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Melissa J. Maney

Northern Arizona University - Yuma

Abstract

As I have begun my journey of education in the area of school counseling, many thoughts and theories of others have begun to shape my own. My technical eclecticism technique, Melvinism, has started to take form. The theories of existential, Rogerian, Gestalt, behavioral, Beck's cognitive, reality, solutions-based, and feminist all play an intrinsic role to my own thoughts and perceptions. Through the incorporation of all of these techniques, I hope to be successful in dealing with children and their problems. By having an open mind and an open door I would like all children to feel that they are important and that there is at least one person in their chaotic worlds that is there to both listen and care.

Pink Floyd once sang “We’re just two lost souls swimming in a fishbowl, year after year” (1975). As I have become exposed to the many different types of theories in counseling, I am reminded of this line over and over again. Many of the reasons people seek counseling are because they are lost and need guidance to help find their way back to themselves. As this class has been my introduction to the world of counseling, I am confident that my personal form of counseling is going to morph and morph again over the years as I don’t believe that there is any perfect way of dealing with the human mind.

There are many different theories in practice and I relate to and incorporate many of these theories into my own. I feel that my base theory exists of existential with Rogerian and Gestalt influences. In addition, behavioral, Beck’s cognitive, reality, solutions-based, and feminist tendencies also have an influence. I like to call this personal theory, Melvinism.

Although this seems to be a jumble of different techniques, I believe that this technical eclectism, Melvinism, will not only serve my clients well but will also allow me to work to the best of my abilities. All the different resources I will have at my fingertips can only help me in various counseling situations that I will encounter. Having all of these theories to draw upon are important as I do not believe that there is one perfect way to counsel a person.

Upon entering the work field in school counseling, I want to work within a K-8 setting. I believe that children of this age have their fair share of problems but people often overlook them and instead just label their problems as “being kids.” Parents and adults can often be too wrapped up in their own problems. Then, when a child who dreads going to school because of a bully, tries to elicit help from an adult, sometimes the adult can give the easy answer to just grow

up and handle the problem. In comparison, the adult views the child's problem as not being as difficult as trying to make ends meet or dealing with a work issue.

Yet, to the child, this bully is his world. As much as I want my office to feel comfortable and open to all, I myself want to be perceived that way. As an adult, I know that I will be dealing with my own problems. Yet, it is my aspiration to check my feelings at the school doors and be at least the one person in a child's world he can turn to.

There are many issues children face on a daily basis that adults can easily overlook and attribute to other matters. Sometimes, though, a child just needs someone to talk to. He needs someone he can share a concern of two with, although he may not always know why he needs to talk about it. He needs a person who is just there to listen, and that can be the most important thing to him.

To begin with, I prefer and relate to the existential point of view because I believe it serves as an excellent opportunity for everyone to become more aware of themselves. Existential therapy is a process of searching for the value and meaning in life. In this avenue, it is the therapist's basic task to encourage clients to explore their options for creating a meaningful existence (Corey, 2005). Listening and helping someone as they work out their problems to develop a solution, allows a client to see himself in a different light. I think that the way existential therapy serves as guidelines to follow, rather than a stringent set of techniques, can empower a person and allow him to overcome his perceived limits.

As a race, humans have the unique ability to be self aware, and the greater our awareness, the greater our possibilities are for freedom (Corey, 2005). Through this self-awareness one can better understand that he is free to choose and that there are many alternatives in life. The only person responsible for shaping his future is the person (Corey, 2005). The road a person takes in

life is not set up for them; instead the choices we make in life determine our path. The sooner a person can realize this and accept it, the sooner he can come to grips with her problems and deal with them appropriately.

Existential therapy has both the client and the counselor together working towards a common goal. I think to truly help a person, I not only can serve as a guide, but I also need to be affected by the process. Each person is unique in his experiences and in order to truly relate, I have to be willing to take the counseling journey with him. People tend to see themselves as helpless before they enter therapy, but after working existentially, clients come to view themselves as responsible for their own existence (Corey, 2005).

