

Assessment 2 (ECPS5008).

Gibb's Reflective Cycle.

A Reflective Commentary on a Practical Skills Assessment.

Description.

Each student counsellor was required to conduct a practical counselling session of approximately fifteen minutes with another student acting as the client. This assessment would form a part of the marks required for a level five module. Leading up to the formal assessment, several role plays had been carried out, the student being either the counsellor, the client or the assessor. These sessions were in person and conducted at the Swansea IQ campus. The assessed session was scheduled to occur online using the medium of Microsoft Teams and in this scenario, I was the student counsellor and as well as the client there were two other people present, one a student and the other an assessor. Both had their cameras switched off and their audio muted. There were two practical assessments carried out a week apart and the student could choose which to have assessed. Prior to the assessments, I had personal issues which left me feeling stressed and more nervous than usual, but I decided to participate in the assessment rather than fall behind in my studies. I hoped that the benefit of the practice sessions would enable me to perform to an acceptable level. I was aware of my detrimental personal traits which with the practice I had managed to overcome for the benefit of the client. I was aware that I retrograded to old habits on both assessment occasions and did not perform to the level I knew I could, or I had hoped.

Feelings.

Prior to the session I did not feel comfortable or confident, but I was able to exude a professional persona so that I could take part in the assessment. During the counselling session I felt I was not at my best but tried to put the best practice of previous sessions in play knowing they had gone well. I was able to make the client comfortable in this situation to the extent that they considered the session went well. My initial feelings and emotions were of disappointment and resignation as I had not done as well as I hoped and

fell below my expectations. Although my student client seemed content with my performance, it was apparent that the undesirable traits I knew I had perpetrated were apparent to the module assessor. I am aware that my performance previously was at a better standard than the assessed occasions so both I and I hope the assessor realise that I am a better counsellor than the graded occasion. At the end of the counselling session, I was aware of every failing during the fifteen minutes and this was reinforced by one or two brief comments from the assessor. Rewatching the video of the session and having time to think deeply about the event, I realised I had alternatives at the time, and it might have been more beneficial to me to exercise them.

Evaluation.

I believe my opening contract with the client went well and I was able to put the client at ease and they were able to air their concerns and life pressures. The process of sitting squarely and open, as well as leaning towards the client with eye contact, all in a relaxed manner (SOLER) as defined by Gerard Egan was not as apparent online but every attempt made to achieve this “Skilled Helper.” I believe I listened to the client and understood the issues, without being judgemental or critical. There were silences but I feel I interacted prematurely on some occasions when it would have been more beneficial to allow the client to consider what they were saying and expand on their thoughts. It was difficult to show physical minimal encouragers, but I gave verbal support to develop the client's story and managed to show I was genuine in my support to the client and to show empathy for their difficulties. I gave short paraphrasing and summarising breaks during the session although at times, my clarification questions were too directive and as opposed to the client-based therapy, which was being practised, the session became more counsellor centred which was not the aim of the assessment. Towards the end of the counselling period, I was able to consider the clients concerns and give a summary of what had been said during the session and highlight any progress the client had made with any self-realisations the client had come to and possible ways to progress. The overall timing of the event was in limits and when asked if further sessions might be sought by the client, the answer was

affirmative.

Analysis

I could have exercised the process of “self-care” as described by Covey (1989), and endorsed by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) where they advocated that the counsellor should be as the saw which to work well needed sharpening now and again and if you are too busy sawing to do this then the blade never works as well. I knew I was not at my best and maybe should have accepted this. There were good points and skills less well executed during the session, and I felt I had underperformed at certain points during the event. When these negative emotions occur during a session when you are acting as a counsellor, it is difficult to suppress them, and the tendency is to let them effect what happens next. To the client's credit, my approach seemed to encourage a confidential disclosure of their frustrations and I did my very best to not allow my negative thoughts to transmit to the client. I can understand that perceived wisdom can be a hindrance on occasions and the wise person should realise when it is valid and not. During client centred therapy, it is fundamental to allow the client to arrive at a possible solution to their problems. There can be no blame to the therapist and if it is not the answer to the anxiety, then the client has not lost faith in the therapist and can pursue another avenue of redemption.

Conclusions.

The main criticism of my counselling attempt was the overuse of directive suggestion which is valid as I lack the experience and skill to use this approach and is not something generally practiced on a humanistic based study regime. I believe I have the wisdom and life experience but lack the skills to practise this system of counselling as proposed by E. G. Williamson (1941), that is the counsellor centred approach. The Gibbs Reflective Cycle advocates lifelong learning and before the student counsellor is permitted to counsel independently, they must conduct one hundred hours of clinically supervised

practice hours with an additional minimum of twenty-five hours of personal therapy to further give skills and experience to support professional and personal development (UWTSD Psychotherapeutic Practice: Humanistic) and it is a well acknowledged route

and a vital requisite to being a professional therapist. Although it is difficult to achieve, I must not allow my previous encounters with similar problems the client might be experiencing to be voiced and allow the client to sort out their own problems. What might have been a solution for one person may not be the way forward for another. If solving peoples' inner fears and anxieties were that simple, then there would be far fewer clients with clinical emotional needs and in need of help.

Action Plan.

On reflecting the event in its entirety, my first change would be to give myself proper preparation time and ensure all equipment was working and some self-meditation to put myself in a “good place” as an unprepared and flustered counsellor does little to put the client at ease and inspire confidence. I believe I have within me the ability to help clients and guide them towards the self-realisation of their core anxieties and to formulate their own solutions to their problems. This will take many sessions of practise counselling and every opportunity in which the chance to be involved in therapy must be grasped. Prior to any future counselling sessions I realise I must give myself time prior to being involved to reflect on those experiences which went not so well and remember the techniques which will prevent the same outcome. It is also important to consider the events which went well and use those as a benchmark for the future.

References

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