# SocioDynamic Counselling

A CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVE

"The person is not the problem, the problem is the problem."

By R. Vance Peavy

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to all those who search for a life in balance, and to those who are inspired by the crimson fingers of dawn and walk amongst whispering pines.

I am enriched by the many intelligent conversations which I have had over the years with graduate students for whom I was, and am, a mentor.

Life has two edges: pain and joy. I have learned much from those persons who have sought me out to speak of their pain and their joy.

In a most fundamental way, I dedicate this book to my "Uncle John" who said to me—one day when I was ten years old straddling the top pole of the corral fence and asking which horse I should try to put my rope on as they circled in the corral below—"If you have eyes that see, ears that hear and a heart with patience, you will have answers to questions your tongue will not need to ask." The memory of his grace and presence inspired my every day.

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PREFACE

Constructivist thinking is rapidly progressing as a valuable way of describing and understanding humans—their thinking, their feeling, their actions. Constructivist thinking is well established in the so-called 'hard' sciences. It is widely used in anthropology and in the arts. It is now emerging as a new way for sociologists to understand the objects of their study. As a philosophy, constructivism goes back at least to the 15th century.

In psychology, until recently constructivist thinking has been kept on the sidelines in North America by behaviourism, cognitivism, and humanistic psychology. It is becoming more and more apparent to serious thinkers that the positivist foundations of behaviouristic social science are flawed and can no longer serve as a legitimatizing basis for counselling and other "helping" professions.

Those who take the time to understand and begin to utilize constructivist thinking in their clinical counselling and research work find it to be enormously liberating...

The pioneering work of Piaget, Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Leontiev, Kelly, Bruner, and Gergen provides a contemporary constructivist perspective for psychology. Recently the work of Michael Mahoney, Vittorio Guidano, Robert and Greg Neimieyer and many therapist-writers associated with systems and family therapies have opened up psychotherapy and counselling to constructivist contributions.

Kenneth Gergen has been a strong intellectual force in presenting a rationale for the value of social constructionism. He has done much to develop this "relational psychology." Peter Ossorio and his "descriptive psychology" at the University of Colorado as well as Rom Harre and his associates at Oxford and other British scholars such as John Shotter have been moving psychology in a constructivist direction.

In the last several decades constructivist thinking has become an increasingly valuable frame of reference for various family therapies, narrative therapy, and some forms of post-rational cognitive therapies. Now it is influencing general counselling. An example is the new book on *Constructivist Counselling: Theory, Research, Training, and Practice* edited by T. Sexton and B. Griffin.

This book which you are reading will be a second book on constructivist approach in counselling.

I have another book, *Konstruktivistisk Vejledning: Teori og Metode* (1998) published in Danish. We can expect others shortly. Much of the newer thinking in qualitative research methods is also springing from a constructivist framework. It is not surprising since those who take the time to understand and begin to utilize constructivist thinking in their clinical counselling and research work find it to be enormously liberating and in many ways inspirational to both practitioners and to clients.

Of course there will be a struggle to bring constructivist thinking to new generations of students and clients. Several generations of academics who were socialized into positivism will have to live out their days, unwilling to shed the mantle of the positivist perspective even though as Karl Popper remarked, "It is a way of thinking that is dominant but dead." One of the great virtues of constructivist thinking, however, is that it does not get into disputations about "I am better than you are." Rather, it says, "Here are some new and different ways of understanding humans and their societies. Try them out and see for yourself."
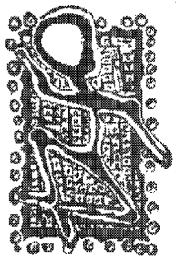
As you will notice, I use the title *SocioDynamic Counselling* for this book. For years I have worked on these ideas and in due time I wish to clearly lay claim to a counselling perspective under the trademark *SocioDynamic* which will identify it as a Canadian invention. SocioDynamic counselling is constructivist-based and also incorporates ideas and knowledge from other disciplines. I want to do what I can to establish the constructivist way of counselling.

You might be interested to know that "Socio" comes from a Greek root meaning 'together', 'companion', 'social' and I use it to establish that this form of counselling is at least as much a relational or social form of helping as it is individualistic. Dynamic also comes from a Greek root, *dynamiko*, which means "characterized by continuous change or movement"; and <u>characterized by an aesthetic equilibrium of parts which otherwise are unstable when considered separately.</u> I have come to understand that we humans are social beings, that we are continuously changing, and that at our best, we are a holistic, aesthetic equilibrium. A life well-lived is a work of art, more like a poem or dance than a machine or collection of disparate traits and parts. I hope to make this understanding come to life in the SocioDynamic constructivist based work of counselling.
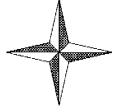
In the writing of this book I have been inspired by the hundreds of clients whom I have listened to and who have taught me much about human existence in its diverse forms. I have also learned much from the many intelligent and creative graduate students for whom I have been mentor over the past thirty years. I am also indebted to the good intelligence and friendship of Mary-Baird Carlsen, Greg Neimeyer, Timo Vahamottonnen, Peter Ossorio, and many others with whom I have had many stimulating, spirited and respectful exchanges of ideas and understandings.