All too often society takes power out of the hands of children and although there are offers of help, often no one is listening. When one can listen to the views of a child, more often than not, the child will reveal both important information about the problem and also what ways they are currently handling it (Sandbaek, 1999). No one knows a situation or a problem better than the person going through it. Although society does not often attribute much to the opinions of children, unless we are willing to listen and serve as a guide, children will not be willing to share their concerns with us.

In addition to existentialism, Rogerian therapy plays a large role in my own personal theory. Just as existential therapy urges a person to take control over his life, Rogerian also encourages a person to personally grow, not necessarily just deal with his problems. I believe that there has to be a congruence presence in the therapy session, both on the behalf of the client and the therapist. Without having this genuineness present, real work cannot ensue. A client and therapist need to respect and trust each other whole-heartedly, and unless this is present, it is impossible to move forward.

Also, the therapist must be able to understand the client's subjective reality (Corey, 2005). A therapist can listen to a client for days, weeks, or years, but unless she truly can see the client's world as the client does, the therapist is not helping. When a client feels that the therapist "gets him", then he is more apt to share his feelings and become more open to the art of therapy. Completely understanding a client's world and his issues is one of the most important factors, as this alone can often assist a client with his problem.

Existentially and Rogerian speaking, just talking to and listening to the client will be the base for my overall technique. By actively responding and clarifying the situation, I hope to be able to draw the child out of his shell and relate to him. Often times, this technique alone can help shed light onto a problem. When a child loses a loved one and seems to blame himself, I will incorporate the Rogerian aspects of clarifying, confronting, self-disclosing etc. all in an attempt to bring the child around to seeing that the situation is not his fault.

Existentially, I feel that this technique will also work in just using my words to help a child better understand his problems. For children who are afraid of being bullied and picked on, I feel that having them understand that they are not living up to their full potential is a good beginning to learn that they can start standing up for themselves. Also, I want the child to be able to realize that he is hiding behind his true potential. Yet, I don't believe that just listening to someone and having them realize that they need to become more aware of themselves and live authentically will solve all problems. This is where I will incorporate other theories and techniques.

Due to the fact that I will be working with children, I anticipate working with problems such as school and family issues. Although there will be children who have severe depression issues, as there will be children with extreme behavioral problems, I want to be able to use a

variety of techniques and never be limited. Also, due to the area of the southwest, which I plan on at least beginning my career, problems of migration will also become an important topic.

Therefore, as much as existential and Rogerian will play a large part in my practice, so will Gestalt. Once again, the idea of a person standing on his own and not always analyzing the problem but instead being more aware of the way he acts when in contact with the environment is important (Corey, 2005). A person must be willing to learn to live with the environment of his life instead of against it. Until this can occur, a person is going to continuously struggle with his problems.

Also, living in the now is an important concept because although there are things that happened in the past that will contribute to a person's life in the present, the past cannot be relived. A person can spend his whole life analyzing what went wrong in his childhood and who is to blame, but a child is currently living in the now. The past is important to an extent, but it must be dealt with in the present as much as possible. Yet, in order to truly work through an issue, a person needs to understand what is going wrong in his life now. A person must be willing to both live in the now, talk about the now, and experience his emotions in the now (Corey, 2005).

Dealing with unfinished business is also very important. When people reach an impasse, a client's progress or therapy can come to a grinding halt. A therapist will then need to work with the client to work through this, but at the same time must be sure not to rescue or frustrate the client (Corey, 2005). I think that both the client and the therapist benefit from this type of therapy because it is a journey that is taken together. Although the client will ultimately be the one to find the answers, it is the joint effort of both that brings the therapy to another level.

The concept of the self being responsible for the self is one that everyone in life must deal with. I believe that existential, Rogerian, and Gestalt all take this into their beliefs. A person is ultimately responsible for his behavior although there are often extenuating circumstances that come into play that affect a person. Yet, it is the person's ultimate responsibility to overcome these obstacles and live an authentic life. Until a person is living authentically, he cannot live a healthy life and will instead struggle.

