

Skills and Values Synthesis

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Abstract

Section one is an analysis of my strengths and areas of needed growth in relation to the skills learned in class this semester. The significance of these skills on both the personal and professional level will be covered. Section two explores how social work values and standards from the NASW Code of Ethics relate to professional practice. Examples for each of the eleven values/standards are covered along with an example of an instance where one of the values was not upheld and how it could be corrected.

Skills and Values Synthesis

Skills

Critical analysis of skills. Throughout the course of this semester I have had numerous opportunities to strengthen and build the skills taught in this Interviewing Skills Class. Overall, I have found that my strengths reside in skills such as warmth, goal formation, and the miracle question. When practicing with pseudo-clients in class, I have been told on more than one occasion that I was able to put them at ease in the “session” and if it had been real life that they would have felt completely comfortable talking to me. Once I better understood the process of goal formation, I began to really enjoy this process. I combine scaling questions, exceptions, and what is important to the client to help them find realistic goals that can be worked towards. During my ten-minute interview, my client stated that one of her goals was to have her boss ask her for her opinion. I realized that this was not realistic, so I guided my pseudo-client to think of goals that she could personally work on. Part of the session that I enjoy is the miracle question. This is a time to bring the session together to find out what the client wants the most by taking a look at the specific aspects of their miracle. When interviewing a pseudo-client in crisis in class I used the miracle question to find out what she needed to feel better about her situation. Her situation was that her live-in boyfriend kicked her out and she suddenly had all of these problems to consider such as tuition money, a job, caring for her kids, transferring her kids to a different school district, and housing as she was currently staying with a friend. By asking follow-up questions to the miracle question I found out that one thing that would help her feel more in control was simply just taking a shower every day. After the session she told me that something similar had happened to her in real life and, looking back on it, she said that if someone had asked her those questions back then that it would have helped her richly. This gave me greater

confidence that I could correctly demonstrate the skills I have learned this semester and ultimately help someone through it.

Along with the strengths I have found in the skills taught this semester, I have also become aware of weaknesses as well. One area in particular that I could grow more in is the reflection of feelings. During a couple of the in-class interviews we did with pseudo clients, my peer reviewer brought to my attention that I did not stop to focus on the feelings of my client as frequently as I should have. Since then I have made a conscious effort to focus on the feelings my clients might be having as we go throughout the session. I have done better, but it is still not as natural for me as some of the other skills.

Reflection on skill significance. The skills learned in this class will benefit me both personally and professionally. Personally, they will help me deal with the people I come in contact with on a daily basis. Outside of the professional realm, I may encounter a person in need of a listening and empathetic ear. This class has helped me to strengthen and build both of those skills. These skills can benefit me in my personal relationships as well. Knowing how to better listen will increase my ability to communicate in relationships. A major aspect of relationships is communication, and skills such as clarification, paraphrasing, and refection, will help me strengthen the communication aspect of my personal relationships.

Professionally, these skills will benefit me in numerous ways. According to the NASW Code of Ethics, the primary mission of social workers is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic need of life of all people, especially the needs and empowerment of vulnerable populations (Workers, 2008). I believe the skills learned in this class for solution-based counseling will help me to do this. Skills such as empathy, goal formation, interviewing for exceptions, and formulating feedback are not only a basis for a successful solution-focused

counseling session, but they also set a foundation for client empowerment. We are taught to remain within the client's frame of reference, and to use the strengths that they have already exhibited to compliment and encourage them to find more exceptions and formulate realistic goals based off what is important to them. This process promotes the core values and standards of dignity and worth of a person, importance of human relationships, self-determination, and empowerment within the client's life.

In my professional helping career, these skills will help me to uphold and encourage the ethics and values of the NASW. Service is the first core value listed in the NASW Code of Ethics, and I will be able to use the knowledge I have gained to better serve the population I am involved with. Within the value of "Dignity and Worth of a Person" is the ethical principal of self-determination that says that social workers are to strive to enhance the client's capacity and opportunity to address their own needs (Workers, 2008). The skill of goal formation promotes this principal by using the client's frame of reference to help them formulate their own goals. "Importance of Human Relationships" is the fourth core value listed in the code. Through a successful session of counseling, I can use the skills I have learned to encourage the strengthening of personal relationships in my client's life that need special focus and attention. These are just some of the ways that the skills I have learned in this class can be of value to me in my professional helping career.

Values

Ethical practice examples. The value of "service" to the social worker is that the profession's primary goal is to elevate service to others above self, to help those in need, and to address social issues. I demonstrated the value of service to my pseudo-clients every time I set myself aside to focus on them. I was interviewing a client in class and she brought up something

similar to an experience I had. However, I was there to focus on her rather than myself. I exemplified the value of service when I put aside my personal frame of reference to stay in the moment with my client.

The second core value listed in the NASW Code of Ethics is “Social Justice”. This refers to how social workers challenge social injustice, pursue social change, and promote participation in decision making, especially on the behalf of the vulnerable in particular. I was interviewing a pseudo-client who was having trouble in the work-place because she felt as though her boss did not value her. She wanted me to give her advice on what she should do, but instead I demonstrated the value of social justice by promoting her own decision making to create social change within that area of her life.

“Dignity and Worth of the Person” is a social work value that means that the professional acknowledges and respects the inherent dignity and worth of every person. The professional should promote self-determination and seek to enhance their clients’ ability to address their own needs. I showed this value when I was using the skill of goal formation with one of my clients. My client wanted to know if she should stay in school or drop out to get a job and she wanted me to tell her. However, I do not know what is best for someone else’s life, so I told her that I was there to help her figure out how to make these big decisions. That is how I demonstrated the value of dignity and worth of the person.