I regard this book as a "work-in-progress"—a report of my "developing ideas" on constructivist thinking and counselling– this version brings my work up-to-date as of September, 1998. I plan to update this book periodically so that I have an opportunity to share with my readers the ongoing development of my ideas about the SocioDynamic perspective for counselling.

REFLECTIONS…
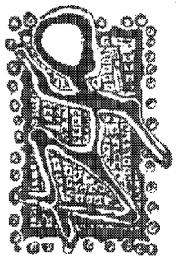
REFLECTIONS...

SECTION I:

CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY & COUNSELLING

REFLECTIONS...

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION AND FIRST STEPS

The reason lightning never strikes twice in the same place is that the same place isn't there the next time. ~Source unknown.~

As I begin writing this book, I am aware that I face a difficult yet potentially rewarding task. My task is to combine the scholarly knowledge of counselling, the result of almost four decades of work as university professor and researcher, with five decades of professional experience of counselling which as a practical counsellor. Moreover, I must try to interweave these two types of knowledge with my world-view as a reflective practitioner to produce a book which is at once informative, inspiring, and enabling of others in their own efforts as counsellors and helpers.

I will begin by giving a brief account of my own professional journey as one who has committed the second half of life to advancing the cause and profession of counselling. It is my belief that within the context of human service or "helping" occupations such as counselling, an author's life should stand behind what he or she writes as a *vivum vadium* of authenticity for what is written.

I took my first job as a fully paid counsellor in 1954. Prior to that time I had only counselling practicum experience and volunteer experience for a year as a counsellor working with immigrants from Afghanistan and Turkey.

I began as a school counsellor, first in a secondary school and then as an itinerant counsellor in elementary schools. Three years later I was teaching counsellors at a college and working as a part-time counsellor at a mental health and rehabilitation clinic. By 1958 I had moved to another college where I directed the counselling services for the college. At that time I also began providing counselling and adult education to native people on the Klamath and Warm Springs Indian reservations where I worked in combined roles as teacher, counsellor and educational advisor.

As I continued to practice as a counsellor my interest in doing research and in writing about counselling became stronger. By 1965 I had completed a doctorate in counselling psychology at the University of Oregon and had spent a year as a research fellow at Stanford University in California, doing counselling research. At this point in my life I was a counsellor, teacher, therapist, and held a license as a psychologist. This professional persona rested on top of a worklife which included 18 years growing up as a rural person, working on farms, ranches, construction and steel mills together with continuous

but intermittent education. Eight years of professional employment had enabled me to begin an integration of a lower class, rural and working class world-view with an urban and professional world view.

These new ideas included a revival of attention to the family of "human sciences" which now includes such disciplines as phenomenology, constructivism, social constructionism, feminist theory, narrative psychology, and various interpretive disciplines such as hermeneutics and ethnography.

In 1967 I moved to Canada, found a job at a university, and applied for Canadian citizenship. When I began teaching at the University of Victoria at which time there were no courses in counselling. My first academic assignment was to organize and begin teaching basic courses in counselling. In a period of four years I was able to create a small counsellor education program where people could study to become counsellors.

Due to an increasing interest in counselling and an increase in employment opportunities for counsellors, several more faculty positions in counselling were opened so that a regular program of study in counselling could become a reality. By then I had also established a Counselling Centre for the university.

In the years that followed I divided my time between training counsellors, researching and writing about counselling, and practicing counselling. I succeeded in bringing Canada's national counselling journal to the University where I worked and served as editor-in-chief of the journal for a period of three years.

By the late 1980s I had completed a ten year project of assisting with the development of a national training program for employment counsellors in Canada. Then, over the period 1988 until 1992, I was director of a research project which examined all current methods of career counselling and began work on the development of a new form of counselling. It was the position of the research group that existing forms of career counselling specifically, and counselling generally, needed revision in order to meet the changing needs of people in the coming century.

From the review of existing counselling models, the research team discovered that most models of counselling and therapy were based on positivistic foundations at a time when positivism was on the decline. New Human Science ideas about how social science should be conceptualized were now beginning to replace positivist ideas. These new ideas were the family of "human sciences" which now includes such disciplines as phenomenology, constructivism, social constructionism, feminist theory, narrative psychology, and various interpretive disciplines such as hermeneutics and ethnography.

In 1993 I was forced to retire as a result of compulsory retirement policies still in effect at some Canadian Universities.

Since then I have continued to research, mentor, write about, and practice counselling. I have now

taken as my goal: the introduction of a constructivist thinking into the theory and practice of counsel-ling. I have spent the past seven years developing a counselling approach based on human science disciplines—especially the constructivist perspective. I have persistently refined my ideas about counselling and have continued to test them out in actual counselling practice with a wide range of clients. It is my belief that a constructivist framework for guiding counsellors will improve their understanding and the quality of the help which they provide for individuals. The constructivist perspective should be especially heplful to individuals who are struggling with the doubts, uncertainties, and conflicts of the postmodern era which Canada and other industrial and post-industrial countries are moving into at the close of the 20th century.

