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Reflective Psychological Counselling as a Special Type of Social and Interpersonal Influence Designed to Offer Psychological Support

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Abstract: *This theoretical article discusses a new approach to psychological support known as reflective psychological counselling. In this approach, the primary focus is on reflection, while the main method is progressive reflection. This counselling method allows psychologists to use various successful solutions for client challenges, integrate approaches from other fields and foster a distinctive and impactful therapeutic practice. Also, this theoretical article describes specific methods within reflective psychological counselling. The primary method, progressive reflection, provides a pathway for problem-solving and learning how to identify solutions. At the same time, special emphasis is placed on techniques such as reflective listening, guided decentring, positional analysis, and self-determination. Additionally, several specialized methods are designed for situations where clients must make decisions and take responsibility. These include the method of focused reflection, the "tree of contradictions" for addressing internal conflicts, the method for constructing and transforming the problem field, philosophical reflection and fostering a deep awareness of universal life principles. Finally, this theoretical article consolidates the key concepts of reflective psychological counselling and its objectives in psychotherapy and outlines the stages, methods and techniques that facilitate various types of reflection.*

Keywords: *reflective psychological counselling; reflection; types of reflection; progressive reflection method; self-determination; self-development.*

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Introduction

Reflective psychological counselling is an innovative approach that emphasizes self-awareness, experience analysis and self-reflection. In today's world, where stress, anxiety and life challenges are increasingly prevalent, reflective counselling has become a crucial tool for fostering a deeper understanding of one's identity, motives and behavioural strategies.

This approach rests on the belief that personal growth is fundamentally driven by one's capacity to evaluate their experiences critically, as well as recognize their emotions, attitudes and values. In this process, the counsellor not only supports the client in resolving specific issues but also fosters the skills necessary for profound self-reflection, which is essential for lasting positive change.

This article explores theoretical underpinnings, key principles and methods of reflective counselling. It highlights the central role of reflection in helping clients build autonomy, achieve emotional maturity and make responsible decisions.

Afanasieva (2017) demonstrates that the primary goal of developing and applying methods in this field is to activate the core mechanism of human agency in transforming the environment. Bulakh et al. (2014) suggest that, within psychology, some consider this mechanism to be motivation, while others view it as willpower; they propose a holistic model of "reflection-motive-will." Hrytsiuk et al. (2021) explain that reflection involves transforming needs into motives and generating motivation related to specific objective conditions, taking into account subjective factors of action. Gershuny & Sher (1998) believe that willpower is essential to bring about positive and constructive changes within oneself and the surrounding environment.

Consequently, this article aims to generalize the concept of reflective psychological counselling, its purpose within psychotherapy, and outline the stages, methods and techniques that facilitate various forms of reflection.

The concept of psychological counselling and its objectives in psychotherapy

Reflective psychological counselling represents a new approach to psychological assistance, blending traditional psychotherapy techniques with an emphasis on fostering personal reflection. This

process serves as a powerful tool for self-discovery, critical evaluation of life events, as well as the development of new behavioural strategies. Grounded in current theories of reflection, this method highlights its vital role in personal growth, adaptability and self-improvement.

In today's world, where stress, uncertainty and evolving social roles are commonplace, reflective counselling equips clients with tools to understand their emotions, values and behavioural patterns better. The primary goal is to teach individuals to make conscious decisions, enhance emotional resilience and cultivate healthier interpersonal relationships.

Reflective counselling is based on several foundational principles: 1) self-awareness as the foundation for change (reflection allows clients to recognize their strengths, identify their needs and pinpoint areas for growth); 2) critical analysis of life events (counsellors guide clients in exploring past experiences to uncover deeper meanings and derive actionable insights); 3) development of new behavioural strategies (clients use the outcomes of reflection to create more effective ways of interacting with themselves and their surroundings) (Mahdysiuk & Fedorenko, 2020).

The ideal outcome of reflective counselling is not only the resolution of specific issues but also achieving psychological remission in some cases. It provides both capable and vulnerable clients with the support they need to address their psychological and therapeutic concerns effectively.

Recent studies have revealed how reflective counselling integrates into practice and its role in advancing psychological support methods. Below is an overview of key works addressing various aspects of reflection as a tool for self-development and psychological assistance.

