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Methods, Processes and Skills of Eclectic Counselling in an Educational Setting

by

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English and English (1958) defined Eclecticism as the selection and orderly combination of compatible features from diverse sources, sometimes from incompatible theories and systems: the effort is to find valid elements in all doctrines or theories and to combine them into a harmonious whole. The resultant system is open to constant revision even in its major outlines. Eclecticism, they further argued, should be distinguished from unsystematic and uncritical combination of elements. The eclectic counsellor seeks as much consistency as is currently possible, but he is unwilling to sacrifice conceptualizations that put meaning into a wide range of facts for the sake of what he is apt to think of as an unworkable over-all systematization.

The concept of eclecticism as viewed by its practitioners is the recognition that no one theoretical orientation or series of techniques is adequate to deal with the complexities of multiple persons in potentially constructive interactions.

Thorne was one of the first practitioners in the field of clinical psychology and counselling or psychotherapy to promote the eclectic viewpoint in terms of a systematic position.

Historical Background

The emergence of eclecticism as a distinct viewpoint was stimulated by many scholars working in isolation, but Thorne (1950) first advocated a complete system of practice based on eclectic viewpoint. As far back as the early 1930s, Robert S. Woodworth described the eclectic position as the general method of science asserting that none of the "schools" of psychology had the complete answers to everything, that there was no universal panacea. Thorne's advocacy of eclecticism developed from a succession of insights concerning the predictive invalidities of the limited systems to which he was exposed during training. Thorne early became convinced that there were no easy paths to clinical wisdom and competency. These can be obtained only through mastering all that is known in psychology and psychiatry and in related specialities. Thorne earned his doctorate in psychology at Columbia University in 1934. He received his M.D. degree at Cornell in 1938. His works include Thorne (1950), Thorne (1961). Recently Brammer (1969) presented a statement advo-

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cating on "ememrging eclecticism" as a view of counselling appropriate for most practitioners.

View of Human Nature

Some of the major concepts of eclectic counselling are subsumed in its view of human nature.

Thorne does not present a single theory of behaviour but attempted instead to bring together all observations and empirical data in behaviour or "person", which is Thorne's preference to the term personality.

Thorne believes that an individual's personality is formed and reflected as he or she interacts with the environment. It is characterized as a process of changing or becoming.

Personality dynamics include a series of drives:

- (1) the drive for higher organization (actualization, perfect functioning, integration);
- (2) the drive to achieve and maintain stability (self preservation, homeostasis, control, life goals, life style) and
- (3) the drive to integrate opposing functions so as to avoid, imbalance.

An individual's life style is assumed to be based on characteristic patterns of achieving unification of his or her strategy in satisfying needs and coping with reality, consciousness is considered the main organizing integrating and unitizing mechanism determining and making possible higher level personality functioning. Emotional status and disturbances in behaviour result from disturbances of consciousness.

Past experience may place limits on an individual but the person, it is believed, can transcend the past by the ability to imagine and manage the future. Logic and rationality are assumed to be the individual's best means for becoming better and healthier.

Personality is assumed to be influenced by constitutional — biological factors, cultural factors and self actualization. The basic units of personality are the acts performed by the individual. These act are assumed to be organized in terms of the various roles that the individual plays, which are defined by his or her concepts of the physical and social world.

From the eclectic viewpoint, personality development is regarded as a struggle to transcend affective - impulsive unconscious determination of behaviour by learning and perfecting rational-logical voluntary behaviour.

Process, Method and Skill in Counselling

Eclectic counselling based on rational plan that involves appropriate measures for:

- (a) Opening the relationship;
- (b) dealing with causes and systems and

(c) terminating counselling.

Elements of counselling or psychotherapy which Thorne (1968) referred to as psychological case handling, are as follows:

- (1) adequate diagnostic study,
- (2) detailed knowledge of limitations of treatment methods, their indications and contradictions;
- (3) treatment of basic causes rather than symptoms;
- (4) an individual plan of treatment;
- (5) choice of methods on the basis of specific indications;
- (6) the use of single methods where possible so that effectiveness can be evaluated;
- (7) Evaluation of results;
- (8) use of scientific methods in analysis of data;
- (9) recognition that there are no panaceas or universally applicable methods and
- (10) eclecticism recognized as the keynote of modern science.

