



Reflective Practice in Counselling

Reflective Practice in counselling (ECCS6002)

Lowrie Mollison (2212647)

Reflective Practice in Counselling

When exploring the effectiveness of reflective practice in counselling, it must first be understood what it means to be a good counsellor and why critical reflection is important to this. According to Wheeler (2000), Rogers (1957) and Traux & Carkuff (1967) provided an explanation and understanding between a developed trustworthy therapeutic relationship during counselling. As all of their work stated that genuineness, empathy alongside positive regard should be a required disposition by the therapist in the session. As these characteristics will allow the individual feel safe and, in a judgment-free environment. Reflective practice and self-reflection are key aspects of counselling for this reasoning.

Reflective practice is the ability to complete critical reflection with professional experience and information that can be developed with a deeper understanding (Loughran, 2002). However, it has been stated by Ruth-Sahd (2003) that reflective practice is also “an imaginative, creative, nonlinear, human act in which educators and students recapture their experience”. Allowing the practitioners, the ability to think and expand/ evaluate their past experience. This is effective to counsellors as each of their clients will be different, this could be through their experiences, traumas or their coping mechanisms. It is the counsellor’s responsibility to form a session that is beneficial to individual clients. Therefore, critical reflections can improve the counsellors’ theories, strategies and biases.

When exploring reflective practice, there are a variety of different models. These models will ask different questions and will focus on specific aspects of an event to reflect on. This highlights the importance of understanding the impact of reflective methods and strategies as each can alter your views and decisions (Bassot, 2015). Having the ability to understand the way in which reflective models and strategies are effective, will also provide understanding which could encourage the act of phenomenological reflection; which is the attempt to gain a deeper meaning of the situation or experience. Comprehension of an experience will improve the reflexivity which would need to be practiced by a counsellor: As personal beliefs, emotions and experiences should not have the ability to impact the counsellor and client relationship that is between the two individuals (Wade, 2015).

To critically reflect one's personal values, and to evaluate the impact that they hold, reflexivity is key. To be reflexive, may be difficult without the appropriate model of reflection as it does not solely focus on the event but the personal impact on the event and afterwards (Bolton & Delderfield, 2018). The model that will be used to gain an understanding of personal morals is the 'Me, More, My, most model' by Wareing (2017), which will be explained more further on. Along with the limitations that it could come to light during the reflective process; this will be easier to comprehend due to it being applied to specific moments in my life that encouraged change and adaptive behaviors. This alongside another method would explain the influences of the different reflective practices and the need to complete both.

However, to understand what values can improve and hinder the counselling environment, The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy clarified what should be considered. The BACP put forth the ethical implications and impacts of values/ personality traits that are most important in the counselling relationship. Therefore, to assess the personality traits an individual may possess that can impact a relationship, it is their responsibility to complete reflective practices as these improve the self-awareness that they have. Understanding one's own values and how they co-exist alongside the BACP's values and ethical considerations is where self-improvement as a practitioner can be found. This is where my own experiences and beliefs will be brought forward, as I will be discussing key values that I hold and how I believe they co-exist with these presented guidelines with the BACP.

The BACP has defined the qualities and values that are considered to be essential to the counselling relationship. However, to be fully aware of my own shortcomings within this field, I had to look more closely at how I responded to past experiences. Understanding my values and how they impacted my decisions as well as the relationships in my life required a critical reflection of my perspective and identify what the others were feeling. There are multiple models that have been formed and adapted over the years, starting from Schon (1983) that tried to improve the way in which practitioners reflected on past experiences with a professional lens. However, due to Schon's model covering the reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, it did not allow me to explore specific questions, which I have found that during personal reflection; prompts have benefitted my understandings. Therefore, not encouraging a deeper form of reflection,

hence a lack of understanding that I have about the values I hold and the impacts the values have. The Gibb's reflective cycle, did allow this: the specific prompt questions allowed all bases of a situation to be covered, therefore this was the model I used to reflect on my university experience and to understand how I grew from it.

