University of Wales

Trinity Saint David

Practicum

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‘Critically reflect on your counselling work with a client, explore ethical issues, application of theory, process recall and use of supervision’

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Throughout this essay it will be critically reflecting a case study provided, it will be exploring the work done with the client, exploring the humanistic approached used and looking into what other approaches could have been used, it will be exploring the ethical issues, exploring the relational depth and looking into how beneficial supervision is and the benefits of the observer in the session. In the case study, the counsellor is in a university setting in a triad group and will be in a twenty-minute counselling session with a lady who is her class peer, in the session, there will also be an observer who is off-camera. The client is a lady in her late forty's, early fifties, she is also a student at the university but has a job as a hypnotherapist outside of university in her own business, she has 2 kids and a husband and has moved to Wales in the last few years from England. In this case study, the client is on her fifth session with the counsellor, in this particular session the lady has come wanting to discuss relationship issues and friendships as she is currently struggling with letting people in since having a negative experience with two close friends back in England, since moving to wales she states she doesn't let anyone into her home or in personally. Towards the end of the session the lady had a light bulb moment and realised that it was herself that she didn't trust in making judgments not others. This session was very effective for the client as she was able to realise deeper connections and emotions that she was struggling with, some deeper emotional connections could have been made if the session was more than twenty minutes.

Within this case study, the objective is to critically analyse how the session went with the counsellor and the client with it looking at any issues that may have been raised, what went well and what went bad during the session and analysing it from all angles. To begin with, reflecting on this session it is addressed and made clear that this isn't the first time that the client and counsellor have met for session as the contract that they do is just a recap to ensure that they are both still agreeing with the contract in place. However in the first session with a client, an assessment process is to be done to ensure that the client is right for the service and to gain an understanding of the client's background before beginning their work together, this was done with this client in their first session, as well using an assessment to get to know the background of the client the assessment is also there to help the counsellor build a bigger picture on the client's issues, as stated by Cooper "The assessment process is also seen as offering another function- namely the opportunity to develop a 'case formulation' of the client and his or hers difficulties.' (Cooper et al,

2013). This helps the therapeutic death grow as without the counsellor knowing any of this information from the start then the therapeutic relationship and depth would have struggled and the sessions would have been no help to the client or counsellor.

Before a counsellor is to start with a client a contract must be made up and discussed before any therapeutic work can begin, as stated in Sills book Berne described a contract “An explicit bilateral commitment to a well defines course of action” (Berne, 1966) in any contact it should clearly outline what is expected for both client and counsellor. In the first session where the contract took place, it did so here ensuring that the client was clear on everything that was included and if they wanted to add anything to the contract that the counsellor and client agreed with this could be done. A contract is a fundamental part of the counselling work as without this in place the sessions would not be a safe place for the client or counsellor, as stated by the BACP (2018) a contract is there to state how a clients confidentiality and privacy will be respected and protected unless there was a need to disclose information this will be addressed and to whom and it is there to provide clients with clear information about the service they will be receiving. From creating this contract with the client and ensuring that from the first session the client understood what was expected from them and what they could expect from counselling, the counsellor felt reassured and safe whereas the client also seemed more relaxed knowing that their private information was safe in the room and could trust in the counsellor. However next time that the counsellor does a contract with a new client, area which could be improved could be ensuring that there is information about the organisation they are working in, as this was a university setting this was quite hard to complete, however, information about the setting could have been addressed still.

During this session the humanistic therapeutic approach that was used throughout the session was person-centred approach by Carl Rogers 1940, this approach was used with the client as the counsellor found that this would be the best approach to work with the client's issues and behaviour. In counselling diversity and ethical issues should always be accepted, reflecting the session there are visible diversities between the counsellor and client, firstly there is an age difference between the counsellor who is twenty-two and the client who is in her late forties, this could have been an issue in the therapeutic relationship as especially in a counselling setting