In the past five years, I have published a number of papers[1] on constructivist counselling and I currently am a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*. I have taught courses on constructivist counselling in five provinces in Canada and abroad in Portugal, Sweden, Finland and Denmark. As well I have produced several professional videotapes demonstrating constructivist counselling[2]. This book is a record of my efforts over the past decade–efforts to develop <u>new ideas</u> for improving the quality of counselling.

My perspective as author

A lot more could be said about any of the topics I have touched upon... I
have meant to ask the question, to break out of the frame... The point is
not a set of answers, but making possible a different practice.
~Kappeler, 1986, p. 212~

I have come to believe that the written word should do two things: first, it should inform the reader, bringing new ideas and knowledge into interaction with the old. Second, a text should be written so as to bring the reader into a reflexive dialogue with the author's ideas and knowledge. It is valuable to perceive reading and reflection as a tool for inching us forward along the path of understanding—regardless of whether or not we agree or disagree with what the author has written. And, if we are fortunate, new paths for thinking and understanding will be revealed to us, about which we may have known little or nothing before our reflexive dialogue with the author. It is wonderful to be inspired by what we read. Inspiration brings on the energy needed to expand conscious ways of knowing and doing.

It is said that writing a book is ten per cent inspiration and ninety per cent perspiration. It is my intention to even this distribution so that it does not take too much perspiration to read what I write but that it offers much more than ten per cent inspiration to the reader who has a sincere interest in counselling ideas and practice.

Good counselling brings hope, encouragement, clarification and active
social participation into the life of the other.

This is a book about the transformation of counselling into a practice which is more relevant for individuals who are in the midst of navigating seas of change. Further, and more specifically, it introduces readers to an understanding of how to practice counselling from a constructivist perspective. I assume that most of the readers of this book are either counsellors or are in some way interested in learning more about counselling. My years as a counsellor educator and mentor has taught me that many counsellors are deeply interested in improving the quality of the counselling which they provide. Other counsellors are searching for a New Look in counselling—one which has been freed from positivism and which is respectful of both human spirit and knowledge gained from life experience. It is for these counsellors that I am writing.

One of my intentions as author is to provide readers with an opportunity to deepen their sense of purpose in their work as counsellors. I hope that reading this book will lead readers to more deeply appreciate counselling as a valued activity in society—a practice which can bring much meaning and fulfillment both to counsellors and to the people whom they counsel.

I understand counselling to be one of the "noble professions" in the sense that it is composed of human intentions and values which are generally considered to be of excellent quality. Good counsellors and good counselling nearly always bring the distinctly "human" factor into human situations of struggle, uncertainty, and pain. Perhaps more than any other calling, counselling is the practice of *respect*—respect for who the other is and is trying to become, respect for the cultural identity of the other, and respect for the importance of the dialectic between human agency and human connectedness which shows itself in the multiple voices which the person may speak.

Good counselling brings hope, encouragement, clarification and active social participation into the life of the other. And it does this on the level of the individual—in a face-to-face meeting where uniqueness can be expressed and where the counsellor can make himself present to the client and the client can experience being authentically listened to, and engaged in person to person dialogue. Of course I recognise the importance and need for group counselling and in no way am I trying to down-play its applications in appropriate circumstances. However, I am primarily concerned with person-to-person interactions. Chapter 10 addresses the application for constructivist methods in group counselling.

When I write about counselling, I try to write in a way that resonates with the human factor in counselling—I intend to make counselling sensible within the context of how people experience their everyday lives. More and more I resist the writing style which I was trained to use when I went to university myself. It was a supposedly "objective", scientific style of writing in which the author was excised and not permitted to enter into the writing as a real person. The style was abstract, and was supposed to keep authors from expressing their own opinions or values. I now no longer allow myself

to be dominated by this mistaken idea of what a text is supposed to be and do. In order to communicate my ideas and articulate my experience as a real person and as an experienced counsellor, I use a writing style which has the following features:

1. For the most part I write in the first person, thus putting the weight of my life experience as a practical counsellor and counselling scholar behind what I write,

2. I maintain the intellectual integrity of my writing by using notes and references. However, I use the simplest referencing style possible so that what I write is not cluttered with "Mr. Smith says this...", "Dr. Jacob's research demonstrates that....", and so on. This "sea-of-names" approach is character-istic of much academic writing and it tends to obscure the originality of the author's own thinking. It is my intention that the reader be able to take what I write as a carefully considered position on counselling—a position developed from a long history of scholarship combined with reflexive knowledge derived from practical experience and which does not require constant buttressing and justification by reference to other authorities.

3. I try to achieve clarity in my writing, but not at the expense of reader intelligence. I am opposed to what is called the "dumbing-down" of texts for the supposedly busy and reluctant reader who wishes to read only prosaic, practical writing—the reader whose interest is in finding out what can be quickly and easily done and "what works".

I believe that counsellors are intelligent and capable of understanding discourse on topics both theoretical and practical as long as it is put forward clearly and with relevance. Contemplation and action are both important in counselling and I try not to slight either in my writing.