The Gibbs' reflective cycle was a development of Kolb's four stage experimental learning model (Kolb, 1984); that focused on the importance of an in-depth critical self-reflection. As this starts to form deeper understanding of a previous experience to improve experiential learning. Gibb's model explores 6 stages that cover many different aspects and possible interpretations of an experience (Gibbs, 1988). These are covered by thought provoking questions that can help start the reflective process for a practitioner/individual. A qualitative study presented by Wikström (2012) used Gibb's reflective model when trying to get student nurses to engage in reflective practice. They viewed paintings that were previously used in psychological and art research to understand the perceptions of art tendencies (Wikström, 2012; Wikström, 2002). Gibb's model of reflection provided a greater understanding of the critical awareness of the students as well as where they metaphorically stood when aiming to understand the position of someone else in a situation. Therefore, understanding on where they may need extra support when assisting a patient in an actual clinical setting (Wikström, 2012).

Whilst performing Gibb's reflective model, the student nurses were writing down their reflections on the pieces of art. This technique of reflecting through writing may have also provided an expressive way in which the students stated their opinions and views.

Literary arts and the way in which individuals write their emotions have been compared to expressive therapies (Hunt & Sampson, 1998). This is highlighted through the act of journalling, diary writing and song lyrics as these demonstrate emotions in different ways, and listening to the lyrics of a song can resonate with others, demonstrating a deeper understanding of the words written. This was the technique I used when reflecting through Gibb's reflective cycle. Whilst completing each of these stages with in my journal, I found that whilst answering the questions, I was not questioning 'why' I wanted to me everyone feels comfortable around me when I hardly knew them. What was the reason behind this drive to make others happy. For that reason, Gibb's reflective cycle did not allow me to achieve a deeper understanding of one-self. It only ensured a clarity of the situations and the emotions effecting that time. However, as clearly highlighted by the research conducted by Wikstom (2012), this model of critical reflection is still efficient when thinking about a certain item of within the experience. But the field that gets most usage of this model is clinical nursing. Therefore, the effectiveness of this reflective practice for a counselling practitioner may not be as effective compared to the clinical nursing field. Hence the need to complete more research into this area.

Although, Gibb's reflective model presented a pathway of a successful reflection as it allowed me to understand the situation and what could be the consequences of the experience. The model presented by Wareing (2017) allowed a greater personal development as it delved into the values and beliefs that I had that impacted those experiences. Wareing (2017) presented 'Me, More, My, Most Model'. This model had the aim to understand the impacts that beliefs and personality traits have on certain events

as well as the critical reflection of the event. As our beliefs and values hold a concrete foundation of our personalities; how we view the world. This model allows individuals to understand the values that are at the core of our responses and decisions. The first aspect of the model is 'Me'; this section requires an individual to question who am I? This considered what is important for certain careers, as well as what has the ability to hold people back. Following that, there is 'My', as this focused on the emotional responses. During this part, an individual may question who they are and how this may impact others, as well as who may be their confidante (Wareing, 2017). The third part of the model brings to light what needs to be asked, for instance gaining more information about the reasoning behind a situation and perhaps what will happen next. This explains why it is considered under the 'More' in this model. Then lastly there is 'Must', this is the where the altering of behaviors and expanding on knowledge is. As this final stage of the model asks questions such as, what are the next steps, what goals are set for growth and what needs to be done to meet them (Wareing, 2017).

This model allowed me to gain a greater understanding of what values underpinned my personal responses within my private life and my professional. An experience that reflected both my personal and professional life is when I moved to a university accommodation. This is when I had to get used to living with new people outside of loved ones, who have different upbringings, personalities that I was new to and different interests. Therefore, my aim during this time was to make everyone feel comfortable and safe in my presence, as this was going to be a difficult time for everyone due to the change in environment. The values that I developed during this time, I believe could have shaped

my choice to go into counselling and if I had the personality traits to do so successfully. Therefore, to evaluate whether or not I would be helpful and successful within the field of counselling I used the 'Me, More, My, most' model to understand what my values are that coincide with the BACPs' ethical guidelines for ethical considerations (2018).

