Appraisal Reflection

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The assignments for this course allowed for individual freedom to tailor the learning needs and objectives for each student. The appraisal assignments provided an opportunity for me to think and reflect about my practice and highlight what is important to me. I will admit some of the appraisals were easier than others to complete. The assignments allowed me to set goals and indicators but I will admit I did not strictly follow through with what I outlined. I did however kept the main concepts in the back of my mind in my personal, student and professional interactions with others.

I appreciated the structure of the course and class discussion that allowed for learning in a more communal manner compare to standard lecture style courses. The first article in the course by Tom Anderson (1995) *Language is powerful and may not be dangerous* and the discussion regarding inner and outer thought was a refreshing and interesting topic of discussion. I have always been an individual that is a good listener and observer. The “inner” talk spoke to me and validated that even though I do not always vocalize my thoughts I am engaged in the learning process of lectures and involved in the conversation regardless if I make my “inner” thoughts “outer”.

The first appraisal on *Language* was a topic I had not given much thought to prior to the readings and class discussion. Completing the appraisal increased my awareness to the use of language in many forms and environments. In clinical practice I was able to learn the language in working with grief and loss to better communicate with clients and the staff of the program. I was also able to recognize the importance of listening to clients stories and clarifying the meaning and language they use in order to speak the same language and work through their grief process in a manner that worked with each individual. This has allowed me to broaden my
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perspective and not just hear and see what I usually listen for (Andersen, 1995). I have found that the language I use with friends, family, fellow students and in the work world varies as every group I belong to has a different language and understanding amongst each other. I have become more aware of the language used in other courses, in academic readings and in the culture of social work. I am enrolled in the Native Social Work Practice class. Throughout the course I have read and engaged in discussions about alternate paradigms which have enhanced my thought process in this topic area. Aboriginal history is a very good example of meaning and the use of language and how that can be interpreted in many ways by different people. I have also been able to recognize differences between professionals with different disciplines in my practice by the language and perspectives they have brought to conversations. My supervisor at my practical placement and I have been able to have some great discussions regarding the language used in practice and among other disciplines in the work place and how that contributes and inhibits dialogue.

Bohm’s (1996) book on Dialogue was an abstract read for me. I found it interesting, thought provoking and frustrating at times. The idea of being able to suspend ideas, think and have discussions from different viewpoints is something I will definitely take away from this course. I think engaging in dialogue is an art form that encourages an individual to take a risk and push one’s colleagues to get out of his or her comfort zone to discuss matters at an alternate level. I was able to engage and build trusting working relationships with the team at my practical placement and worked on projects that started dialogue. I was interested in looking at the diversity or lack thereof of diversity amongst clients of the grief support program. I felt comfortable approaching staff to test the waters and see what their reaction would be on my
question of inquiry. Making it knowing that this was an observation I had made while I was at the program and wanted to try and understand why this was, I received great reception from staff. I was able to talk with staff, complete some research and bring my findings back to the group for a conversation. I was able to put forward different perspectives and encourage at least conversation amongst the group to discuss how they view diversity and what diversity looks like within the clients they serve. During this process I also looked at the promotional material of the program and raised some questions about the use of language and the inclusivity of the material to invite diverse populations to the program. The conversation was intentional in the sense to have the program “suspend” an idea/aspect of the program and start a conversation. How they will continue this conversation and topic is still undetermined.

Collaborative team work is something I have been involved in and see as an integral part of social work practice. Social workers never work alone, we work with clients, family systems, program staff, organizations and government to name a few situations where we need to have the skills to work with varying groups of people. Working in teams can present challenges when different thoughts and perspectives are presented. The discussion in this course has broadened my thought process and has provided me with an alternate viewpoint when working with individuals that have ideas that differ from my own. I think that there is a lot of value in stepping back from my own position and trying to see a point of view from a different perspective. I also feel that I have a personal and professional obligation to stay true to my own values and beliefs and to advocate for my position in the appropriate circumstances.

The format of this course and the entire Masters of Social Work program has led me to the importance of reflective practice. This journey through the program has been more of a
personal process than I would have ever thought coming into the program. I was looking forward to gaining new knowledge and skills, which I have. But the personal reflection on how I as a person and social worker bring specific qualities and skills to my work has been the most significant learning experience. I plan to continue developing my career through education, professional development activities, supervision with colleagues and continue my own personal reflective practice.

In closing, the process of building relationships, using language and working with others to develop an opportunity to have dialogue and embrace a new thought and work process will be a continued work in progress. In my journey over the year, I found the following quote that has come to light on many occasions “the challenge is to learn how to recognize what we have trained ourselves not to see” (Saul, 2008, p.35). This quote reminds me to stop, reflect and think about what I am doing and maybe what I should be doing instead.
References

Andersen, T. (1995). Language is powerful, and may not be dangerous. Guadalajara, MX.