Finally, I am aware of the awkwardness of trying to correct the masculine gendered writing which has been dominant in literature almost since the invention of books. I try to maintain a balance be-tween using feminine, masculine and plural forms of the pronoun and at times I resort to the use of the royal "we" and other stylistic manoeuvres in an attempt to correct gender inequity.

So what is counselling anyway?

Counselling provides a person the opportunity to examine the implications of her life as she is living it *and thereby give consideration to alternative paths as she* might live it in the future.

It is estimated that there are more than 400 different helping models[3]. Most of these approaches to counselling and therapy are derived from four main theory sources: psychoanalytic, behavioural, cog-nitive or humanistic.

Most counselling approaches share some common features. However, in other ways counselling approaches may differ from each other greatly.

There is good research evidence that skillful counselling is helpful and meets individual needs which cannot be met in other ways[4]. However, no one method of counselling has proven to be clearly better than others. I believe that there are several reasons for this. First, the "person" or "self" of the counsellor is just as important as any method the counsellor may use. Second, people seeking counselling have many different, and often unique, needs. Adherence to a single formula method of counselling prevents the counsellor from meeting the unique need of a particular client.

Finally, most counselling approaches do share some common features. For example, most counselling methods stress the importance of the counselling relationship and the value of good interpersonal communication. In general terms, five factors seem to be present in most counselling methods applied to clients seeking help with problems in worklife, health, family relations and other types of counselling. These five common factors are:

1. A supportive relationship of care, trust and hope is provided.
2. Pertinent and accurate information is provided when needed.
3. Clients are helped to clarify and create images of their personal goals and futures.
4. Clients are helped to recognize their personal potentials/limits.
5. Clients are helped to construct alternative choices, plans and to implement their actions; and they are helped to deal with obstacles to their progress towards achieving their goals. Or to put it in narrative terms, clients are helped to find their voices and empowerment in the stories which they tell and re-tell.

However, in other ways counselling approaches may differ from each other greatly. One example of difference is whether or not the counsellor's role is that of "expert" or "ally"; another difference between counselling approaches is whether the counsellor's role is primarily advisory or catalytic. An even greater range of opinions across counselling methods is found on how emotions in counselling are treated.

Counselling can be described in many ways. In the following list I will present ten different descriptions of counselling. I will examine some of these descriptions in much greater detail in later sections of the book. As you read through the descriptions notice your own response to each; and reflect on how you respond.

Counselling is a *process* which conveys *care, hope, encouragement, clarification and activation*.

To *care* means to value and love; also to attend to and nourish the other. To care is to transcend sentimentalism, to engage actively in creating better conditions for the other and to recognize that no one deserves isolation. To care is to recognize our interdependence and need for mutuality. Caring is

the opposite of indifference and thus implies further communication and a give-and-receive relationship.

Caring for others, and caring for ourselves, is the basis for a new humanism. Such a humanism can serve as a standpoint from which to create sustainable selves, life-styles and communities. The construction of new life-styles is necessary for many as they struggle to go beyond economic unfairness and greed to fashion selves, families and ways of working which are functional in the rapidly changing social life of the 21st century[5]. In fact there are some signs that an effort is beginning in some countries to invent new social contracts which embody care. Good counselling is the *sine qua non* for providing care on the level of the individual.

Counselling is a process of care which conveys care, hope,

encouragement, clarification and activation.

Counselling is a *reflexive social practice* (for helping others).

From a constructivist point of view there are many classes of social practice:
1. regulatory (for example: parenting and policing),
2. instructional (teaching and informing), and
3. helping (therapy, ministering, counselling), just to name a few examples.

Counselling is a complex set of social (that is, "between-people") activities which are intended to be "helping" activities.

Several important, specific social practices which are constitutive of counselling are personal negotiation, problem-solving, dialogue, personal planning, and project construction. The potential value of conceptualizing counselling as a social practice is that it places counselling in the domain of social life and reduces the emphasis on individualistic psychology. With social practice there is more attention upon what happens between persons and not so much on what goes on inside the head of the individual.

Counselling is an individualized, practical *problem-solving* method.

Most counsellors concur that problem-solving is often the focus of counselling conversations but would not be able to reach any consensus on just what kind of problem-solving procedures should be used.

Problem-solving strategies used by counsellors invoke the theoretical assumptions of the particular counselling approach. For example a counsellor under the influence of psychoanalytic theory will want to spend time reconstructing the client's past, and may emphasize such things as infantile behaviours carried forward into adulthood. On the other hand, a behaviourally oriented counsellor will typically have little interest in a person's past or interior self, but much interest in specific present behaviours. Constructivist counselling emphasises the construction of meaning and the invention of solutions.

Counselling is a *general method of life-planning*.

This description of counselling assumes that an individual's life is evolving over time and is, to some extent, historical and drawn forward by imagined futures. The concept of life-planning is holistic and suggests that counselling is more appropriately viewed as a general activity since a person has a whole life rather than a fragmented life of unrelated activities. Thus counselling is a general method which should address the whole person rather than being broken into varieties of counselling such as educational, career, vocational, personal, etc.