Throughout my reflection into my university experience, I found that I always attempted to be aware of the feelings and upbringings of those surrounding me. I aimed to understand how their versions of the world differed from my own; this provided common grounds and mutual understanding of boundaries. This provided a peaceful environment where we all were able to thrive within an already stressful situation. Therefore, in short, I considered these to be basic qualities of Respect. This is one of my core values as I have grown. Therefore, whilst I was doing research into the British Association for counselling and psychotherapy's (2018) ethical framework; Respect was considered one of the key values that was listed under the moral personality section. This trait is considered essential within the field of counselling due to the amount of different people that could be involved within therapy and seeking help.

Alongside the BACP, Pettifor (2010) clarified that "respect, caring, and integrity" were the foundations of professional ethics within counselling. This is due to how many aspects of the counselling session is altered by the respect that the practitioner has for the client. When evaluating the client and practitioner relationship it is clear that the client places trust and confidence in the counsellor. This may be due to the expertise and authority that the practitioner holds (Black, 1991), however this is where the need for

respect comes into it. As there is unequal power and responsibility held between both individuals in the relationship it is the counsellor's duty to not abuse their position or exploit others. Respecting others and aiming to keep the environment beneficial to the client is what upholds the therapeutic relationship (Feltham, 1999). Following that, Respect is also a key concept connected to confidentiality, respecting the boundaries that have been put in place for all individuals, as well as aiming to understand the cultural differences with respect. Therefore, ensuring both boundaries are being respected within the counselling relationship improves the feeling of equality and comfort that is in the space (Carter, 2011).

Alongside respecting others, the BACP has specified that having self-respect and maintaining calm exterior. Whilst evaluating my past experiences alongside my university experience, I discovered self-preservation and self-respect was not a key value I practiced. This was shown as I had the tendency to compromise my own happiness to assist someone else's. I believed helping others be happy would contribute to a happy environment and I would learn to deal with what happened on my end. This affected my mental health during my second in university as I was unable to go home during the COVID-19 lockdown and my housemates would not clean up, assist with house needs, following this one of my housemates undermined my intelligence many times and it made me doubt myself within the course. Therefore, a trait that I will need to work on whilst entering the counselling field is maintaining my own health and taking time to help myself as this will benefit the counselling session more effectively as there would not be a chance of personal issues affecting them.

Following this, whilst completing my reflection into my values, I found that I express empathy and compassion consistently during situations. More so during my university experience. My experience with using empathy during recent years have demonstrated the importance of it and has highlighted to be a key value. A situation where it was effective was when two of my housemates were arguing with one another about a new house and they both wanted to speak to me about it. Neither of these individuals wanted answers or solutions, they just wanted to voice their frustrations with the other. Therefore, my presence, allowing them to speak freely and know they are being understood benefitted them as it gave them both a chance to breathe and reflect on their responses in a safe space. Empathy would hold a lot of weight within a therapeutic relationship as it is where the counsellor can communicate an understanding of the situation that their client is talking about and view it from the perspective of their client (Elliott et al, 2011). A study that examined the mediating role of empathy in prejudice, concluded that when individuals have empathetic skills or are training them have lower prejudice skills (Boag & Carnelley, 2016). This emphasized the role and need of empathy in a therapeutic relationship (Elliott et al, 2011).

Elliott et al (2011), Highlighted that empathy is inseparable from the other relational factors in the therapeutic environment. For instance, when individuals are feeling certain emotions, these are exposed via visual and auditory hints. When judgement occurs, it can be visually seen be expressions alongside tones in the voice, these can be easily identified by others (Gelder & Vroomen, 2000). Therefore, practicing one's empathy skills and

working on their emotional intelligence can be key to developing one's relationships, not just within the counselling environment. The importance of understanding the client's perspective would allow the counsellor to provide the best session they can: Where the client can feel safe and understood. The BACP (2018) demonstrated within the personal moral values that empathy is essential for practitioners to bring this quality to the relationship as the client is there to be open and seen for what they feel.

