone of voice; awareness is defined as congruence and transparency either in the moment with the client or, separately, reflexively; the therapeutic relationship is explored both as a process in itself and as a construct of the training environment. A phenomenological method was used to analyse data collected through a series of three Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) sessions and subsequent semi-structured interviews.

Co-researchers revealed not only an awareness of their own body language and its possible impact on the therapeutic relationship, but also an awareness of their own body language within the wider contexts of their inner experiencing, their own separateness, and their movement towards being in relationship, as well as an awareness of how their body language communicates Rogers' conditions and constitutes a rich, diverse, complex and ambiguous form of communication which nurtures and sustains the therapeutic relationship.

IPR was found to be an effective research tool in facilitating the co-researchers' recall of their own process as a trainee therapist in a clinical practice session and in facilitating their self-discovery, developing their personal and professional congruence.