

RESEARCH DIGEST

Guidance and Counselling in Hong Kong, Malaysia and China

In July, 2008, the Inaugural Asia Pacific Rim International Counselling Conference was held in Hong Kong. The conference attracted nearly 400 delegates and students and culminated in the founding of a new regional association; the Asia Pacific Rim Confederation of Counsellors Ltd. For this research digest, I would like to draw your attention to three research articles that provide us with a picture of the context of three contributing jurisdictions; Hong Kong, Malaysia and China.

1. Ming-Tak Hue. (2008) The influence of Confucianism: a narrative study of Hong Kong teachers' understanding and practices of school guidance and counselling. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 36, (3): 303-316.

There are a number of articles which outline the development of guidance and counselling in Hong Kong from remediation to student development, (see, for example, Chan, 2008; Hui, 2000; Lee & Wong, 2008). Similarly, in this article, the important 1990s government initiative to implement a whole school approach to guidance is described. It appears, however, that the role of the guidance teacher in school reforms has not been clearly stated. Furthermore, the author notes that, while there is global focus on finding the best ways to support students with diverse backgrounds, this has not been explored in Hong Kong. In this paper, therefore, the author seeks to investigate how school guidance and counselling is practised within schools in a Chinese society.

Twelve in-service teachers, enrolled in the Postgraduate Diploma in Education programme at the Hong Kong Institute of Education were interviewed about their perceived goals for guidance, their relationship with students in need and the ways in which they helped students make changes. The central focus of their responses was that while many of the guidance teachers have received training based upon Western literature, particularly person-centred, in practice, they are inevitably influenced by the local culture of Confucianism. As the author notes:

'The results showed that Confucianism served as a paramount and respected reference for school guidance and for teachers' expectations of how students could be better counseled' p.306 Since Confucianism emphasises personal morality, correctness of social behaviour and, most importantly, harmony of interpersonal relationships, the author was able to describe ways in which this is played out in counselling practice.

As Confucians believe that every individual inherits 'natural tendencies' at birth, the guidance teachers in this study regarded their role as one of helping students explore their potential, deal with difficulties and promote their personal growth to reveal their 'natural tendencies'. Furthermore, when a student had lost 'heart', the counsellor's role was to encourage the student to take responsibility to search for it, through self-reflection. This also raised an interesting tension between the need for students to be socialised to cultural values of collectivism while being encouraged to pursue personal interests. Most guidance teachers suggested that 'students should be fully developed as people able to pursue the interests of the collective while their personal interests and needs were still appropriately addressed and fulfilled' p.311

While the study focuses on the responses of a small group of teachers in Hong Kong, it serves as a reminder that when counsellors work in multi-cultural contexts, they need to keep aware of how local and dominant culture influences the practice of guidance and counselling.

References

Chan, D.W., (2008). Theoretical counselling orientations of teachers in Hong Kong. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 21(3), 257-266.

Hui, E.K.P., (2000). Guidance as a whole school approach in Hong Kong: From remediation to student development. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 22, 69-82.

Lee, B.S.F., & Wong, C.K.F., (2008). Transition to comprehensive student guidance service in Hong Kong. *Counselling Psychotherapy, and Health*, 4(1), 17-23.

2. Glamcevski II, Mahajlo Tome. (2008). The Malaysian counselling profession, history and brief discussion of the future. *Counselling, Psychotherapy, and Health*, 4(1), Counselling in the Asia Pacific Rim: A Coming Together of Neighbours Special Issue, 1 -18.

In this article, the author provides a clear chronological description of the development of counselling in Malaysia. While parallels can be drawn between the initial development of counselling in Malaysia and its emergence in Western countries, there are major differences in its later development. In the 1960s, the Malaysian Ministry of Education supported the appointment of guidance teachers in schools, and the establishment of in-service guidance and counselling programmes in University Faculties of Education. Counsellors were, primarily, teachers whose focus was on remedial attention to deviant behaviour and career guidance.

Professionally, in 1980 a group of college and school counsellors founded the Malaysian Counsellors' Association. Furthermore, in 1998, counselling was regulated under the Counsellors Act and the Government established 129 mental health counselling centres nationwide. These offered a range of services to the Malaysian public including psychosocial rehabilitation, vocational training and preparation, daily skills, mental health and life skills training.

These apparent symbols of professionalisation, however, have had little impact on the practice of counselling in Malaysia. In this article, the author provides a different picture of development through interview responses of four prominent counsellors. First, while there is a perceived need to address mental health issues such as broken relationships and increases in depression and suicide rates, Malaysian people still assume that counselling is for 'crazy' people. Second, many school counsellors still have minimal qualifications, experience and supervision in counselling, and schools lack adequate assessment tools to equip students with career guidance. Third, only six universities are offering counselling courses and there is concern that scholars who have gained government funding to complete counselling courses abroad are not returning. Related to this lack of training, experienced counsellors see a need for Malaysian counselling models to be researched and used, as appropriate, to improve the mental health of Malaysians. They are concerned that Western models do not always suit Malaysian clients' need for more direction and advice.

In this article, as in the former, we are reminded that we need to consider the cultural context of clients, and counsellors, when providing models of helping.

3. Goh, M., Baoshen, X., Wahl, K., Zhong, G., Lian, F., & Romano, J.L. (2007). Chinese students' attitude toward seeking professional psychological help. *International Journal for Advancement of Counselling* 29: 187-202.

The first student counselling service was established in China in 1984 and by the 1990s approximately 40 per cent of schools in Beijing and 26 per cent of schools in Shanghai had counselling services. The survey in this paper seeks to understand how professional psychological help is perceived in order to promote counselling services in China.

A total of 1,453 subjects from seven universities/colleges and nine senior high schools participated in this study. They completed an adapted Attitude Toward Seeking Professional Psychological help Scale (ATSPPH; Fischer and Turner, 1970). Results demonstrated that Chinese students held positive attitudes towards seeking psychological help. The results were consistent with those in other countries in that they supported the view that females, college students, and those who know more about counselling or psychology have a more positive attitude than males, high school students and those who know very little about counselling or psychology. Furthermore, students who had counselling experience, who took action to seek help for their major problems, and who had a broader range of help-seeking preferences were more likely to hold positive attitudes than those who did not.

These common findings encouraged the authors to look for strategies to improve treatment attitudes of some potential clients. They were guided by suggestions made by McCarthy and Holliday (2004) to improve men's attitudes about seeking professional psychological help. Whereas the former two articles highlight the need to privilege the local, the recommendations for counselling practice provided in this article would be useful for all counsellors and all potential clients. These strategies include addressing stigma attached to seeking help, taking a positive and strength-based approach, describing the helping process in neutral terms such as 'consultation' and adapting helping methods to fit with personalities.

Reference

Fischer, E. H. & Turner, J.L., (1970). Orientations to seeking professional help: Development and research utility of an attitude scale. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. 35, 79 -90.

McCarthy, J., & Holliday, E. L. (2004). Help-seeking and counselling within a traditional male gender role: An examination from a multicultural perspective. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 82, 25 -30.

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