Factors Determining the Choice Counselling Method

According to Thorne (1950), some of the factors or criteria that determine the method of choice are:

1. *Specificity of Action*:- There is little evidence for the specificity of action of various methods, the counsellor must depend on counselling experience.
2. *Economy of Action*: The method that is most economically effective is preferred.
3. *Natural History of the Disorder*
The pattern of development of the disorder must be understood for the most effective choice of treatment methods. Specific methods, relative to the severity of the disorder, must be applied to achieve maximum effect.
4. *The Distributive Principle*. The counsellor directs the treatment actively and according to a plan adapting to the course of treatment and client progress.
5. *Total Push*. Every possible influence and treatment should be brought to bear in a concentrated manner.
6. *Failure of progress*. When a client fails to respond to treatment, more drastic methods are applied. When no rational prescription is possible or when plans have failed, every possible method is used.

Eclectic counselling requires counsellors to be sensitive to the developing situations so that they can evaluate the indications and contraindications for the application of any method.

Active Versus Passive Techniques

One issue the eclectic counsellor is likely to face is degree of his activeness or directiveness to be employed while counselling the client. Thorne makes the fo-

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Following generalizations concerning the use of directive or non-directive methods:

1. In general, passive methods should be used whenever possible.
2. Active methods should be used only with specific indication and with the minimum amount of directive interference that is necessary to achieve therapeutic goals.
3. Passive techniques are usually the methods of choice in early stages of therapy in order to permit emotional release.
4. The law of parsimony (great carefulness) should be observed at all times. Complicated methods should not be attempted (except with specific indications) until simpler methods have failed.
5. All therapy should be client-centered. That is the interest of the client are the prime consideration. It does not mean that the directive methods are contra-indicated. In many cases, the client's needs indicate directive action.
6. It is desirable to give every client an opportunity to resolve his problems non-directively, inability of the client to do this is an indication that more directive methods are needed.
7. Directive methods are usually indicated in situational maladjustment that requires the co-operation of other persons.
8. Some degree of directiveness is inevitable, even if it is only reaching the decision to use passive methods.

Thorne (1950) further outlined the stages developed in the course of treating a disorder. The phases of treatment are as follows:

1. Stage of Incipient Maladjustment — characterized by minimal evidences of maladjustment.
2. Stage of Overt Maladjustment — when the fact of maladjustment becomes apparent.
3. Stage of Reactive Personality Disorder
Characterized by attempts to conceal or compensate for the maladjustments
4. Stage of Bewilderment and Trial and Error Behaviour — Awareness that something is wrong and the individual develops a need for help.
5. State of Insight into Psychological Nature of Disorder:— The person learns that the problem may be mental.
6. Stage of Reactive Depression and Discouragement: There is feeling of futility, shock and embarrassment.
7. Stage of Symptomatic Relief:— Superficial improvement occurs.
8. Stages of Growth and Recovery:— There is remediation of the specific etiological factors.

9. Stage of Relapse. When there is no uniform positive acceleration and a kind of "backsliding".
10. Stage of cure: When the client is relieved of the symptom.

Diagnosis and Use of Case History

Eclectic counsellors call for a comprehensive case history to be taken and that objective information be obtained from many sources. Accurate case histories are significant because of their potential diagnostic yield.

Termination of Counselling.

Ideally, counselling terminates naturally, with the client gradually resuming independent self-regulation. The closing phase of counselling is characterized by the achievement of an understanding of the nature and origin of maladjustment; the reduction of tension and defence reactions.

Most counselling relationships come to a natural termination by mutual consent.

While the counsellor is concerned about premature termination, he should also avoid over treatment. Counselling should be concluded with some type of summary of the process and its accomplishments.

Case Study to Illustrate Eclectic Counselling Skills

As previously discussed eclecticism in counselling select, pick out or choose from various systems or theories valid elements to help a client. In the case study discussed here, dream analysis from psychoanalysis, assertive training from the behavioural counselling approach are combined with active directive teaching, the use of logic and reason as emphasized in Rational Emotive Therapy, in treatment of the client, under consideration.

Background Information on Client

Client A was a final year student in a Nigerian University. The reasons for referral included examination phobia, declining academic performance and marked anxiety.