Holmes (2023) explores the effectiveness of reflective counselling in managing stress and anxiety. The researcher focuses on using reflective techniques with individuals experiencing chronic anxiety. The findings reveal that helping clients become aware of their thoughts, fears and behavioural patterns enables them to identify anxiety triggers and develop healthier coping mechanisms. Reflection was shown to significantly enhance resilience to stress, a core benefit of this counselling approach.

Rania et al. (2021) examine the role of reflection in overcoming personal crises. Their work centres on using reflective counselling to address crises such as job loss, divorce, or the death of a loved one. The

scholars detail methods for helping clients understand their emotional reactions and transform them into opportunities for finding new meaning. Finally, they demonstrate how reflective counselling supports psychological recovery and facilitates emotional growth during challenging times.

Adams et al. (2006) analyze the impact of reflection on personal competency development. They investigate how reflective counselling fosters skills such as self-control, empathy and effective interpersonal communication. The researchers show how clients working with counsellors gained greater emotional awareness and built healthier relationships. Their findings emphasize that reflective counselling not only resolves psychological challenges but also promotes the development of key social and emotional skills.

Thus, current studies confirm the effectiveness of reflective psychological counselling in addressing a wide range of issues, from anxiety to the development of personal competencies. Progressive approaches combine classical methods of reflection with innovative technologies, making this field adaptable to the challenges of today's world.

The aim of reflective counselling is not personal growth, as emphasized in humanistic approaches, but rather the development of reflective skills within the interaction between the psychologist and the client (Barlow et al., 2014).

Personal changes can be considered a sort of "side effect" in reflective psychological counselling; they are likely to occur as reflective skills are developed. This notion is supported by various experimental studies on reflective mechanisms, shifts in motivation, self-esteem and value orientations. Such changes can also happen without reflection, as seen in situations involving suggestion, hypnosis, or imitation (copying a model). Consequently, emphasizing personal growth does not necessarily guarantee the development of reflective skills.

In Gestalt therapy, there is minimal focus on teaching reflection and cultivating clients' reflective abilities; nonetheless, personal changes and problem resolutions still take place. The reflective mechanism serves as the backbone of Gestalt therapy methods, promoting personal growth. However, in this framework, clients do not cultivate their reflective abilities to the same extent they would if reflection development were a primary goal of counselling.

Developing reflection is a complex process that involves both personal growth and problem resolution, enabling clients to address their challenges independently. Thus, one argues for recognizing reflective counselling as a distinct form of counselling that qualitatively differs from other types (Klymchuk, 2013).

Reflective counselling is based on theoretical principles of the humanistic paradigm, meta-ontology of activity, and person-centred and cultural-historical approaches. This perspective indicates that personality develops through activity, with individuals engaging in actions and gaining new dimensions of psychological reality through signs. This integration connects personality, consciousness, activity and thought. By characterizing counselling as reflective, one highlights its intrinsic capacity for self-development, both theoretically and practically, suggesting that the counselling process includes a reflective mechanism for personal growth.

During consultations, psychologists enter a creative state of scientific inquiry, creating new theoretical propositions and developing techniques and methods while maintaining the uniqueness of each case and making generalizations. Thus, reflective counselling most accurately reflects the essence of humanistic therapy and counselling, which is to "teach people to help themselves".

The second task involves defining the means, methods and techniques of reflective psychological counselling. To accomplish this, it is crucial to understand the nature of a problematic situation. Such a situation arises from conflict, contradiction, or aporia (a deadlock, constrained circumstances, complexity, or hopelessness). Its essence lies in conflicting tendencies, the necessity of action and the illusion of an inability to choose a course of action. In the context of reflective psychological counselling, the psychologist and client collaboratively create various forms of problem fixation, selecting one they intend to work on. After exploring this fixation, they revisit other fixations for further examination. This return does not carry the previous context of the problem; instead, it occurs at a new developmental level for the client, following their engagement with at least one fixation. As a result, all subsequent work with fixations offers fresh insights into the problem, using the new skills and abilities the client has acquired during their exploration (Mahdysiuk et al., 2020).

In this process, clients develop guided decentration, flexible thinking and a multifaceted perspective on life situations and the wider

context of the world and its interactions. The nature of problem fixation varies according to the client's intellectual, personal, emotional and rational development, as well as the psychologist's professionalism, maturity and ability to adopt diverse viewpoints. This article emphasizes the use of problem fixation as a technique for fostering guided decentration.

