

Paul North

Reflective Essay

Counseling Program

Chadron State College

Introduction

When pursuing a career in counseling, it is important to develop a skill set which allows us to become the most effective counselors possible. During my time as a graduate student at Chadron State College, I have developed the skill set necessary to become an effective clinical mental health counselor as well as having experienced academic and personal development. As I begin my counseling career, it will be important to continue to develop these skills and abilities so I can be the most effective counselor I can be when working with my clients.

During my studies at Chadron State College, the program focused on a number of core areas, such as Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice, Cultural Diversity, Human Growth and Development, Career Development, Counseling and Helping Relationships, Group Counseling and Group Work, Assessment and Testing, Research and Program Evaluation. In each of these areas, I completed classes and coursework to ensure I will be well equipped to be the best counselor possible when working with my clients. As I continue into becoming a counselor, I will keep focusing on these areas in order to develop my counseling skill set still further for the benefit of my clients.

Counseling Professional Identity

One of the most important aspects of a beginning counselor is that of developing a professional identity. As a new counselor, my main role is to work with clients and work with them to resolve their mental health problems. When compared with other mental health professionals such as social workers and psychologists, the counselor focuses more

on developing coping skills for the client so they learn to manage and overcome their problems. Psychologists focus on attempting to uncover the client's underlying issues and are often more concerned about research and assessment. A social worker will often turn to community resources to help their clients and are concerned about both the physical and mental well being of their clients and ensuring both needs are met.

Clinical Mental Health Counselors also differ from school counselors since school counselors are often concerned about students' academic performance in an educational setting and are not necessarily trained to deal with mental health concerns of students. When compared to other mental health professionals, clinical mental health counselors possess a skill set that is designed to work individually with a client and build a strong therapeutic relationship. This sets the clinical mental health counselor apart from other mental health professionals because counselors help clients handle challenges regarding their emotional and mental health.

As a counselor, my main role in therapy is to act as a guide and collaborator with the client. The client is the expert in their own life and it is up to me as the counselor to help the client to explore their own life experiences. The goal of counseling is for the counselor to bring about self-awareness in the client so they can face the problems and issues affecting their life. My role as counselor is to listen carefully to the client and guide them to find solutions to their problems. It is important to have a strong therapeutic relationship with the client. The relationship would be expected to exist in the present and focus not on the past or future, but what is affecting the client in the here and now. By

having a strong therapeutic relationship with the client, I would expect a successful outcome to the therapy process.

These roles and functions are different from other mental health professionals who often have a different skill set when compared to a counselor. While they are engaged in helping the client they do not work with the client to help them develop coping skills to overcome their mental health concerns and personal issues.

Legal and Ethical Issues

From a personal perspective, the most pressing legal and ethical issue is privacy and confidentiality. As a developing counselor, it is important to take the rights of the client seriously. When first meeting clients, it is important to outline informed consent and inform the client the limits of informed consent and privacy. It is also important to begin developing a therapeutic relationship with the client in order to establish trust with the client. Once established, the counselor must continue to work with the client to maintain that trust. This includes maintaining high levels of confidentiality and not disclosing what is said in session unless it falls under the circumstances in which confidentiality should be broken. As a counselor there is always a risk of facing a complaint due to a breach of confidentiality or even the possibility of a malpractice lawsuit.

As a new counselor, I will also have to ensure client confidentiality concerning documentation and what is said in the counseling office environment. While it is important to discuss cases with my supervisor, it is essential I only disclose what

information I need to in order to maintain client confidentiality. I hope to maintain high professional standards and integrity to avoid any breaches of confidentiality and a possible malpractice lawsuit. I will follow laws concerning informed consent and closely follow the ethical guidelines of my professional organization, the ACA. If ever presented with an ethical or legal issue, I will consult colleagues and supervisors to help me resolve any legal or ethical issues I may face.

Professional Competence

As I continue to grow as a counselor, I will develop both my strengths and weaknesses so I can be the best counselor possible to my clients. My main strength as a counselor is my ability to listen carefully to my clients and focus on their needs. Through listening to my clients, I can help them find solutions to their problems. Each client is unique and different. Listening is important to have a high degree of empathy for the client. Being able to place yourself in the position of the client can help understand the issues the client is experiencing and help them deal with their problems. Empathy is something I possess and allows me to understand my clients and what they have to deal with in their lives.

One of my main weaknesses as a counselor is my ability to use reflection skills. In order to be an effective therapist, I must be able to use reflection with my clients. Reflection skills is something I must continue to work on and use with my clients if I am to be an effective counselor. This includes being able to use reflection of feelings and using reflection to encourage the client to talk and communicate to ensure the conversation flow. As a new counselor, the use of reflection skills has been one of my

main weaknesses and something I must work on to develop if I am to develop trust and rapport with a client.

In addition to developing my reflection skills, I need to work on my group therapy skills. During my internship, I have worked in a group setting with sex offenders and have gradually learned to counsel my clients at a level and pace that is appropriate for them. This includes working on assignments in the group and allowing feedback and offering support to all group members as they progress through their assignments. During my time working as a group counselor, I have developed my group counseling skills but feel this is an area I still need to develop. In particular, I need to be more sensitive to the needs of the clients and be willing to work with them at their pace and level of understanding.

Continuing Development

All counselors must continue to develop and evolve if they are to continue to be successful as counselors. This is especially true of new counselors such as myself and I must be willing to learn new ideas, theories, and techniques if I am to be a successful counselor. As a new counselor, I see myself continuing to develop in the area of Gestalt Therapy while also developing my therapeutic techniques in other areas. One area I am interested in is Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT). While working as an intern, I have been learning to use CBT with my clients to change their cognitive distortions and faulty thinking, to challenge their cognitive distortions and correct their negative thoughts and ideas.

In addition to developing in the area of CBT, I am also interested in the area of EMDR or Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing. While working in my practicum and internship, I have been able to observe EMDR in use with my site supervisor in the treatment of trauma. This is something I would be interested in learning as I continue to develop my counseling techniques as a new counselor. While observing the use of EMDR, I have learned it can be effective in the treatment of trauma and other adverse life experiences.

As a new counselor, I see continuing development as essential to my overall professional growth and will seek to learn new ideas and techniques which will allow me to become a better counselor.

Conclusions

Overall, the clinical mental health program at Chadron State College has prepared me for a career in mental health counseling. It has addressed a number of core areas that are important to a career in clinical mental health therapy. Areas such as social and cultural diversity have been emphasized, which is important as our society becomes more diverse. It is important counselors have the tools necessary to be able to work with clients from many different backgrounds and to respect their cultures and cultural differences.

Another area of importance is counseling orientation and ethical practice. During my time in the counseling program at Chadron State College, I have developed my theoretical orientation and come to understand the importance of ethics as a part of the counseling profession. To have strong ethical values and to follow the ethical code of

your professional organization is important, especially when it comes to the issue of client confidentiality and informed consent. As a new and developing counselor, the issue of ethics is important and one a new counselor must adapt to as they grow in the counseling profession.

The program ensures I will be an effective counselor as it has focused on several areas of study, including a practicum and internship, which provided me with the opportunity to use the skills I learned in the classes I completed while in the program. Moving forward, I hope to apply those skills in my career as a clinical mental health practitioner.