Counselling Interview

First Session

- Co — Good Morning Miss A,
Please come in and have a seat.
- Cl. Thank you sir,
- Co. I have received the referral letter on your concerns and I believe we can both work out something that will be beneficial to you. Please tell me more about your concerns.
- Cl. Thank you sir, You see I am the first child of my mother in a polygamous home. I am currently in the final year of my degree programme. I have

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not been doing well in my final class contrary to my performance in previous years. It is apparent I may not graduate this year.

- Co. You feel concerned about your deteriorating performance and you are unhappy about these recent developments.
- Cl. Yes, I do not know what I have done her and why she is picking on me this time
- Co. It appears you have indentified the source of your concerns, could you tell me more about it.?
- Cl. You see, at the beginning of this session, I saw my father's second wife in my dream, she hid something under my pillow in my sleep and told me I will flunk out of the university. Ever since that dream, I always experience "blankness" during examinations despite adequate preparations. I find it difficult to recollect details, I must have been charmed by my father's second wife who is envious of my brilliant performance in school. You see sir, her own children are not doing well at all in school and she does not like it and she feels I am becoming the favourite of our father even though I am a female.
- Co. It appears you are convinced that your father's second wife is responsible for your present situation.
- Cl. Yes, people can be very wicked, after all I am not to blame for the poor academic performance of her children (The client sobs and counsellor consoles and allowed some time to elapse before continuing the session).
- Co. You seem to be helpless about the situation, now let us look at the issue more closely. Could you show me other concrete evidences that convinced you that your father's second wife was responsible for your present predicament?
- Cl. All I know is that I dreamt about it, I have a feeling of her responsibility for my present problems even though she pretends to like me.

Comments: During this session, The client was taken though dream analysis, that

- (1) dreams provide means of understanding the unconscious;
- (2) that the reported dream content is not as important as the conflicts symbolized in the dream and that
- (3) there is no absolute symbolism and universal key to the meaning of dreams.

The belief system of the client was further explored on the subject matter using Rational Emotive Therapy.

The focus of therapy here, is not centered on whether such supernatural power exists or not, but on whether it is actually currently responsible and causing the client's academic and emotional problems. Other illogical ideas of the client were explored e.g., that she should be loved and approved by everyone all the time without reservations (including her father's second wife).

The basics of Assertive — training were discussed with the client, the need to express her feelings freely toward people without aggression was emphasized. Implications of non-assertiveness were also explained to the client.

Assignments given Client against next session

1. The client was to look for concrete evidences to validate her conviction of her father's second wife's responsibility for her predicament. This could perhaps enable the client do some disputing.
2. The client could also confront her father's second wife on the issue directly or in a subtle way that will reveal her concerns. This was to be done in an assertive but not in an aggressive manner.
3. Client was to bring evidence of her performance during the previous years.

Unselling Interview/ Second Session

How are you today Miss A?

Much better (with smiles)

Do you have records of your performance in the last two years?

Yes.

Let me go through them with you

(The record of academic performance showed that the client was well above average in performance. Decline in performance actually started in the final year)

Could you tell me other concrete evidences that you have to implicate your father's second wife?

I confronted my father's second wife about my dreams and my subsequent poor performances but she claimed innocence of the allegations.

The client was made to see what rational beliefs (rB) and what irrational beliefs (iB) she held towards the Activating event A, the Dream which was responsible for consequences C, such as exam phobia, anxiety and actual poor academic performance.

Comments Attempts were made to help the client modify her symptom-producing propensities in general. Some other irrational superstitious beliefs were discussed with the client and a reasonable position to adopt in each instance was noted.

Follow-up. The client was able to rid herself of general anxiety and exam phobia and she passed her final year degree examinations with second upper distinction, while her father's second wife attended her graduation ceremony.

Some Limitations of Eclecticism

Some of the limitations of eclectic counselling are as follows:

It is argued that it is doubtful if a counsellor can determine the correct

- or the most appropriate method of counselling on the basis of immediate client reaction.
2. That the eclectic system could lead to inconsistencies and contradictions.
 3. That clients are likely to be uneasy with changes in methods during counselling.

Summary

Eclecticism involves scientific thinking concerning the valid and reliable application of relevant basic science methods and facts to individual case handling. It emphasizes the utilization of contributions of all recognized systems and methods of psychological science according to their indications and contra indications. It is an approach which emphasizes inductive methods of behaviour data analysis and it permits a much broader and more flexible approach based on the indication of each individual case.

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