In reflective counselling, the client's immaturity is the central focus of reflective analysis, contrasting with other approaches that may directly or indirectly reinforce a childlike attitude toward the world and themselves. The psychologist guides the client in understanding that they have the inherent ability to address and resolve their issues. Throughout their interaction, the client discovers new interpretations of their experiences and actions, develops a more nuanced understanding of others, builds confidence in their abilities and begins to change their behaviour. Positive validation of their actions leads to the final acceptance of responsibility for their life and choices. Individuals experience change by accessing their latent capabilities. The primary aim of reflective counselling is to uncover these resources through reflection, facilitating meaningful interaction between the psychologist and the client (Rogers, 1995).

The technique of guided decentration, along with other methods focused on resource discovery, constitutes a unified approach, namely, the method of progressive reflection, which fosters self-development in both the client and the psychologist.

By referring to this approach as "progressive reflection", the authors of the article imply that regressive reflection also exists. They believe that while regressive reflection can occur, it fails to uncover the client's resources, despite potentially involving decentration. Clients engaged in regressive reflection may feel as though they are "going in circles", which reduces the effectiveness of their insights into problem resolution. This can lead to a fragmentation of the self, leaving no chance for reassembly and increasing the risk of suicidal thoughts and actions.

A method is a specific set of techniques. The techniques within the aggressive reflection method are organized according to the stages of reflective counselling, and this organization is defined by the method's goals and the psychological reality it addresses. This method aims to develop reflective processes that allow the client to master decentration, make choices, seek solutions and take responsibility for their issues and their resolution.

The stages of reflective psychological counselling

The authors of the article identify three stages of reflective psychological counselling, grounded in an analysis of the client's self-awareness and reflection processes during their sessions with a psychologist. Each stage emphasizes a particular type of reflection that helps the client recognize the issue, explore solutions and plan actions to reach their goals.

Retrospective reflection. In this stage, the client reflects on their past to gain insights into the issue they are facing. This involves revisiting previous experiences and evaluating their actions, feelings and thoughts associated with the problem. The purpose of this stage is to help the client develop a more precise understanding of their situation.

Introspective reflection. In this stage, the client engages in introspection, exploring their internal experiences, emotions and motivations that could be impacting the problem. An essential component of this stage is evaluating different potential solutions and contemplating each one. This self-reflective process helps the client uncover various strategies for addressing challenges.

Prospective reflection. In the final stage, the client focuses on the future. They create an action plan to help implement the selected solutions. This stage involves evaluating the effectiveness of the action plan, identifying possible obstacles and adjusting the plan to ensure it remains realistic and achievable (Bezliudnyi et al., 2019).

The method of progressive reflection involves enhancing the complexity of the reflective content and changing the depth of understanding of current reality. At each stage, the client engages in various types of reflection, including personal, operational, interpretive and meta-reflection (awareness). By using various types of reflection, one expands, deepens and accumulates knowledge, leading to an elevated level of new insights, skills and abilities. Previously acquired knowledge becomes less prominent, while the quantity of newly conscious knowledge continues to increase (Melnychuk, 2023).

The shift from one counselling stage to another is characterized by a change in consciousness and the emergence of new meanings and interpretations, allowing individuals to view their life situation from a fresh perspective.

Techniques associated with this method include reflective listening (which involves questions designed to promote awareness, summarizing, offering feedback and interpretation), as well as guided

decentration, which focuses on the problematic situation where the client must make choices and take responsibility. This involves exploring alternatives, evaluation, decentration and engaging in dialogue from various perspectives and other approaches.

The process of organizing reflective counselling can be studied through two dimensions: substantive and reflective (the reflection on reflection). At the same time, Honchar et al. (2021) outline the following stages of working with each component. The stages of working with substantive content include a) identifying emotional responses to the problem; b) examining personal and interpersonal dimensions of the problem; c) recognizing the strategies the client has used to address the problem. The stages of working with reflective content encompass a) reconstructing and analyzing cause-and-effect relationships; b) assessing the effectiveness of the strategies used to solve the problem; c) reconstructing the current states of interaction with the psychologist concerning problem resolution; d) developing the content of relevant strategies to address the problem and analyze their effectiveness through predictive reflection; e) engaging in second-order reflection (reflection on the means of reflection) to consider how work was conducted in the previous stages; f) transitioning to a new substantive dimension.