The assumption underlying life-planning is that a person always brings her whole life to the counselling session. While the person's concern may be with one aspect of her life—finding work, for example—other aspects of her life such as family relations, health, and training are invariably implicated and need to be brought into the counselling dialogue whenever they appear as relevant parts of the person's whole concern.

Counselling is an activity for supporting *empowerment*.

Empowerment has been criticized as a concept but I believe that it still has value in two aspects. First, one gains power in social life by becoming eligible to participate in social life activities such as schooling, working, leisure, training, and gaining membership in various groups and organizations making up community life. One of the purposes of counselling from a constructivist perspective **is to assist clients to gain eligibility for participation in social life.**

Participation in social life means to be able to engage, by choice, in social practices such as working, voting, recreating, family life, religion, learning, and accessing health resources. Individuals are often made ineligible for participation in a social practice due to age, gender, poverty, certification, lack of expertise, discriminatory practices, citizenship status, prior criminal record, inadequate self-confidence, lack of language proficiency, strong conflicting beliefs, and so on.

Secondly, counselling should enable the person to experience a greater sense of control over her life and the activities in her life, including her own thoughts, emotions and projects. Counselling can help individuals examine the assumptions by which they are living, and thereby gain more latitude for revising or replacing assumptions which are interfering with the individual's sense of control over self and context. Sometimes what has been assumed to be "normal" such as being the object of sexual abuse or harassment is realized by the individual to be "not" normal and thereby the individual is mobilized to resist or fight off the abuse. This process of gaining power in the situation often starts with the lifting of a previously unexamined assumption. One of the most important manifestations of "empowerment" is gaining a new frame of reference with which to interpret what is happening and what is being experienced.

Counselling is an activity which produces maps for navigating social life.

This description of counselling emphasizes the planning aspect of counselling. A map is a plan. Most counselling which clarifies a person's problem or concern will open up alternatives for making better maps to follow in getting where one wishes to go in social life. Constructivist counselling stresses

the need to "map" life-spaces and this procedure will be discussed in detail in the second section of this book.

Counselling is an opportunity to search for new locations in social life.

The term "social location" refers to our individual status or role in the social structures of social life and society. For example the youngest member of a family is often located as the "baby" of the family in reference to all other family members, and may occupy this status well into adulthood. Social location implies the presence or absence of opportunities in your life to take up various roles in work, play, love, recreation, and so on.

Counselling is an activity in which *opportunity* rather than regulation or compliance is stressed.

New and accurate information often constitutes the path to opportunities previously unknown to the individual. This is why accurate and accessible information concerning jobs, training, further education and other services which can be found in the community are so important.

However, information is of little value until it is incorporated into the consciousness of the individual as useable and valued knowledge. Often this will depend upon the individual adopting a new vantage point or frame of understanding which enables her or him to perceive, for the first time, the value of the information presented.

This is why the quality of counselling conversation is important, and why it is necessary for the counsellor and client to unearth the assumptions which are preventing the information from becoming knowledge. To choose or to act requires opportunities for doing so.

Counselling is a shelter where hope, support, clarity and action can be promoted.

In modern social life, more and more people live without the "shelter" of a large family, traditions, or religious life. In North America some cities are seemingly filled with "homeless" people—the unsheltered. Of course in Africa and in some other places huge numbers of people are rendered unsheltered overnight by the outbreak of war and violence. In every community, there are people who are unsheltered, if not physically, then emotionally.

Good counsellors do care and are not indifferent to the difficulties faced by individuals. The counselling relationship itself can be viewed as a kind of temporary shelter. In those times when the individual has no place to go, no one to turn to, no one who will listen respectfully, the counselling relationship can offer temporary emotional shelter.

Within the safety of a counselling meeting, things can be sorted out—clarity is provided. The fact that a person (a counsellor) is found who will listen, who will show respect, who will offer an intelligent problem-solving structure, who will have information about the network of help and services available in the community, and who will provide temporary emotional support—this means that the person is, for the moment, experiencing *being sheltered.*

Counselling is an alliance formed in order to solve concrete problems in living.

Early in the history of counselling as a professional practice, counselling was seen as an advisory

procedure. Later, advice-giving came to be discouraged but the role of the counsellor was deemed to be that of an objective observer and the counsellor was assumed to be an 'expert'.

However, under the influence of the Rogerian school of counselling, the counsellor's status as expert was reduced and an effort made to introduce equity and the concept of "facilitation" into the counselling relationship. This trend spread to other types of counselling. The next historical step was the perception of the counselling relationship as a 'helping alliance'. Counsellor and client came to be construed as allies. As allies, they work together in the search for solutions to practical problems of everyday living. The notion of the helping alliance is rather widely accepted today.

The counsellor and client are partners in the reality-constructing conversations of the counselling session.

Constructivists have entered into this discussion with even further revisions. They tend to see the counsellor and other as joint participants in language. Counselling conversations are organized and constructed through the joint or mutual participation of counsellor and client. Generally, the conversations focus on the client's concerns.

Through the constructed conversation, problems emerge, get defined, linger, dissipate, or go away. Most constructivists would probably agree that it is better to think of counsellors as allies or co-operators than to think of them as objective observers, or experts. They view counsellors as participants with their clients in conversational dialogue which is aimed at getting things done in the person's life.