young counsellors are seen as not having enough life experience and from the outset older clients struggle to open up to the young counsellor, however, in this instance this was not the case and the therapeutic relationship was shown to be trusting and authentic with the client being able to open up to the young counsellor. The counsellor must be aware of these situations with diversity and ethical dilemmas as not every client will have the same morals and issues. As all counsellors have to be aligned with a professional working body, the counsellor in the case study is alleged with the BACP, being aligned with this the counsellor will need to follow all procedures and frameworks, one of the frameworks which need to be followed at all times is the ethical framework (2018), within this framework, it has three main sections which include their commitment to clients, Good practice and Ethics. Within any counselling session, there will always be a mixture of clients that come through the door such as different genders, different race and different beliefs but everyone is equal and should be respected this is why the ethical framework is in place to protect these ethics. The ethical framework (2018) state how they see their ethics “Our ethics are based on values, principles and personal moral qualities that underpin and inform the interpretation and application of Our commitment to clients and Good practice.” (BACP, 2018).

Reflecting the counselling session, the counsellor respected the client's diversity and ensured they followed the ethical framework, as stated by the BACP “Principles direct attention to important ethical responsibilities” (BACP, 2018) these principles include autonomy, Beneficence, being trustworthy, justice, non- maleficence and self-respect without these core principles being used and taken into account the sessions would not be beneficial, would be harmful to the client and counsellor and ethical issues could arise, as seen from this session these core principles were respected.

Reflecting on the counselling session, using the Gibbs model (1988) to help reflect. The counsellor uses techniques from Rogers person-centred approach, following this approach all the way through, seeing the client as the expert and allowing the client to lead the sessions to where they want to explore. During this session it is seen that the client has a lot going on at the moment and starts telling the counsellor about how they have been feeling, reflecting where they believe this feeling of not trusting people and not letting friends in started from, the counsellor is actively

listening and using minimum encouragers during this process. Phenomenological noticing can be a very useful tool during counselling and in the right setting can be beneficial, as stated by Casemore phenomenological noticing is

> “That is, noticing all the events, feelings, experiences, behaviours, words, tones of voice and anything else that we see or hear, as they are in the moment and not interpreting them based on our past experiences.” (Casemore, 2010)

During the session, the counsellor uses phenomenological noticing, by picking up on the feelings that the client has mentioned about feeling as though they can't trust themselves, this opened up and gave the client a light bulb moment. However, more of this tool could have been done as there are moments during the session where the client's body language changes when talking about previous situations and there is a time where the client puts their head in their hands, this should have been picked up by the counsellor and challenged the client. It is clear that the counsellor was using the person-centred approach with the client and it seemed as though this was the right choice for this particular client, the client had a lot to talk about and seemed to know where they wanted to take the session, the counsellor was very aware of this and can be seen respecting the choice of the client, the three core conditions of rogers which are congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard by using these skills as stated by Thorne “Such understanding involves on the therapists part a willingness to enter the private perpetual world of the client and to become thoroughly conversant with it.” (Thorne, 2007).

By the counsellor using these three conditions, it has given some depth to the therapeutic relationship. As seen from this session there were moments where the relational depth was present this was from using the core conditions by using these as stated by Cooper et al “In such a relationship, the therapist is experienced by the client as genuine and caring.” (Cooper, 2013) This was evidential in the counselling session, the counsellor showed empathy when the client was talking about their past and by the counsellor using their body language, facial expressions and tone of voice this came across to the client, which built the relationship. Relating to the session to see when this encounter of relational depth happened was when the client was unsure of how to

explain how they were feeling and gave a nervous laugh, the counsellor shared the laugh and by using facial expressions the client seemed safe and received that the counsellor understood them, little moments like these can change the whole counselling relationship and build the trust and therapeutic depth. However, there could have been some deeper relational depth as there are some areas where it could have been used such as the counsellor could have questioned the use of some of the body language the client did when fiddling more with their hands when talking about their past with friendships if this was questioned the therapeutic relationship could have grown deeper.

