

A collaborative pluralistic framework for counselling practice

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A pluralistic collaborative framework for counselling practice: structure of the talk

- Background – why do we need a pluralistic framework?
- Basic principles – how it works in practice
- Case example
- Strengths of the pluralistic framework
- Further development of practice
- Implications for research

Why do we need a pluralistic framework?

- Existence of multiple change processes – all of which seem to be effective (at least some of the time)
- Maximising client agency and involvement
- Inadequacy of eclectic and integrative models:
 - Eclecticism does not identify criteria for choosing between interventions
 - Integrationism ultimately leads to the development of new ‘unitary’ approaches (which focus on a limited sub-set of change processes)
 - Assimilative integration – leaves it all up to the individual therapist
- Enhance the capability of research to inform practice
- Overcome the theoretical factionalism that exists within the profession

Basic principles of the pluralistic framework

- ‘Design criteria’ for a pluralistic framework:
- Does not attempt to replace ‘unitary’ models, but seeks to respect and enhance their contribution
 - A simple set of ideas that will make sense to counsellors and clients
 - Straightforward counsellor ‘algorithm’ that can readily be incorporated into practice
 - Generates questions and possibilities for research and inquiry

Basic principles that guide practice

- Underlying assumptions about therapy:
- Concept of the person existing within a social world, and creating a *personal niche* (Willi)
- Person is an *active client*: purposefully seeking to resolve his/her problems (Bohart)
- Counselling offers a space, outside of everyday life, to enable reflection and talking things through
- The counselling space embodies certain *values*, e.g. affirmation, agency
- Research and practical experience emphasises the central importance of the client-counsellor *relationship*

Basic principles that guide practice

- The **pluralistic framework**:
- The process of counselling/psychotherapy can be broken down into a series of inter-related **collaborative** activities:
- **Understanding** the underlying problem in living that has lead the person to seek therapy
- Identifying what the person wants – their **goals** for therapy
- Agreeing on specific therapeutic **tasks** that would be necessary for the achievement of these goals

A preliminary list of counselling tasks

- making meaning: talking through an issue in order to understand things better
- making sense of a specific problematic experience
- problem-solving, planning and decision-making
- changing behaviour
- negotiating a life transition or developmental crisis
- dealing with difficult feelings and emotions
- finding, analysing and acting on information
- undoing self-criticism and enhancing self-care
- dealing with difficult or painful relationships

Basic principles that guide practice

- The process of counseling/psychotherapy can be broken down into a series of inter-related **collaborative** activities:
- **Understanding** the underlying problem in living that has lead the person to seek therapy
- Identifying what the person wants – their **goals** for therapy
- Agreeing on specific therapeutic **tasks** that would be necessary for the achievement of these goals
- Collaboratively selecting and implementing appropriate **methods** that will enable these tasks to be carried out

What are counselling methods?

- A counselling **method** is a sequence of client and counsellor activities that enable the completion of a counselling task
- Counsellor and client are **jointly responsible** for identifying/adapting methods
- Sources of methods:
 - Formal therapy interventions (e.g., CBT protocol, empathic reflection, experiential focusing, two-chair work)
 - ‘Personal knowledge’ of the counsellor or client (‘existential touchstones’ – Mearns, and Cooper, 2005)
 - Cultural resources (e.g., art, reading, nature)

How the pluralistic framework is implemented at the Tayside Centre for Counselling in Dundee

- Counsellors trained/encouraged to think pluralistically
- Clients have pre-counselling meeting – are encouraged to think pluralistically
- Clients identify and rate their goals for counselling at every session

Your goals for counselling

This page asks you to describe, in your own words:

- the two most disturbing problems or complaints for which you are seeking help
- how much each of these problems is bothering you at the moment (during the last week)

Problem/complaint/concern no. 1

Describe the problem, as you see it:

How much has this problem been bothering you? (circle one number):

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Not at all

Couldn't be worse

Problem/complaint/concern no. 2

Describe the problem, as you see it:

How much has this problem been bothering you? (circle one number):

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Not at all

Couldn't be worse

Source: Deane, F.P., Spicer, J. and Todd, D.M. (1997) Validity of a simplified target complaints measure. Assessment, 4: 119-130

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- Counsellors engage in regular metacommunication, process contracting and reviewing, around goals, tasks and methods

Brief case examples

- Mary: a tragic bereavement – key tasks included dealing with awful emotions, and getting support from family members
- Mike: coping with a health-related life transition and severe pain
- Margaret: unable to move on in life because of obsessive compulsive rituals

Strengths of the pluralistic framework in practice

- Reinforces the therapeutic relationship – provides a series of opportunities for ‘relationship work’
- Brings ‘indigenous/traditional healing practices’ into the heart of counselling: promotes multiculturalism
- Provides a structure for on-going counsellor professional development
- Encourages counsellor and client creativity

Further development of pluralistic practice at Tayside Centre for Counselling

- Use of preparatory written materials for clients
- Better client access to self-help resources (books, leaflets, websites)
- Enhanced system for client tracking and feedback ('conversational tools')
- Client choice of counsellor
- Enhanced training for counsellors

Research projects

- Mapping the methods that can be used in relation to specific tasks
- Developing pluralistic frameworks for specific problems – e.g., dementia project
- Making sense of goals, and how best to measure/assess/track them
- Developing a research-based taxonomy of counselling tasks
- Analysing effective and ineffective counsellor collaborative strategies
- Exploring the impact of pluralistic counselling on outcomes – the quality of the therapy relationship, client retention, client satisfaction, long-term gains