Overall, the techniques I will employ will be ones that are hands-on. I feel that the Gestalt technique of reversal is both important and can be easily employed with children. Specifically, I feel that the reversal technique will be useful when a child is encountering problems of shyness. Many times a child will not feel like he is good enough or capable enough to partake in a school game or participate in class. By utilizing the reversal exercise, a child can learn to become more dominant and take control over the situation. He can do this in the protection of the therapy session and when he becomes comfortable enough with it, take this technique and new found confidence into the world.

Also, many children find themselves facing problems of assertion. I believe that the assertion training found in behavioral therapy will prove to be highly effective. Many children have a hard time expressing their anger properly and instead of sharing it in a healthy manner, can either shut down and bottle it up inside of them or erupt in rages. By helping a child express himself in a positive manner, other obstacles that hinder him can be overcome.

As this is my core theory of beliefs I also believe that behavioral, Beck's cognitive, reality, solutions-based, and feminist tendencies also influence my personal counseling theory. Just as existential, Rogerian, and Gestalt emphasize a person's freedom of choice, behavioral

therapy works at increasing a person's skills so they develop more options for responding (Corey, 2005).

Behavioral therapy has clients take on an active role in their therapy and rather than just talking about a problem, has them do something about it. I believe it is important that at the beginning of the session, to state goals out loud and in terms that the client can agree to. Assessing these goals throughout the therapy sessions is important as it helps to keep the therapist and client on track. To me, having these goals restated often not only helps the client, but also the counselor and insures that each is working towards a common goal.

Also, understanding the past can be important, but the current problem needs to be addressed in order to produce a change. Once again, the therapist and client work together. Although, in the case of behavioral therapy, more emphasis is placed on working together to develop a solution. I believe this to be important because just as it is imperative to listen to a client whole-heartedly in order to form a bond, there also must be some sort of outcome to a therapy session. Some clients enter into counseling expecting the therapist to have all of the answers. Although it will take work on both parts to come to a solution, I feel that having the client work towards something concrete is very important.

Just as behavioral therapy encourages actively working towards a solution, Beck's cognitive therapy works to debunk negative thoughts and overcome "logical errors" (Corey, 2005). Often times, people confuse their own views of a situation with how the events actually occur in reality. People, instead of just reacting to a situation, fail to distinguish between fantasy and reality (Corey, 2005). By working with a client to identify and better understand how these negative thoughts are affecting their life, the client can overcome them.

Beck's cognitive therapy involves working with a client and engaging in Socratic dialogue, which I feel is better and more productive than direct confrontation. Working with the client rather than directly confronting him is better suited to my personal beliefs and personality. Many people, including myself, can often fall prey to negative thinking and commit logical errors. When one takes an active role in recognizing, observing, and monitoring their own thoughts, it is much easier to see when mistakes are made (Corey, 2005). Also, Beck's cognitive therapy can be applied to many different situations and I feel that when this is paired with the other theories I have discussed, success will occur.

In addition, reality therapy has also influenced my personal theory. I believe that a human is born with certain needs such as: to survive, love and belong, power or achievement, freedom or independence, and fun (Corey, 2005). Inherently, a person wants to feel good and when one feels good then one feels at peace with both himself and with the world. Living in a "quality world" exists in everyone I know (Corey, 2005). When one achieves the feeling of being at peace, that memory is stored away and forever more the person tries to achieve that feeling. The problem arise in that the world and environment we live in do not work to fulfill each individual's quality world.

Being able to address this through emphasizing choice and responsibility is important. People can spend their whole lives looking for the "perfect someone." I believe that this goal is at the core of many people's problems. In regards to children, they can constantly seek out ways to please their parents in order to achieve a sense of stability. It is always easier to blame someone else for the problems a person encounters. Reality therapy helps a person focus on what a person he can control in his life, thereby giving the child control over his life (Corey, 2005).

By focusing on the control of the self, a person can become empowered and will often times meet the needs of himself without even realizing it. Blaming and complaining will never allow a person to move forward in life. Reality therapy emphasizes a person taking control over his feelings and instead of succumbing to the negative feelings, understand that they are choosing to live life this way (Corey, 2005). It is not until a person is willing to make his own choices that he can be truly free. I feel that this view falls right into my eclectic recipe for counseling.

