

Unit 4: Assignment 2

Diversity

2 Understand issues of diversity

2.1 Assess how diversity impacts on the counselling relationship

Student should complete a brief essay explaining how diversity impacts on the counselling relationship.

Word count: 500 minimum.

In a globalised society which sees peoples from across the globe navigate their way through the world together, it is important to celebrate and embrace diversity to enable a productive and peaceful society. Understanding identity is an integral part of the human experience; it is how we define ourselves, how we uniquely process our experiences and it is how we perceive differences between ourselves and others.

The notion of 'diversity' has become inextricable from the experience of living in a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-national society. It is an issue which, through its inherent acknowledgement of difference, has been a cause of both conflict and celebration. Diversity impacts the counselling relationship in a myriad of ways - including: the counsellor's capacity to self-reflect, the counsellor's commitment to ongoing learning, the counsellor's understanding of a client's 'frame of reference' and the quality of the service provided by the counsellor.

Professional counsellors have certain professional standards to abide by, which can be referred to in the BACP's 'Ethical Framework'. These expectations relate to: counselling skills, professional standards, ethics, values and qualities - often in relation to diversity. Embracing diversity is central to the humanistic approach of counselling which values idiosyncratic differences and requires empathy from the counsellor.

Counsellors are expected to be able to reflect and self-evaluate their own thoughts - a skill which is developed throughout training. This is evident in the BACP Ethical Framework which states that counsellors must 'accept we are all vulnerable to prejudice and recognise the importance of self-inquiry, personal feedback and professional development'. Whilst learning, aspiring counsellors will be expected to reflect upon their own preconceptions and prejudices which necessitates - first and foremost - that the counsellor understands their own [cultural, religious, gender, socio-economic, sexual] identity. A multicultural counselling session is one in which both the counsellor and client share differences which are not limited to solely cultural differences, but differences which also relate to other protected characteristics. When a counsellor is aware of their own identity, it makes relating to the client within a multicultural session more effective. A successful multicultural counsellor is one who embraces diversity and values a social 'melting pot' of different people.

Perceiving the client's experiences through their unique perspective (commonly referred to as 'frame of reference'), is fundamental to effective counselling and relate to the counselling skill empathy. Being aware of diversity amongst clients means also being aware that a client's identity (also relating to the Equality Act's 2010 'protected characteristics') informs how they perceive phenomenal experiences.

Counsellors are also expected to continue to develop their learning according to the BACP Ethical Framework - 'Work to professional standards by:... keeping our skills and knowledge up to date' (BACP 'Ethical Framework' - which includes cultural awareness and diversity training. Similarly, BACP also advises that counsellors must 'take steps to inform ourself from other

sources where appropriate, rather than expecting the client to teach us' if one's knowledge of the client's background is insufficient. Fundamentally, counsellors are expected to 'value diversity and ensure inclusion for all clients' (BACP 'Ethical Framework') and are driven to work beyond basic legal requirements and embrace differences genuinely and professionally.

REFERENCES

BACP (2016), 'Ethical Framework' Accessed at: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/ethical-framework-for-the-counselling-professions/> Accessed on: 16/07/18

END OF 2.1

2.2 Analyse examples from own experience where they have encountered issues of difference and diversity

Students should complete a reflective piece analysing examples from own experience where they have encountered issues of difference and diversity.

Word count: 600 minimum.

My own experiences encountering issues of differences and diversity tend to relate to those moments I have witnessed or been a part of during my professional experience working in education.

After the 2017 Manchester terrorist attack at an Ariana Grande concert, a Muslim colleague and friend shared with staff how Muslim students may be contending with the events: not only shaken and sharing in the city's grief, but also terrified of the hateful far-right Islamophobic response. In response to the attack, the headteacher organised separate year group assemblies - during which she sought to contextualise the events away from the rhetoric of the far-right as well as discussing the values central to Islam including the etymological synonymy of Islam with peace. For the remainder of the day, the feeling of solidarity between all students and staff was palpable.

The following day, however, was different. The previous evenings spent at home meant some students had been exposed to more extreme views which they had not fully encountered during the previous school day. Consequently, some Muslim students had felt ostracised by some of their peers; these peers had been posting far-right Islamophobic images and slogans online. This bullying and discriminatory behaviour led to four students being temporarily suspended from school, whilst the headteacher called for another urgent assembly to challenge these behaviour and re-instil all students with a sense of solidarity and sisterhood. During a later moment in the day, one of the students (a typically smiling and outgoing student) approached me quietly after having spent the day being unusually reserved. As a practicing Muslim, her grandparents had asked her not to attend school, fearing her safety on public transport.

In response to the Manchester attack, the senior team co-ordinated different modes of support for students and staff alike. Staff had fifteen minutes of daily briefings each day (as opposed to just two). Staff encouraged conversations, understanding and compassion during class discussions in order to challenge those extreme views in a balanced and non-judgemental environment. The safeguarding team - combined with the Special Educational Needs & Disabilities department - facilitated extra 'Time out' sessions for students struggling to contend

with the recent events. Those students who had attended the concert were also supported with professional counselling through school as well as having more scheduled time with the safeguarding staff. Staff were also given further training relating to 'Prevent' duty within schools.