“Importance of Human Relationships” is another value that is central to the social work profession. It means that the professional recognizes the importance of human relationships and can be central to change. I displayed this value when interviewing a client-in-crisis who felt as though she had no friends in college. While this may not seem like a crisis to some, I recognized

how central human relationships are to a person's well-being, and I sought to help her enhance and promote friendship in her life.

When the social worker behaves in a trustworthy manner and are continually aware of their profession's mission by acting honestly and responsibly, they are promoting the NASW core value of "Integrity". I incorporated this value into every session I had with a pseudo client. At the beginning of each session, I was honest with my client and told them that they could expect everything they said to be confidential unless someone may be in danger as result of the particular situation. I behaved in a trustworthy manner, while being aware of the ethical practices of the classroom organization.

"Competence" to the social worker means that the professional practices within their personal areas of expertise and competence. This is another value that I demonstrated in each of my interviews this semester. As an Interviewing Skills student, I am learning the basic skills of solution-based therapy. While meeting with pseudo-clients, I realized that I am not a professional, nor do I have the expertise necessary to help them on a professional level. Therefore, during or after each interview I gave them a referral card where they could go and see someone with more expertise than myself if they needed more service.

"Self-Determination" is an ethical standard that says that social workers are to respect and promote the right of each client to identify and clarify their own goals. I demonstrated this particular value when dealing with a client whose goals did not seem, to me, like they would work very well. However, I have learned that the client is the expert over their own life and allowed her the freedom to set the goals that seemed right to her.

Another standard central to the NASW is "Cultural Competence and Social Diversity", which means that social workers should understand culture, its function in society, and have a

knowledge base of their clients' cultures. I demonstrated this standard when I was practicing and interviewed a client with a Hispanic ethic background. She used some terms particular to her culture and, because of a sociology class I took, understood what she was trying to get across. Also, if I did not understand any part of what she said, I clarified to make sure we were both understood and heard.

“Informed Consent” is the ethical standard that social workers should inform clients about the disclosure of confidential information and the potential consequences before the disclosure is made. Every time I clarified how I work at the beginning of a session, I demonstrated this standard. One particular case was a time when a client of mine jumped right into the discussion of his problem before I could do so. When he came to a pause, I acknowledged what he said, then let him know that what he disclosed with me throughout the session would be confidential to the extent possible.

The standard that social workers should not permit their private conduct to interfere with their professional responsibilities is called “Professionalism”. I exhibited this standard when I ended up counseling the friend that I brought to class one day. There were no groups left and it was my turn to interview a client, so I ended up interviewing my good friend. However, I did not allow our outside friendship to affect how the session went.

The final value/standard discussed in this paper is “empowerment”. This is the standard that the social work profession strives to give particular attention to the needs and empowerment of those who are oppressed and vulnerable. I once had a pseudo-client who was feeling depressed and insecure after a breakup and wanted to get her life in order. I helped empower her to set goals, make a plan to achieve them, and ultimately reach her goal of getting her life in order through the session we had.

Self-correction. During one of the in-class practice sessions, I was interviewing a pseudo client as we prepared for our upcoming ten-minute videos. His situation was that he felt like he did not have any friends in school and was becoming lonely and depressed. When talking to him, we did not seem to be finding any exceptions to his problem. I remembered how he mentioned to me earlier how he liked to play basketball and so I said to him, “Have you tried joining intramurals?” My mistake was that I tried giving him advice. I realized my error as soon as it slipped out, but I had already compromised some important values/standards in social work. I compromised the standard of self-determinism. By giving my client advice like that, I robbed him of the chance to find his own solution. I compromised the standard of empowerment as well, because when I took away the opportunity for him to find his own solution and form his own goals, I also took away an opportunity for self-empowerment. A third value that I compromised was dignity and worth of a person. Social workers are supposed to seek to enhance their clients’ ability to address their own needs, but by using my own frame of reference for what I thought would be a good idea, I endangered my client into a possible dependence on me for solutions that I know he can find in himself. Looking back, if I were to have a chance to do it over, I would stay with my client even though he did not seem to be finding any exceptions. I would ask him other questions that might be able to find an exception. If that did not work, I would turn to scaling questions.

Further growth for ethical practice. In light of the fact that I have not had any experience with real clients, it is hard to say what challenges me the most because I have not been ethically challenged. However, I can imagine the kinds of situations that may be more difficult to work with. As a Christian, I try to maintain a Biblical lifestyle. I realize that many of my future clients will not have similar lifestyles for themselves. In the future, I may have a hard

time treating a client the same when I know the kinds of things they have done. To be able to demonstrate all of the standards and core values with this client and all others, I believe it would be a good idea to frequently review them. I could read our code of ethics to help remind myself of the mission of my profession. Also, as a Christian, I am provided with ample examples where Jesus treated even the worst people with the greatest amount of love. I should look to the cornerstone of my faith to see how to live each day when dealing with people.

Conclusion. This paper gave me the opportunity to dive into the very core and foundation of my future profession and to evaluate myself in light of it. The process of writing this paper has helped assure me that I am where I am supposed to be. I am more excited than ever to be a part of this helping profession, but I realize that there will be hard times. I will make mistakes sometimes, and sometimes I will be challenged. There is no way to predict everything that I will come across. However, at the base of this profession are core values and standards that will help guide me each step of the way.

References

Workers, N.A. (2008). NASW code of ethics. Washington D.C. : NASW.