As noted by Demchenko et al. (2021), the stages of working with new substantive content comprise identifying the choice and decision-making and modelling the implementation of the decision.

The method of progressive reflection helps clients move beyond an immature mindset and uncovers their internal resources for addressing their problems. A crucial aspect of this method is teaching clients to practice decentration, enabling them to adopt different perspectives and understand the psychologist's viewpoint on themselves. This process allows clients to pose questions to themselves and, by answering, to enhance their awareness of the issue, leading to a more thorough understanding. Consequently, their knowledge of the problem becomes holistic rather than fragmented.

Therefore, the shift from the substantive to the reflective level leads to intellectual development, revealed through new insights about the problem and possible solutions, as well as personal changes in how one relates to their issue (Gonzalez-Torres, 2018).

The client's self-determination during counselling can be categorized into two stages. The first stage focuses on perceiving the problematic situation and the counselling context as an overwhelming

experience for the individual. Their perception is composed of a series of disconnected moments. This fragmented understanding prevents them from recognizing the role of the problem in their life, grasping its underlying causes, or identifying potential consequences, thus limiting their ability to incorporate it into their broader life context.

In reflective analysis, a model of reality is formed with considerable limitations, lacking a comprehensive understanding of the situation. Retrospective reflection is essential in this process since it helps to regenerate the perception and cognitive stereotypes embedded in personal experience, which often lead to inadequate responses to problem-solving scenarios. During this stage, individuals may adopt various perspectives that typically do not facilitate constructive self-definition in the context (Miller, 1999).

A fragmented view of the situation results in ineffective actions and self-evaluations by the individual.

The method of progressive reflection, which seeks to broaden one's understanding of the situation and one's role within it, facilitates a shift to the second stage of self-determination. At this stage, through reflective analysis and insight, the situation is assessed within a wider context, promoting a more effective self-definition for the individual. Here, the focus of reflection encompasses the situation itself within its broader perceptual frames, as well as one's specific position within it.

Introspective and prospective forms of reflection serve to align the ideal future with the realities of everyday life. By comparing these two dimensions, pathways for correcting and changing the situation are identified, demonstrating one's productive engagement in self-determination. Transitions between the first and second stages, and vice versa, involve adopting a new perspective on the situation, expanding one's vision, enriching it with new parameters and mastering new techniques and approaches.

One's reflective abilities during self-determination are linked to learning that purposefully shifts their view of the situation, fostering a more comprehensive understanding. The result of this method is not only the resolution of the client's problem but also their acquisition of reflective techniques.

Therefore, reflective counselling focused on cultivating reflective consciousness allows the client to rise above the problematic situation, themselves and others. This is achieved through the psychologist's use of progressive reflection in counselling, which broadens the client's

awareness, transforms their worldview and changes their typical perception of life situations.

Methods and techniques that define various forms of reflection

To enhance the client's reflective, motivational and volitional strengths, the psychologist uses various methods and techniques that facilitate different types of reflection: a) personal, existential, action-oriented, intellectual reflection, b) conscious reflection, c) retrospective, prospective and introspective reflection. These approaches aim to influence changes in motivation and activate the client's will for new decisions and actions (Coleman, 2010).

The core method of reflective psychological counselling is progressive reflection. In contrast, regressive reflection fails to assist individuals in uncovering their resources, instead guiding them through repeated cycles of reflecting on the problem and searching for solutions. This process often results in a state of being "stuck" in self-examination or becoming overly focused on the issue. Certain techniques in the authors' reflective methods are inspired by reflective practices from other frameworks, including methodologies and organizational role-playing games, and have been designed to meet the needs of psychological counselling.

Berbets et al. (2021) outline three stages involved in conducting a single consultation and the overall counselling process using progressive reflection: 1) *stages of working with substantive content* (identifying emotional responses to the problem; recognizing personal and interpersonal aspects of the problem; documenting the strategies the client has used to address the problem); 2) stages of working with *reflective content* (reconstructing and analyzing cause-and-effect relationships; evaluating the effectiveness of problem-solving strategies identified through interpretations and positional analysis; recreating current states of interaction with the psychologist; identifying resources and foundations to develop relevant problem-solving strategies, analyzing their effectiveness based on predictive reflection; engaging in second-order reflection (reflection on the means of reflection), focusing on how previous stages were approached; transitioning to a new substantive domain); 3) stages of working with *new substantive content* (identifying choices and making decisions; modelling the implementation of decisions).