In a constructivist view, the counsellor and client may well be allies, but they are allies by virtue of their participation in communication. They are, first and foremost, partners in the reality-constructing conversations of the counselling session. They construct the relationship they have with each other, and through it, construct or deconstruct what gets defined as a problem or concern that brought them together to begin with. Constructivist counsellors are intrigued by the way in which people talk and tell stories about their everyday lives. Telling stories seems to be both a way of inventing solutions and of preventing solutions. From this perspective one of the main counsellor skills as an "ally" is to elicit narratives or stories from the client and then work with the client to use the story in making improvements in the client's area of concern. I will discuss this in great detail in a later chapter.

Counselling as bricolage.

The terms "bricolage" and "bricoleur" are a bit obscure. Those familiar with the term "bricolage" believe that it often has less-than-desirable connotations, probably because of how it came into use. The famous anthropologist Levi-Strauss[6] used it to describe a person who uses cultural knowledge to solve problems. Such a person was originally seen as a kind of jack-of-all-trades who could 'do things with his hands'. Levi-Strauss was at pains to show that there was a difference between scientific

thinking and the bricoleur's "mind of the savage". To Levi-Strauss, while a bricoleur could solve certain practical problems he was hopelessly limited because of his inability to think 'scientifically'.

Since no one has shown indigenous peoples to possess less intelligence, or inferior intelligence, compared to non-indigenous people, it seems likely that Levi-Strauss was unintentionally perpetuating a discriminatory concept that held everyday reasoning to be inferior to scientific reasoning. I believe that the terms bricoleur and bricolage are descriptive of a very important function in social life and that is: *practical problem-solving ability*. In my frame of understanding, a bricoleur is a kind of professional do-it-yourself person, one who takes the cultural knowledge at hand and uses these life-relevant materials to solve concrete problems which people encounter in everyday living.

In the best sense of the word bricoleurs are inventors. They face concrete problems in the here-and-now and often have to work with what is at hand. Counsellors who choose the path of the bricoleur might tell a story as follows:

> *We are those who face flesh and blood human beings asking for help in daily social life. We know the meaning of uniqueness and the particular. We are not able to work with 'standard parts', or 'universal strategies', and even doubt if such phenomena exist. We listen to people cobble together their stories and we even cobble with them, looking for sense-making. When we do our work skillfully, and with respect to the cultural context, we are, in joint efforts with our clients, making sense and solving problems. We are like Mad Max, the Road Warrior. We have something that runs and we have ways of weaving meaning and finding sense even in the face of considerable constraint and obstruction. We realize that solutions, just like problems, are largely the result of inventiveness.*

Is counselling the same as therapy?

I have been asked many times if I construe counselling to be the same as therapy and if I understand counselling to be primarily psychological in nature. I will discuss both of these questions for they have serious implications for the practice of counselling.

First, counselling is both like and unlike therapy. Counselling and therapy are alike in that they both refer to a similar process of interpersonal communication and self-examination. This is a process by means of which individuals confirm, review, invent or discard aspects of their selves, their frames of meaning, and their repertory of actions.

Generally, we can say that this process in an internal process of evaluation, change and confirmation. The purpose of counselling is to help people evaluate, accept, or change aspects of their self, relations, or context. Through counselling people attempt to choose, understand, and make things better for themselves in everyday living. In general, we can visualize counselling as a process by means of which individuals are helped to **develop and strengthen a set of internal criteria for choosing, deciding, judging, and analyzing.** In other words, counselling seeks to help people extend

their control over their own lives—currently this is called "empowerment". We can state that this purpose of strengthening internal criteria more-or-less fits therapy also. However the procedures used in the empowering process are often quite different.

Counselling is organized around the provision of hope, support, clarification and action planning. Therapy, on the other hand, often brings to bear various categories of pathology, deficit, mental illness, and is often associated with medication.

While there are ways in which therapy and counselling are similar, the two are quite different in other ways. First of all, therapy tends to employ a language of deficiency. In therapy individuals are seen as being "sick", in need of "curing", or in some way exhibiting deficits. I recently read that psychiatry has now a diagnostic category for virtually all human activities. In other words we can go wrong in every possible way!

Gergen[7] has pointed out that therapy's vocabulary of deficit has expanded enormously in the past few decades. This vocabulary of deficiency draws attention to alleged shortcomings, problems and incapacities and has a disempowering influence on people, it would seem.

Terms like inferiority, manic-depressive, anorexic, compulsive,

schizophrenic, learning disordered, and co-dependency are generated by

therapists and then spread to the general public.

Terms like inferiority, manic-depressive, anorexic, compulsive, schizophrenic, learning disordered, and co-dependency are generated by therapists and then spread to the general public through the electronic media and various magazines and books. In our time it is customary for many people to think and talk about themselves a great deal of the time in deficit-terms and see others that way also. People who adopt such a vocabulary simultaneously see having a therapist as a necessity. In this way a more-or-less permanent spiral of infirmity is created[8]. To illustrate this vocabulary of deficiency, consider the following table.