Throughout the session the counsellor was using minimal encouragers, by the counsellor using this it gave the client space and time to talk about how they were feeling and reflect on their past. These are also known as encouragers as by the counsellor using their facial expressions nodding and saying “uh-huh” this makes the client feel listened to and that the counsellor is engaging. Cooper stated that “Such utterances communicates to clients, without interrupting them, that what they say has been understood, reacted and that they should say more”(Cooper, 2016). Sometimes during a session this is all the client wants to hear, referring back to this session it seems like from the counsellor using these minimal encourages the client feels understood and it gave them the acceptance to continue with how they were feeling.

There was a theme that continued throughout the session with this client and that was trust and vulnerability, the client showed fear and lack of trust of opening up her self to new people and inviting them into her homes but what she went onto discover from the help of the counsellor using the metaphor and using immediacy, it was clear that the client was the fearful of inviting people into her soul as well as her house. By the counsellor jumping in using immediacy here and reflecting to the client “your doors?” it is seen that the client has that light bulb moment and realises that is what has been going on, however when using immediacy the counsellor has to make sure that it is the correct moment to do so otherwise it could affect the therapeutic process and relationship, a client could see the counsellor as interrupting them or even not listening if it is done wrong. However, in this session, the immediacy was done at the correct time and it can be seen that the client really appreciated it and benefited them greatly. Bishop explains how “Immediacy is very helpful as it

gives a person insight into their physiological and/or emotional responses related to a subject." (Bishop, 2011)

In every counselling setting there should always be a safe space within the session, without this safe space the client would hesitate to trust in the therapeutic relationship and open up about their issues, this is why it is so important to create a safe space for the client and counsellor otherwise no progress will be made. A safe space isn't just the room that the counselling takes place, it also means emotionally and physically safe for both counsellor and client, as stated by the BACP

> "To protect both parties, we agree we will work 'to professional standards' and 'within our competence' whilst 'keeping our skills and knowledge up to date'. We ensure 'our wellbeing is sufficient to sustain the quality of the work' and that our 'resilience' (the capacity to work with a client's concerns without being personally diminished) is sustained." (BACP, 2019).

Reflecting on this session, a safe space is contained for both counsellor and client, for starters, it is in a private room with blinds on the window and door so no one can see in watching the session and the counsellor is abided by the BACP framework. During the session, the client seems to feel safe and trusting throughout the session as they are opening up about their feelings and past as seen by their body language it is open and engaging within the session.

Throughout the session the counsellor uses mirroring quite a bit, in some sessions, this can be all the client needs and especially for a short amount of time in a session it can be hard to explore everything but by using the tool of mirroring this can give so much depth to the session and gives the client's time to process their emotions and feelings. The tool of mirroring is linked into the three conditions by Carl Rogers, it comes under the empathic understanding

> "The Client-Centred therapist must extend empathy to the client, both to form a positive therapeutic relationship and to act as a sort of mirror, reflecting the client's thoughts and

feelings to them; this will allow the client to better understand themselves." (Ackerman, 2020)

As seen from above using mirroring is so important when it can be used as it allows the client to become more self-aware. During the session the client kept referring back and forth from their past to present day and to keep the client back on track to stop and think about how they were actually feeling instead of just telling a story, the counsellor begins to repeat what the client said back to them in some parts it is the word for word but just changing it to the third person and saying "you", the counsellor could see that the client wasn't connecting with what they were saying and could see it was just a story to them until they mirrored back to them. From the counsellor doing so it was clear the client switched and started thinking about the feeling surrounding what they were saying rather than just a story, the client however then did go back into the storytelling way until the counsellor pulled them back into the here and now using mirroring again, it was clear that the client had a lot on their mind and just wanted to get it out in the open and in a safe environment, its although they haven't been able to process this out loud before. Although as this was a pattern though the session the counsellor realised this and could have used a different tool such as a sensitive challenge to stop and let the client be in the moment.

Furthermore, it was clear from the session that the client had trust issues within their self and with others, it was although the client is constantly battling with themselves and others surrounding the feeling of being unable to trust and having difficulty in letting go. It seems although that the trust issues that the client has been there for some time and it has gotten to the point where it is affecting their lives, it is shown that this is the issues from the client stating about friendships in the past that have ended and their trust within their selves was shown to been affected. Something that the counsellor could give the client in the next session to have a read and think about is The Four Agreements by Ruiz (1997), in these four agreements it includes to be impeccable with your word, Don't take anything personally, Don't make assumptions and Always do your best. By the use of processing these four agreements with the client and reflecting further into the trust issues with sensitive challenging, this way would be beneficial for the client.