Contrastingly, in a positive experience of diversity, the school hosted an annual 'East meets West' evening which celebrated the different cultures and faiths within school through food, song, dance, music and performance.

Earlier this year, I moved to Bradford where I have begun working as a Teaching Assistant in a primary school. The school is situated in a low-income and deprived community which is known for its local links to the British National Party (BNP). The popularity of the party has exposed children in the community to fascist and racist rhetoric; low levels of attainment within education may also contribute towards the persistent prevalence of such views. Recently, a child of the age of 10 complained that his peers were mocking his mother for wearing a burka, describing her as a "ninja". Whilst explaining the situation to me, a part-time and casual member of staff interrupted the conversation by dismissing his side of the story and arguing in favour of the other children who "were not being racist" and were "just joking". It was my opinion that these peers in question had not understood the implications or significance of their mockery, and did not understand why it had caused offence. Had I been the initial member of staff to deal with this scenario, I would have helped them to understand why their 'jokes' had been offensive by contextualising racism and bullying in reference to their recent PSCE (Personal, Social, Citizenship, Health Education) lessons. I would have then logged the incident on our Safeguarding software which would have informed the Senior Safeguarding officers in school who would have been able to follow up the incident. Regardless of the involvement of the other member of staff (and in accordance with my previous training at another school) I reported the incident to the class teacher including the dismissive reaction of the other member of staff.

I believe that all of these experiences in which I have encountered the discriminatory implications of diversity have arisen from misinformation, misunderstanding and naivety on the parts of children. These instances highlight the importance of education and its role in promoting British Values of tolerance and peace to students, by challenging discriminatory views and encouraging empathy.

2.3 Evaluate how awareness of diversity has impacted on own development and application of counselling skills.

Students should complete a reflective essay evaluating how awareness of diversity has impacted on their own development and application of counselling skills.

Word count: 600 minimum.

Being aware of diversity has impacted upon my own development in several ways, predominantly through helping me to understand one's individual 'self' and the notion of identity. Understanding diversity in this depth has helped me to recognise that a person's sense of self is inextricable from their identity or sense of belonging within a community. Through understanding the idiosyncrasies of the individual self, I have more of a

comprehension of how issues of diversity may impact upon a person's self-worth and self-belief.

Within my professional development as a teaching assistant, understanding diversity has supported me within my professional training at work. Understanding identity within the context of diversity has helped me to recognise how a child's self-esteem impacts upon attainment levels from an early age. It has helped me to understand the socio-economic impact upon children's self-belief within education from an early age. Relating to socio-economic circumstance for instance - low-income areas often have low levels of attainment within education. This typically leads to lower levels of aspirations within children, perpetuated by lack of self-worth.

Inline with BACP's expectations of what constitutes good professional practice, I have also been motivated to explore other issues around diversity. An area of academic interest to me has been the subject of Cultural Appropriation and how marginalised or minority groups feel when their own cultural symbols/rituals are seemingly pillaged and appropriated by historically-oppressive majority groups. I am continuing to read more in this field to learn how issues of diversity impact upon minority groups - sometimes without the awareness or understanding of majority groups. Within the scope of diversity, I am also sociologically interested in the implications of people whose identity is formed by dual or multi-heritage. This can be a conflicting - perhaps even paradoxical - experience for those with parents of different cultures, countries or faiths. A person's sense of belonging - which is inextricable from the possibility of self-actualisation suggested by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod) - determines a person's successes in achieving one's potential. I am therefore interested in how multi-heritage may impact upon a person's sense of belonging. This is something I will continue to explore on an academic level related to my continuing counselling studies.

Further to this, understanding diversity has instilled me with a sense of hyperawareness which has fine-tuned my levels of empathy - raising them to the deep idiosyncratic empathy which is necessary to understand the uniqueness of individual clients. By developing my empathetic skills, I recognise that diversity often informs how counsellor's should perceive a client's *frame of reference*: the unique way in which a client perceives the world. This in turn has impacted upon my listening skills, which I recognise to be fundamental as to how I perceive my client's material. It is imperative that I listen to the client and interpret their meaning through their individual frame of reference, rather than through mine; this has broken down the process of listening in a similar way to John Berger's approach in 'Ways of Seeing'. By viewing issues through the client's frame of reference, I have also learnt the importance of being non-judgemental. Judging another person against my own upbringing and beliefs would be counter-productive to the counselling process and would be an inherent denial and dismissal of diversity. Through being non-judgemental, I also recognise that practicing Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR) will naturally embrace differences and diversity (Joseph, 2012). This is something I will continue to practice in my relations with people on a personal level as I continue to study counselling skills.

REFERENCES

Joseph, Stephen (2012) *Unconditional Positive Regard*, Accessed at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/what-doesnt-kill-us/201210/unconditional-positive-regard>, Accessed on: 08/08/18

McLeod, Saul (2018), *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, Accessed at: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>, Accessed on: 08/08/18