Following empathy, I believe another key value I hold that can be beneficial to my career in counselling is my compassion. Compassion is the act of being warm and sympathetic to a client's plight without making the individual feel pitied. This is entwined to the moral qualities that can enhance to the quality of the counselling relationship as stated by the BACP (2018). As highlighted by Fulton & Cashwell (2015), compassion towards others has been positively associated to the "cognitive and affective empathy". Compassion is seen as the part of empathy that encourages an individual to want to alleviate someone else's suffering (Siegel & Germer, 2012). To be able to be a compassionate practitioner in counselling, self-compassion and mindfulness is highly important. This is due to the fact that without the self-compassion and self-considerations as a practitioner could lead the counsellor to "compassion fatigue" (Fulton, 2018).

As stated previously, compassion is an essential value to my life. Throughout my university experience I did show compassion to many, however, due to lockdown I did not see many people. However, over the recent months, this has been a value and trait that I have practiced consistently as I have been working within a nursing home. However, this was a big transition for me to learn from whilst many changes were happening therefore showing others compassion, I found that I was happier with the work I

completed. This is supported by Bridges transition model, as it is highlighted during this model that the changes of a person during change are more effective than achieving an actual goal (Tilson, Luecking & Donovan, 1994). Throughout all the previous changes in my life compassion has been important and has become most useful whilst working. Compassion has helped my relationship with many of the residents within the home. This is due to the fact that I took the time to get to know them, and try and make them as comfortable as possible in their environment as I am unable to provide any pain relief in any other way. Following the long days within work, I do ensure that I provide myself with a self-care hour, to relax and gather my thoughts from the day. This allows me to feel calm and relaxed for the evenings. This experience will benefit my career within counselling: As it has provided me with the ability to read the body language and verbal cues more affectively as I am trying to understand their feelings and how to assist them effectively. To ensure clients feel safe and confident in the presence of their counsellor; the counsellor needs to maintain the relationship and strategies that are demonstrating positive outcomes

I did take into consideration that there could be limitations that could be presented whilst in use or afterwards. Wareing's values-based model of reflection being new to the field of reflection, there is limited research and reviews that look into the whole effectiveness. To fully comprehend the overall effectiveness of the reflective model, the examination of previous research into values can provide an indication of the limitations. This Value-based model presented by Wareing (2016) required the practitioner to ask questions that encouraged a deeper thought process into what beliefs and values

influenced a certain situation. However, a key aspect that must be identified is that individual beliefs and values can change. Personal values do have higher chance affecting the working environment that individuals are in, whether this be a practicing therapist or an individual working within an office (Arieli, Sagiv & Roccas, 2018). An individual's values can be key predictors of behaviors and relationships that form if values are compatible. Nevertheless, these values can be altered by a working environment or certain personal experiences, the foundations of our personalities can be altered by the passing of life. Alongside this, Gibbons (2004) highlighted that the type of people that individuals surround themselves with, may help sustain or change existing values. This is demonstrated throughout adolescents, as friends and family members can imprint certain traits and individuals adapt the them. This is further highlighted by Gouveia et al (2015) as their research found that the age and gender of individuals have an impact on their values; alongside the development of said values. Therefore, this will need to be a frequent reflective practice to truly reach a reflexive reflective style, as certain values could influence situations. Not just the same ones, hence the self-awareness comes from the honesty individuals have with themselves.