The planning and action technique of reality therapy is also one that I find to be effective. A plan is often something that everyone can relate to and offers both guidelines and direction. Using the SAMIC3 model, a client and child can work together to come up with a plan to overcome a problem. For example, if a child is struggling with his schoolwork or homework, this would be a great way to come up with a way to structure his school time. By developing a plan of how he can complete his homework, whether it be by setting aside time after school or working with a tutor, the child is actively coming up with his own solution to the problem.

This often can result as an empowering exercise as the child can physically write down his plan and then stick to it. If he does stray from it, the plan can be reevaluated by both the child and the counselor to come up with something else that is feasible. This is not something that will result in large gains at first; instead this can be done in small, achievable steps to demonstrate to the child that his idea is workable.

Additionally, I feel that solutions-based therapy is one that is incorporated into my own personal theory. This is very different than the others I have listed as it instead focuses only on what is possible (Corey, 2005). One of the main concepts is that people are competent and the therapist is there to help recognize the skills a person already possesses but cannot see (Corey,

2005). People can become so wrapped up in their problems that they do not ever consider that they may already know the solution. By being positive and upbeat in a session, a therapist can help guide a person to view his life in a different light.

When a therapist can ask a client what is working in his life and help discover the exceptions that exist, a client can then see that there is a road to if not a relatively problem free life, then a better one. By talking and asking questions about when times are good and when a person is not experiencing the problems, can help lead a person to his own solutions. Most importantly solutions-based therapy focuses on what can work rather than the negativity a client may bring to a session. Not everything needs to be analyzed to figure out from where it derived, sometimes just finding a solution to a problem can be the best case scenario (Corey, 2005).

The use of miracle questions from solutions-based therapy also has the potential to help a child work through a problem. Although the question can be overwhelming at first, this may work well with children of migrant families. I have noticed that children of migrant families have a hard time adjusting to moving, making friends, and settling in. A lot of their problems may stem from this. By being able to ask them if you could wake up and no longer be migrating how would your life be different, this could offer insight into what they think would make their life better.

Although I do not subscribe to the feminist theory whole heartedly, I do believe that it does have some concepts that influence my own. The empowerment concept of feminist therapy syncs up well with my own theory. I feel that the more a person feels in control, the more willing and able he will be to get the most out of his therapy. By clarifying expectations, identifying goals, and working towards a contract, a person will be more apt to stick to, and complete, the process of counseling (Corey, 2005).

A technique I really like and feel will work well is bibliotherapy. Both behavioral and feminist therapy incorporate this type of therapy. Although this can be a form of therapy highly effective for adults, this also works well with children. A study that was conducted to find out the effectiveness of bibliotherapy with children, found that the use of stories as a method for helping children solve problems or better understand themselves, works as a motivating therapy and personal growth (Borders and Paisley, 1992).

The study found that counselors can help students through the use of bibliotherapy by connecting the children to the stories that help with their self-worth and offer insights into relationships with others (Borders and Paisley, 1992). I find this to be a highly effective technique because I feel that children often can understand the moral of a story better when they read it rather than when they are told it. When a counselor can then bridge a correlation between the story and the child, it can be a tremendous helping factor. With the push for students to read more in our schools right now, this can be an excellent resource for both counselors and teachers.

Also, self-disclosing is a strategy that I feel will work well in my own therapy. While working with children, I believe that demonstrating to them different scenarios through my own personal experiences will allow them to feel more comfortable and better able to relate to me. In addition to sharing experiences, the sense of authenticity and mutuality that will arise is also very important (Corey, 2005). A child, or any client, will only feel truly comfortable with a therapist if he can relate to her.

With such a high Hispanic population in the area, this will be one of my main groups of “clients.” Although I myself am not Hispanic, I do believe that I have experiences that will allow me to relate to them, and them to me. Having grown up in a mostly middle class white area, I know I have a lot to learn about other cultures but at the same time I feel that I can bring a

variation and another view to the table. Yet, I also believe that professionally I need to “learn enough about the role of culture in determining children’s behaviors and the role of culture in determining their own behaviors relative to teaching children from a variety of cultural backgrounds” (Jones & Fuller, 2003, 21). Sometimes, fresh eyes can bring forth fresh ideas.

