

REFLECTIVE REPORT OF BASIC COUNSELLING

Synopsis

Tiana Campos is a student of a Master in Agribusiness at University of Queensland. She is a Mozambican awardee of AUSAID scholarship. At the moment she is experiencing emotional stress with her studies. Her main concern is the time pressure and assignment overload. She fears not being able to cope and finish her degree in the expected time as agreed with AUSAID Office and thus be forced to return to her country without the Masters Certificate.

1. Introduction

Counseling is a process of helping others go through the difficulties, (Geldard and Geldard 2012). Therefore, many people seek counseling help when they cannot cope alone with one issue or sometimes when they need professional support to provide strategies. In addition McLeod (2007) states that counseling as a relationship initiated by the person who needs help and a professional of counseling. This essay will present a reflection on the use of micro counselling skills provided to a volunteer student of University of Queensland. This reflection will focus mainly on counseling techniques learnt in the course SPN 651 at Queensland University of Technology (2013). These techniques include: presentation, voice, questioning, paraphrasing, reflection of content, reflection of feeling and summarising.

2. Methodology

In order to carry out this assignment, I selected a student from The University of Queensland. This student is a 33-year-old female from Mozambique/Africa. The

selection process was made based on her motivation to share her concerns and perhaps benefitting from some important tips on how to deal with her situation. She was informed in advanced that this session is for an assessment purpose and that it would be recorded and listened to, by a QUT lecturer. However all the information will be anonymous and then destroyed at the end of the assessment.

3. Critical Reflection

3.1. Presentation

At the beginning of the session, the counselor's goal is to help the person seeking counseling to feel comfortable and willing to share his or her concerns, (Geldard and Geldard 2012). Having this in mind, I tried to be neither too friendly nor too detached. I started by presenting myself and then asking her a little about herself. Following this, I tried to engage her in questions about the geography of her country. I believe that showing this interest will soften the professional barrier between us and set us in a more friend-to-friend relationship, and thus making her feel more comfortable to share her feelings. There was a good moment in the beginning of the interview when my client (who knew that I was recording for forty minutes) reminded me to start the clock when I had forgotten. That was very encouraging, since I could see that she was aware of what was going on. That also alleviated the tension from both sides, as we both laughed at the same thing.

The key moment started at exactly 01:00. At this period I set up the ground rules. According to Sutton and Stewart (2002) it is important to clarify the limits of confidentiality at the beginning of the session. The author highlights that this is very

important since it helps the person to feel safer and thus disclose important information. Although, I did not directly refer my client to the fact that the lecturer would watch the video to assess me: I had explained this before starting the recorder. It is important to notice that during the ground rules setting, I always tried to check with her if she was comfortable with those rules. Furthermore, Geldard and Geldard (2012) explain that it is important to let the person seeking counseling know that if any important issue emerges during the session, and if the counselor is not well prepared to deal with it, he or she should refer the person to another professional who is more capable. It is for this reason that I mentioned to her that a referral might happen during the session.

After giving her space to share her problem, I gave her the opportunity to express how she wanted to be helped. This is to make sure that her expectation is satisfied. Geldard and Geldard (2012) explain that this technique is important to avoid that the counselors provide his/her own solution, which may not correspond to the person's expectations. Then I explained to her how the session would be structured in terms of short and long goals, as recommended by (Geldard and Geldard 2012).

3.2. Voice

According to Geldard and Geldard (2012) voice is very important during the counseling session. For example if it is too low or too high, it may impact unfavorably on the counseling outcomes. Therefore, I tried to keep my voice at a medium volume and tone. Furthermore, this will help with clarity and ease of understanding for my client. I also tried speaking at a reasonable pace. I used pauses and repetition during the questions to enhance this. Despite of some background noise, I think that there were no interferences

in the counseling process.

3.3. Questioning

During a counselling session, questioning is an important tool, since it allows the counsellors to explore the person's concerns, (Guindon 2011). Nevertheless, it is a skill that must be practiced and disciplined. Guindon (2011) reminds us that counsellors should ask the appropriate questions at appropriate time in order to efficiently guide the patient to disclose more and valuable information, and thus achieve efficient solution. This theory is also supported by (Geldard and Geldard 2012). During this session, I bore in mind this theory. For example, I tried to use more open questions than closed: in order to allow the person to give deeper explanations while exploring the issues herself. An important thing to consider is the space that I gave between the questions. I think that it gave the person enough time to reflect about the issue, and to not feel pressure or be overwhelmed, as defended by (Geldard and Geldard 2012).

3.4. Paraphrasing

Evans (2007) explains that paraphrasing is when the counsellor repeats the persons words in his or her own words. The author emphasizes that the art of paraphrasing is fundamental during counselling. Additionally, Geldard and Geldard (2012) present some benefits of paraphrasing, such as: it allows the counsellor to verify if he or she has understood what the person has said, while at the same time it demonstrates that the counsellor is actually listening. During this session, I tried to paraphrase when my client finished answering a question. I think that it was very efficient, because most of the time when I finished paraphrasing, I noticed that she added some extra information that

she had not disclosed in the beginning.

4. Needs Improvement

Despite significant effort to run this counselling session efficiently, I recognize that there are some points that I need to reflect upon and improve. First of all, I need to improve the time management. I was not able to track the time appropriately, because I could not see the clock easily. Therefore, I was fifteen minutes over the due time. Then, I felt myself trying to rush to finish the session. I think that that if I had managed my time properly, I would have concluded the session more efficiently. That was an important lesson learned.

Another important aspect is regarding the environment where the counselling takes place. In my case, the place was vulnerable to noises, such as cars, birds and people moving in the corridors. This could have some impact on the counselling session, transgressing the confidentiality agreement. So next time, I will definitely choose a better place.

Despite of the effort to ask efficient questions, I think I should improve my oratory. I believe that I spent too much time repeating the same question in a lot of different ways. I have a tendency to assume that the person did not understand at first, so I oversimplified. Moreover, I should explore other types of questions, such as miracle questions and scaling questions (Geldard and Geldard 2012).

Concerning reflection of feeling and content, I think I need to develop these skills more. I think that I have hardly done them in the appropriate manner. Nevertheless, I have

learned a number of significant aspects about my own practice with this experience. I hope to have more chance in the future to practice the improvements and become a good counsellor.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this reflective analysis on a basic counselling session provided to a student of University of Queensland was extremely useful. This reflection focused on my performance in a counselling session; the use of the basic counselling skills, such as voice, questioning, paraphrasing, reflection of content, reflection of feeling and being able to summarise my clients responses. This reflection reveals that despite correctly implementing some of these basic requirements; there is still a necessity to improve the ability to use correct reflection of content, and enhance my ability to reflect feeling and to appropriately summarise.

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