Table of Deficits	Low Self Esteem	Repressed Personality
	Depressed	Obsessive-compulsive
	Co-dependency	Stress Syndrome
	Seasonal Affective Disorder	Mid-life Crisis
	Inadequate Personality	Bulemia
	Addictive Personality	Burned Out
	Anti-social Personality	Hyperactivity
	Split Personality	Learning Disorder

This is just a sampling from a vast repertory of how people allegedly can be deficient and thus need therapy to be "cured". Therapy is associated with medicine and a "scientific" approach to human change. Generally, the therapist is seen as having expert status, and as possessing knowledge about human problems which is superior to that of the everyday person. In clinical settings, therapists may even wear white coats to bolster their image of being close to, or part of, the medical profession.

Counselling, on the other hand is not a curing process. Rather, counselling is undertaken so as to help people solve concrete, practical problems in living—such as choosing an occupation, finding resources in the community, making life-choices, building or repairing a relationship, and so on. Counselling is a practice directly attuned to problematics in the social life of everyday people. While counsellors may use psychological knowledge, or knowledge from other disciplines such as sociology, economics or philosophy to inform their practice, they have fewer pretensions about being part of the natural science establishment.

People are simply not predictable in many ways.

Counsellors draw more on cultural knowledge—sometimes referred to as "common-sense" or "local" knowledge. Counsellors often conduct themselves as bricoleurs, drawing on the knowledge at hand in the specific cultural situation of the client to help the client fashion resolutions to life difficulties which the individual is experiencing in her everyday context.

Counsellors operate, so-to-speak, as "practitioners of the best-guess" rather than as scientists claiming to be able to predict and control people, behaviour, and emotional feelings. Scientists, and therapists who emulate scientists, search for, and try to establish "universal" or generalized laws of behaviour. This is sometimes referred to as the fallacy of the "universal child". We now know and accept that there is no such creature—each of us has grown up in a particular context and has developed a unique twist to life. People are simply not predictable in many ways. Counsellors live and work in contexts of the particular life-space, of local knowledge, and not the universe of the general.

In the following table I have drawn together some ways of distinguishing counselling from therapy, bearing in mind that there is no unanimity in either counselling or therapy about just how either practice should be constituted and described.

Distinctions Between the Practice of Counselling and Therapy

Counselling	Therapy
Counselling is participatory	Therapy is expert-oriented
Uses cultural hypotheses	Uses scientific hypotheses
Associated with learning	Associated with curing
Focuses on normal behaviour	Focuses on deficit behaviour
Multi-disciplinary resources	Psychology/medical resources

To recap, counselling and therapy are alike in that they are both interested in the process of examination and change. They are quite different from one another in their choice of methods and in their vocabularies.

Introducing a new vocabulary into counselling discourse

In order to exist in the social world with a comfortable sense of being a
good, socially proper, and stable person, an individual needs to have a
coherent, acceptable and constantly revised life story. ~Linde~

Every profession builds up a vocabulary which tells the world what the profession is about, and what its members believe, value, and do. Over the years, counselling has been accepted as one of the "helping" professions (others are social work, psychiatry, psychotherapy and pastoring). Historically, counselling has established a vocabulary borrowing heavily from therapy and personality theory. With the exception of humanistic and existentialist counselling, this association with therapy and personality science has meant that the vocabulary of counselling tends to have a positivist and quasi-scientific bent. It is heavily endowed with psychological language.

Choosing constructivism as a theoretical scaffold upon which to build a revised form of counselling requires a partial, but not complete, change in the vocabulary used to describe the theory and practice of counselling.

Constructivist thinking differs in several significant ways from positivist thinking and uses different words [**and uses words** *differently*] to describe concepts and practices. Five aspects of constructivist thinking and constructivist language are:

1. Constructivist thinking is not just psychological; it is also philosophical, sociological and literary.
2. Constructivist thinking is contemplative. It is receptive to poetic expressions and especially to metaphor.
3. Constructivist thinking does not aim for final answers or unassailable, proven facts. It remains open to invention and is directed to noticing and making differences.
4. Constructivist thinkers are inclined toward vocabularies which are dominated by metaphors of "making" rather than "finding" (for example, making meaning rather than finding meaning), of diversification and novelty rather than convergence to the already known[9]. The constructivist thinker tends to see useful vocabularies as poetic achievements rather than compliance with universal standards.
5. Constructivist thinking is more concerned with making changes than with employing fixed categories; more concerned with describing than explaining, and more concerned with always re-describing in order to find ways of re-making ourselves in ever more meaningful and more flexible forms.

For the constructivist, questions have a much greater power than answers since questions open pathways to new alternatives and explorations while answers tend to close off alternatives and convert inquiries into conclusions.

So, in introducing constructivist counselling, I am, in part, introducing a new vocabulary into counselling. My belief is that certain aspects and terms of this new vocabulary will be appealing to readers and thus give them the tools for beginning to rethink their conceptualizations and practice of counselling. I am not particularly interested in trying to prove that the new vocabulary is better than the old, nor am I interested in tearing down the old in counselling.