The method of progressive reflection involves increasing the complexity of reflective material and deepening the understanding of urgent reality. At each stage, the client engages in personal and action-oriented reflection, as well as reflective awareness. The process of reflection and counselling unfolds in a spiral, capturing intermediate results and culminating in a decision accepted and put into practice in daily life.

According to Nerubasska et al. (2020), the techniques of progressive reflection involve *reflective listening* (identifying "gaps" in the client's narrative and asking questions that promote awareness, summarization, feedback and interpretation); *guided decentration* (focusing on the problematic situation where the client must adopt different perspectives and make choices (based on positional analysis)); reflective self-determination (the process where the client consciously accepts responsibility for their actions and decisions, positioning themselves within a framework of value orientations).

Reflective techniques are essential tools in psychological counselling, enabling the exploration of one's cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects. These methods promote self-awareness, facilitate the analysis of internal processes and behavioural patterns, as well as support the integration of new insights and changes in thinking.

Cognitive reflection is among the most impactful forms, focusing on a client's beliefs, values and thought processes. One effective tool for this is the "Problem Tree" method, where clients draw a tree to represent their situation: the roots symbolize the causes, the trunk represents the core problem, and the branches depict its consequences. This technique helps clients organize their thoughts and identify underlying challenges.

Another valuable tool is "Cognitive Mapping", which involves creating a "mental map" to visualize connections between thoughts, beliefs and reactions. This method highlights destructive thinking patterns and encourages clients to develop healthier perspectives.

The decatastrophizing technique is useful for addressing exaggerated fears. By asking questions such as "What is the worst that could happen?" and "How would that realistically affect me?" clients can rationalize their fears and reduce anxiety.

To enhance emotional awareness, the "Emotion Diary" technique involves recording daily emotions, their triggers and the surrounding context. This practice helps clients identify patterns and improve emotional intelligence by fostering reflection and self-expression.

The "Emotion Scale" technique invites clients to rate the intensity of their emotions on a scale (e.g., 1 to 10) in specific situations. This process helps them understand the range of their emotional experiences and reduce overwhelming feelings through analysis.

The "Behavioural Mirror" technique allows clients to review their actions in specific situations and consider how others might respond. This approach fosters empathy and helps clients evaluate the potential consequences of their behaviour.

These reflective techniques offer psychologists a flexible framework to integrate different approaches and tailor them to the individual needs of each client. By applying these methods, counsellors can guide clients toward deeper self-understanding, emotional resilience and personal growth.

Conclusion

This article highlights the significance of reflective psychological counselling, offering a comprehensive understanding of its role and objectives in psychotherapy. Reflective psychological counselling is an innovative approach to psychological support, focusing on actively engaging clients in the process of self-discovery and the analysis of their experiences, behaviours and values. It can be defined as a structured approach aimed at fostering deep awareness of one's mental processes, promoting the harmonization of the inner self and the development of adaptive behavioural strategies.

The primary goal of reflective counselling in psychotherapy is to help clients become aware of their emotional states and behavioural patterns, encourage self-acceptance and emotional resilience, identify and transform destructive beliefs and attitudes, as well as support the creation of new meanings and life goals. The counselling process is divided into three key stages: the preparatory stage (establishing rapport, defining the issues, motivating reflection), the main stage (working actively with different types of reflection, such as cognitive, emotional and behavioural, through self-analysis and constructive thinking), the final stage (integrating new insights into daily behaviour, planning future actions, providing resources for further self-development) (Holmes, 2023).

The methods and techniques used in reflective counselling include the "Problem Tree" technique, analysis of personal beliefs, cognitive mapping, emotion recognition methods (such as the "Emotion

Diary"), role-playing, empathetic listening, situation modelling, the "Behavioural Mirror" technique, as well as the analysis of past events.

Reflective counselling enables clients to better understand themselves and discover internal resources for overcoming crises and improving their quality of life. This approach has become a powerful tool for transformation in psychotherapy, enriching its methods and addressing the challenges of today's global society.

The article also outlines the stages of reflective psychological counselling, along with the methods and techniques that facilitate different types of reflection.

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