Understanding the importance of values and the impacts they hold in the everyday activities and relationships is highly effective. As this allows for a greater self-awareness and understanding how certain values could be impacting one's development. However, alongside our values, experiences and responses could be highly situational; driving the decisions and relationships in a situation could be the emotions. For our values to be the main aspects of our personalities that influence our actions in a situation, our emotions according to Bench, Lench & Tibbett (2016) must be equal between positive and negative feelings. This is due to the fact that emotions have the ability to cloud affective judgement

and decision making (Keinemans, 2015). Having a constant state of happiness can reduce the success of individuals and can impact the self-development that people have. Having a mix of all emotions in our memory and understanding the impacts they have on people can alter our decision making. Expressing anger, could create a better chance of personal success but it does compel others in a situation to want to leave as it may not be pleasant for them (Bench, Lench & Tibbett, 2016). Therefore, emotional awareness and the impact of situations on emotions could lead a situation down a certain route. Not the values individuals hold to the highest importance. Applying this to a therapeutic session, a topic could be mentioned by the client. This topic can resonate deeply to the practitioner; therefore, the emotional change could impact the neutral perspective from the practitioner. Depending on the emotional changes could alter how the client perceives the session as this could make them feel judged and more alone, therefore negatively impacting their progress.

My journey into my experiences, I have found that many situations have altered my values and how I adapted to the changes during them. Following this I can confidently state that I do hold values and moral personality traits that co-exist with the BACP's guidelines (2018). However, it cannot be stated that they do not still need personal attention to improve on other traits as there is always room for improvement. Hence the need to continue my reflective practice whilst continuing within this career.

When reviewing Gibb's reflective model, it is a clear tool for reflection and self-development amongst the clinical aspect of health industry. Although this tool was

presented within the therapeutic fields, training nurses and doctors have found to have used this cycle frequently as the prompt questions allow them to evaluate how their decisions can affect not only the patients, they have but also the families that could be affected by such decisions. As highlighted previously, research supports this due to the emotional and logical considerations that are taken into account about the art pieces by the nurses and many responded to the similarly. Therefore, highlighting that a deeper reflection gave the insight to another perspective in a situation. However, Gibb's model of reflection does not specifically delve into the personal preconceived opinions or beliefs that could have impacted an individual's perception nor their views points whilst reflecting in a certain moment. However, if it can come naturally for an individual to question their values and thoughts during a reflective process, it could still be effective for that. Following on from that, if there are other practitioner that could use deeper questioning to question their deeper influences. Providing a values-based model of reflection ensured that all practitioners have the potential to gain that deeper self-awareness. Wareing's (2017) model question the personal aspects that could alter the direction of situations, this will provide an individual to understand whether personal dilemmas or traumas could alter their opinions in a therapeutic situation. However, emotions can also alter the results of a situation not just the values therefore this must always be considered during the reflective process (Bench, Lench & Tibbett, 2016).

Overall, during this review into the effectiveness of both the experienced based model and value-based model: The influence these have on the development of a practitioner is critical to understand as each of the reflective modes are different, hence the reflective

processes and their results altering. Whilst completing both I became very aware that the Gibb's model would allow me to expand on my knowledge and how my actions can create a better outcome in the future. However, when I was exploring the BACP's ethical guidelines, a key aspect was the considered values section. This demonstrated to me that the Gibb's reflective model (1988) is more effective when needing more knowledge of an experience, understanding my values and how they work with the BACP guidelines was not going to be assisted with this model. Therefore, highlighting my need to use Me, More, My, More model (2017). I applied this model to two situations that incorporated a lot of change, including the environment and relationships, this is where I found my default values that come to the surface when changes are occurring and I am aiming to make people feel comfortable.

The values of empathy and respect have been consistently used throughout my life, however, during the relational changes in these situations, I found that during my reflection I put the importance of others' opinions and cultures before my own boundaries in order to make them feel more comfortable in a situation. These will highly benefit my career and relationships within a therapeutic session; to use my existing skills and values to ease any anxieties and frustrations an individual may feel could be highly beneficial as it could allow them to express their emotions freely. Evaluating the information, I learnt about myself during both Gibbs and Wareing models (1988, 2017), I can confidently conclude that each gave me the ability to reflect on my university and working experiences from different perspectives. The areas in which one lacked in either in the subjective or objective area of an experience is where the other was able to provide with

relevant prompt questioning. Therefore, I will continue to use both to continue a greater understanding of myself and others.