Moving on to the ending of the session, the counsellor must keep within in the time allocated for the session, if the counsellor goes over or under the time allocated then the boundaries that have been put in place from the start are being broken, it is understandable that sometimes a session may go over a few minutes in certain circumstances, but happening more than once is breaking the boundaries and suggesting that they don't mean much to the client, as stated by the BACP "Boundaries maintain clear standards of therapy and protect you from poor or unethical practice" (BACP, 2017). Reflecting onto this session the time management could have been better as the ending was rushed and the summary could have flowed better, however, the session did finish at the allocated time of 20 minutes. The counsellor for next time needs to be more prepared in having a clock with them so they can see as this will help the counsellor to know when to start the summary of the session and not get into anything deep with the client in a short amount of time, this could be damaging to their mental health even more.

Reflecting onto the session, some areas went well and areas that would need improving for in the future. Firstly it will be exploring what went well, during the session relational depth was apparent throughout as stated by Knox

> "With the focus on what Rogers called the three 'core' conditions of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard, the description of relational depth emphases the importance of the integrative nature of these conditions." (Knox, et al, 2013)

The counsellor showed that they were using these three core conditions throughout and it was recognised by the client as the client was seen to be getting more comfortable in opening up about their past and their feelings, However, this is knowing that it is the fifth session with the client so the therapeutic relationship has had a past but it is shown in this session how apparent it is. Once this was apparent it was seen that the client seemed more relaxed in the session and their body language started to relax.

Another area that went well was the counsellor's use of paraphrasing and mirroring back to the client, this seen the client stop and think about how they feel to what they have previously said which was needed in this session, the counsellor also showed an open body language and welcoming facial expressions throughout the session and this was reflected onto the client as they were made to feel comfortable and trusting in this therapeutic relationship.

However there were areas which could have been improved during the session following refection on this session the counsellor could have used more sensitive challenges as the client had a lot to say about how they were feeling and what went on in the past with relationships, using sensitive challenges this would have brought the client back to the here and now and how they were feeling in this moment, this was missed during the session and it could have given the client more understanding of how they've been feeling.

Another area which could have been improved was the ending of the session, the summary was quite rushed and there was no warning to the client that they had only 10 minutes left, this could have affected the client as stated by Hill “A poor ending that is rushed or avoided can leave clients feeling vulnerable and not able to cope on their own.” (Hill, 2016)

From the use of the counsellor having supervision and having an observer in the session, this gives the counsellor more of an outlook on what went well for them and what needs to be improved, From critiquing this session one element that would be taken to supervision would be knowing the right times to sensitive challenge the client as the client had a lot to say in 20 minutes and from reflecting the counsellor didn't feel as though they could say much as the client just wanted someone to listen to them which the counsellor did and from using the use of supervision this helped the counsellor realise that some times that is all the client wants is someone to hear them and actively listen to them which is what the counsellor did.

To conclude this case study has shown the areas that went well and areas that didn't go well, it explored the diversity issues and ethical conservations that could have been experienced in the

session and explored if any were experienced, whilst understanding how important it is to follow the ethical guidelines by the BACP. This case study also looked into the therapeutic relationship between counsellor and client and just how important it is to have a good therapeutic relationship which in this case study was evident from the start, it explored how beneficial it was for the client to have all the protocols in places such as a contract, boundaries and relational depth. As well as the sessions it is noted just how important it is to ensure the counsellor receives supervision and observation notes from the observer during the session as this gives the counsellor notes on how to improve and to keep progressing as a trainee counsellor. The counsellor is taking away from the sessions more knowledge on how to deal with someone with trust issues and also knowing when to use sensitive challenging as sometimes you may have to jump into the client talking but to know when it is the right time to do so, to help them and bring them back into the here and now.

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