Children as a whole fare better when they believe and know that someone genuinely cares about them. Due to the culture that Hispanic children are brought up in, this holds especially true for them. Research has shown that Hispanic children often feel that no one cares for them, that no one expects much from them, that they are outsiders, and they don’t belong (Jones & Fuller, 2003). Yet, this is not a thought unique to Hispanic children; I truly believe children everywhere at one time or another encounter these thoughts.

As much as I seem to have an eclectic theory, I feel that all of these will better serve me as a counselor. Being able to both incorporate these concepts along with the techniques each encompasses will allow me to serve my clients better, but also allow my clients to relate to me more deeply. As I have stated before, I do not believe that there is only one answer to each person’s problems. Just as each person is unique, so are his problems and the solutions that will allow that person to succeed. By forming a therapeutic relationship through congruence and authenticity, I will better be able to determine which technique or techniques to apply in order to maximize my sessions.

Although I believe these techniques will work with the majority of children, I am anticipating times when they will not. I realize that the culture I grew up in limits me to an extent in being able to relate to children of this area on a self-disclosure level. Although I have the fact that I was once a child as my main reference point, to a child sometimes that is not enough and also too hard to even grasp. In this area, my childhood experiences might be

completely different but at the same time, I feel that life has given me other experiences which I plan on using in order to relate.

Also, I don't believe that my techniques will work well with those accused or involved in sexually motivated situations. I think that at this point in my approach I do not have the skills or techniques to properly deal with these situations. The techniques I have listed so far would not allow me the breadth of knowledge to properly deal with these issues.

In addition, children tend to be extremely resilient, which is another reason I would like to work with this group. Children encounter many of the same obstacles that their parents do, except that children do not always fully grasp and understand the feelings that accompany them. When a parent is going through a divorce or financial crisis, oftentimes it is the child who worries just as much as the parent but does not yet have the capacity to fully handle this matter. Parents can be too busy to or too wrapped up in their problems to see the affects on their child.

Yet, despite all of these obstacles, children still pull through, and often without any traumatic issues. Findings over the last two decades have shown that even children who come from highly stressed families or resource deprived communities do manage to make decent lives for themselves (Benard, 2004). Children do not always know other ways of life, so if they grow up one particular way, they learn to adapt and live the best they can. Adults can spend too much time lamenting on how their lives are difficult and how they are doomed.

One of the main factors attributed to children surviving successfully despite their environment is due to someone caring about them. One finding that is common throughout resilience research is that teachers have a power to tip the scales of resiliency. This can be easily accomplished through the skill of caring (Benard, 2004). Just having someone who shows an interest in a child's life has the power to help that child work through his problem and overcome

obstacles. As children are resilient in their ways, I believe that resiliency as a whole is an important factor in counseling.

Therefore, who I am as a future counselor has begun to take shape but I feel that I still have lots to learn. I feel more comfortable with the various techniques and concepts than from when I first began this class, but I know that there is much more to come. Children are an exciting group of clients to work with. Due to their resiliency, I believe they are much more willing to listen and try to overcome their obstacles than adults.

Like adults, children have problems that are real and need to be understood and dealt with in order to allow a child to live authentically in this world. All too often, children's problems are overlooked because of their age. I want to be a counselor that a child can feel instantly comfortable with and not be afraid to both enter my office and engage in conversation with me. At the same time, I fully acknowledge that there are going to be many children who are too overcome by their problems or too shy to seek me out. For these children, I plan on using the skills I will gain throughout my education to make sure I instead seek them out and do everything in my power to work with them.

Pink Floyd affected millions with their song "Wish You Were Here," and although I admire this song and I believe there are lost souls in this world, I also believe that everyone can find a way to overcome their problems. It takes a counselor with an open mind and a willingness to work with a variety of techniques in order to find one that is best suited for each person. There are times when children will feel that they are lost and that no one cares for them but I plan on doing everything in my professional power to allow them to see that they do have options and that the world is theirs for the taking.

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