References

Arieli, S., Sagiv, L., Roccas, S. (2020) 'Values at work: The impact of personal values in organisations', *Applied Psychology*, 69(2), pp.230-275.

BACP, (2018) 'Ethical Framework for counselling professions', *Ethics and standards*. Available at: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/ethical-framework-for-the-counselling-professions/> (Accessed: 20/11/22).

Bassot, B. (2015). 'The reflective practice guide: An interdisciplinary approach to critical reflection'. *Routledge*.

Black, H.C.(1991) 'Blacks Law Dictionary', *St. Paul: West Publishing Co*.

Boag, E.M., Carnelley, K.B. (2016) 'Attachment and prejudice: The mediating role of empathy', *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 55(2), pp.337-356.

Bolton, G., Delderfield, R. (2018). 'Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development'.

Carter, I. (2011) 'Respect and the Basis of Equality', *Ethics*, 121(3), pp.538-571.

De Gelder, B., Vroomen, J. (2000) 'The perception of emotions by ear and by eye', *Cognition & Emotion*, 14(3), pp.289-311.

Elliott, R., Bohart, A.C., Watson, J.C., Greenberg, L.S. (2011) 'Empathy' *Psychotherapy*, 48(1), p.43.

Feltham, C. (1999) 'Understanding the counselling relationship'. *Sage publications*, pp.1-256.

Fulton, C.L. (2018) 'Self-compassion as a mediator of mindfulness and compassion for others', *Counseling and Values*, 63(1), pp.45-56.

Gibb, G. (1988) 'Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods'. Oxford: *Oxford Brookes University Further Education Unit*

Gibbons, D.E. (2004) 'Friendship and advice networks in the context of changing professional values', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 49(2), pp.238-262.

Gouveia, V.V., Vione, K.C., Milfont, T.L., Fischer, R. (2015) 'Patterns of value change during the life span: Some evidence from a functional approach to values', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 41(9), pp.1276-1290.

Keinemans, S., (2015) 'Be sensible: Emotions in social work ethics and education', *The British Journal of Social Work*, 45(7), pp.2176-2191.

Kolb, D.A. (1984) 'The process of experiential learning', *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*, pp.20-38.

Lench, H.C., Tibbett, T.P., Bench, S.W. (2016) 'Exploring the toolkit of emotion: What do sadness and anger do for us?' *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 10(1), pp.11-25.

Loughran, J.J. (2002) 'Effective reflective practice: In search of meaning in learning about teaching', *Journal of teacher education*, 53(1), pp.33-43.

Pettifor, J. (2010) 'Ethics, diversity, and respect in multicultural counselling', *Culture-infused counselling*, 2, pp.167-188.

Rogers, C.R. (1957) 'The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change', *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 21, 95±103

Ruth-Sahd, L.A. (2003) 'Reflective practice: A critical analysis of data-based studies and implications for nursing education', *Journal of Nursing Education*, 42(11), pp.488-497.

Schon, D.A. (1983) 'The reflective practitioner', *How professionals think in action*.

Tilson JR, G.P., Luecking, R.G., Donovan, M.R. (1994) 'Involving employers in transition: The Bridges model', *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 17(1), pp.77-89.

Truax, C.B., Carkuff, R.R. (1967) *Towards Effective Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Chicago: Aldine

Wade, M.E. (2015) 'Handling conflicts of personal values', *Ethics inquiries*. Available at: https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/ethics/ethics-columns/ethics_april_2015_personal-values.pdf?sfvrsn=1e24522c_4 (accessed: 28/11/22).

Wareing, M. (2017) 'Me, my, more, must: a values-based model of reflection', *Reflective practice*, 18(2), pp. 268–279. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2016.1269002>.

Wheeler, S. (2000) 'What makes a good counsellor? An analysis of ways in which counsellor trainers construe good and bad counselling trainees', *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 13(1), pp.65-83.

Wikström, B.M. (2002) Social interaction associated with visual art dialogs: A controlled intervention study. *Aging & Mental Health Issue*, 6, 80-85.