Final Reflection

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This was one of my most enriching course both professional and personal. I felt supported and valued by my professor, mates, and my site supervisor. This does not mean that was the ideal experience throughout but in reflecting I have a great appreciation for the time spent grooming me and cultivating my skills to further advance to field an impact client's outcomes.

**Performance Appraisal**

**Site/supervisor**

I confronted several challenges getting acclimated and settling into the culture of ATRA Counseling Center. I received progressive and continuous feedback to help advance the settling in period. This level of support was internalized so much so, that I felt like I overstepped by making business/administrative suggestions out of turn. This was a learning/teaching moment for me, which I can say that I benefited from greatly. Clinically, I appreciated the access to Ms. Connie, where I would have discussed countertransference and transference issues within the workday. Outside of the office, Ms. Connie would call or text me and was willing to provide supervision long distances, even to support me during my LU intensive period. Overall, she has continued to be a wonderful support, even when I walked out of sessions still wrestling with her feedback. Her ultimate vote of confidence was demonstrated when she recommended me for a position as a site supervisor at another agency and served as one of my professional references.

**Personal Reflection**

I believe I have met the learning outcomes from the course by interacting and integrating theories relevant to counseling, ethically. I completed evaluations and conceptualization plans of clients from multiple theoretical perspectives and evidence-based counseling.

*Advancements Made*

During the semester I was reminded, introduced and guided through several clinical techniques to add to my toolbox. Additionally, I was able to grow my library with books specific to trauma, self-esteem, and recovering from infidelities. My site placement allowed me the opportunity to do research, facilitate supervision, in addition to conducting therapy sessions. My vocabulary has grown in terms of field changes and service definitions. Through verbatims and reproduction reflective activities, I was able to see areas for growth, gaps in my therapeutic manner and my communication skills. I felt safe to explore subjects both within my strengths and weaknesses without judgment. I found myself leaving work at work because I was able to take off the clinical hat, the student hat, and the gate-keeper hat. This contributed to a great sense of work-life balance and overall well-being.

In closing, clinical leadership in this field looks different for everyone but I was able to see first-hand my supervisor advocating for clinical reform and legislative changes by lobbing, writing emails and letters to local and state officials. I have read of the need to have our voices heard in this way, but I have never seemed these actions executed with such diligence. I will take this example to implement for myself, however, I plan on also inspiring other counselors coming after me to follow Ms. Connie’s lead.

*Room for growth*

This process and course changed my conceptual perspective by allowing me to see that I am not as good of a counselor as I once thought. I can see now that I have several areas that require improvement. Some examples of this include implementing evidence-based techniques with fidelity. I have noticed that there is a delicate balance of being in harmonious agreement with the client, following the pulse of the session, and implementing strategy in a sequential order. What I mean is, during this time I have the experience, some clients as insistent as they are trying to skip to the end of the process. For me, one challenge was not slowing the process too much at each step to where it felt un-useful therapeutically, but not moving ahead at some a rate that they missed the therapeutic value intended. Consequently, I experienced some clients showing up with a broken spirit and asking me to “fix it” or “fix them”. I will reply by setting the expectations with a statement like:

“The enormous strength that it takes to be bold and vulnerable at the same time is inspiring. I want you to know that as a therapist, I won’t:

Try to fix you. Give you advice. Tell you what to do. Pretend I know more about you than you do. Assume what is best for you. Have all the answers. Make the hard stuff go away.

But as a therapist, I will:

Remind you that you are not broken. Give you room to access your own wisdom. Support you in figuring out what to do. Recognize that you are the expert on your own life. Remember that only you know what is best for you. Honor that I do not know it all. Collaborate with you on how to make that hard stuff easier to sit with”.

For several clients, this does provide some comfort, however, I am challenged treating severely depressed clients (non-Christian) or clients who are deeply rooted in their hopeless; helplessness. One example of this is the client's struggle to understand the theology of the Imago Dei, grace and the first sin. This to me highlights my weaknesses and it feels vulnerable.

**Modification**

I enjoyed having two forms of supervision sessions each week. Attending group sessions in the form of our classroom structure and on-site supervision improved my confidence as a clinician. The correction, affirmation, and validation of my clinical skills were invaluable. Moving forward I would like to access one more hour of supervision session per week, for me to continue on the growth trajectory that this course has set me on.

**Personal counselor identity**

I am determined to engage in effective counseling and professional advocacy practices that will not only benefit the clients for whom I serve, but will also advance the overall field. I hope to accomplish this through a great deal of mentorship and supervision from those who came before me.