18th April 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for attending the ED and EMDR series of webinars.

My apologies that we ran over time on the 4th webinar and one or two questions at the end only got a minimal and very hurried response.

I thought it might be helpful to revisit one question in particular, that could benefit from further clarification.

The question relates to the video excerpt and can be summarised as ‘why was I using slow continuous BLS while doing the Polarity Dialogue with the 2 Polarised ED parts (Restrictor & Binger), as I was not processing?’

A more thorough answer to this is as follows:

I agree, this is not reprocessing as we would usually know it. My purpose in using slow, continuous, BLS for the Polarity Exploration with this client was to use it to support narrative integration of the dialogue arising from two separate neuro-networks/parts that are holding conflicting beliefs, drives and needs and this can, of course, lead to some re-processing.

My clinical experience is that continuous slow BLS during this intervention can for some clients deepen the awareness of the dysfunctional dynamic in quite a profound way, and also bring unwanted consequences more clearly into view - in this case – increased anxiety driving the binging part to further escalate the binges. I have found that for some ED clients, slow continuous BLS during the Polarity Dialogue seems to facilitate a kind of very gentle, mini-processing of the conflict dynamic which seems to allow new insights and awareness to connect up and some neuro-network integration may start to take place. The work somehow, seems to ‘stick better’. And this may be because there has been some integration and perhaps some gentle processing has also started.

We may hypothesise that these effects are achieved in this instance by the BLS facilitating;

1. Down regulation of the ANS
2. Intra and inter-hemispheric communication

Therefore, as this particular client was very avoidant, as many ED clients are, of inner experience and are fearful of the harsh punitive ED voice, she found that the slow continuous BLS during Parts Work helped her to feel “calmer” about the prospect of “going inside”. From this more grounded place, she could more effectively and calmly focus on the dialogue between these two parts, while still totally maintaining dual attention. The parasympathetic response of the slow BLS was really useful for her.

Interestingly, other therapeutic approaches such as Brainspotting and the Comprehensive Resource Model all use BLS in a way that differs from EMDR but have very positive outcomes also.

In deciding whether to use slow BLS for Polarity Dialogues, it’s important to consider each client’s individual presentation and assess their capacity to tolerate slow continuous BLS without associating to negative material. As we know, clients vary enormously in this regard, and even very slow BLS for some can be highly activating and quickly pull up disturbing material. Also, some clients might find it too distracting to have their attention split between the conversation and bilateral stimulation….even if it is passive as in the use of tactile buzzers. In these instances, it would of course, not be helpful to add in the BLS.

Finally, just to emphasize, BLS is not a necessary component of Polarity Explorations, and most ED clients are totally able to do the work without it.

If you are new to EMDR and/or Parts Work…I would advise leaving the BLS out when trying out the Polarity Dialogues ….and use it only as we normally would for reprocessing selected targets – or use slow BLS for the installation of Resources for which it may be useful. Although, as we know there are conflicting views in the field about whether it should even be used for that!

In conclusion, so much is still to be discovered about the mechanisms of BLS….currently we don’t actually know with much confidence what the mechanisms are, and so it is seems that we can get positive results from various uses of it.

 As always, we need more research…more research ….more research.