What I am interested in doing is pointing out some ways in which society and the social order are changing, how these changes in social institutions have implications for people in the way they live their individual lives, and how a revised counselling can be useful to people who are in the midst of trying to navigate 21st century social life.

In order to try to achieve my objectives, I use a vocabulary which both describes and inspires, and which breaks away from the scientific models and deficit languages of psychology and therapy and relocates itself in the on-going cultural and social life experience of people. This new vocabulary uses descriptions and metaphors from a wide range of disciplines, but especially from cultural experience.

I will bring this introduction to a close by returning to a source which I encountered in the 1950s and which has stayed with me ever since. This is the voice of the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard[10] and his thoughts on what it means to actually help another person. I have slightly altered the wording but have retained the meaning as I believe Kierkegaard meant it. The quote is pieced together from his writing on pp. 27-29 of *The Point of View of My Work as an Author:*

> *One must first take the pains to find the other where the other is and begin there. This is the secret of the art of helping others. Any one who does not master this is himself deluded when he proposes to help others. In order to help another I must understand more than she—yet first of all surely I must understand what she understands. If I do not know that, then my greater understanding will be of no help to the other. If however, I am disposed to plume myself on my greater understanding it is because I am vain or proud, so that at bottom, instead of benefiting her, I want to be admired. But all true helping begins with self-humbling; the helper must first humble himself and not set himself over and above the one he would help, and therewith understand that to help does not mean to dominate, but to serve, that to help does not mean to be ambitious but to be patient, that to help means to endure for the time being the imputation that one is ignorant and does not understand what the other understands. Be the amazed listener who sits and hears what the other finds more delight in telling you because you listen with amazement. Take the case of the man who is passionately angry... Unless you can begin with him as though it were he who had to in-*

struct you, and unless you can do it in such a way that the angry man, who was too

impatient to listen to a word of yours, is glad to discover in you a complaisant and

attentive listener—if you cannot do that, you cannot help him at all.

This remarkable piece of text was written in 1848 but was not published until after his death (1855) by Kierkegaard's brother. In this writing, he singles out a number of aspects of what one must do if one wishes to truly help another:

1. Listen, and listen from the viewpoint of the other
2. Exercise patience and humility
3. Begin where the other is
4. Let the other teach you
5. Restrain your own vanity and your need to be viewed as superior in knowledge and skill to the client
6. Be willing to admit your own ignorance.

These observations form a good testament for counsellors in all walks of life.

As counsellors we have the privilege of hearing many stories and scripts
and then joining the storytellers in the task of re-authoring them toward
more preferred futures.

In the pages of this chapter I have begun to set up an understanding of what constructivist thinking is. I have introduced some portion of my own basic attitude toward counselling and I have probably left more questions in your mind than when you started reading. I hope that this is the case. Some answers will come as we go along in subsequent chapters. However, other questions will likely arise to take the place of answered ones. Perhaps, as we move along toward a future of being better counsellors, (as I have paraphrased from Alasdair MacIntyre[11]), we will be able to grasp that:

Each human being who stands before us to speak, listen or remain silent is not only

a moral agent capable of choice, she is also an author or co-author of scripts mak-

ing up the story of her own life. It is because we all live out stories in our lives and

that we understand our own lives in terms of the stories that we live out that the story

is an appropriate form for understanding others. We must remember, however, that

we often are tellers-of-stories in a drama not of our own design. Then we are not

more than co-authors of our lives, and sometimes much less. Each drama constrains

some other, and no drama is ever perfectly, nor finally, written. We live out our

lives—our stories—both individually and in relation to each other, drawn forward

by certain images—imagined futures. Some futures attract us, others repel—some
seem impossible of attainment, others may seem inevitable. The future always presents
us with a telos—a range of goals. By our activities and projects in the present we
either move or fail to move toward hoped-for futures. And we tell each other stories
of our movements and our failures to move. Our lives are lived out metaphorically
and mythically. Deprive people of their stories and you leave them paralyzed in their
actions and stuttering in their words.

As counsellors we have the privilege of hearing many stories and scripts and then joining the storytellers in the task of re-authoring them toward more preferred futures. In order to proceed in our task of becoming ever better counsellors for people moving into the 21st century, we need new words and new tools for working. Words such as constructs, construction and co-construction, meaning-making, meaning-generating, possible selves, future selves, life-space, mapping, multiple-realities, strengths and preferences, relational being, personal and social reality making, the 'as-if', and many others. Most of all, we need to shed our proclivities for a language of defect and deficiency and adopt a language of construction and empowerment.

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CHAPTER 2
A CONSTRUCTIVIST FRAME FOR UNDERSTANDING

I frequently use the term 'frame for understanding'. What I mean by this is that we always 'look out on', or perceive the world, using our own mental lens to interpret whatever it is that we see, hear or sense. Another way of saying this is that all of our knowledge is 'perspectival'—that is, our knowing is from a certain perspective. A good example of what I am talking about is the parable of the four men and a mountain.

> *Once there was a land where God decided to place a tall mountain, covered by forests and filled with rocks and precious minerals. Four men stood on the plain below the mountain and gazed at this gift. One man, a builder, said "What a wonderful gift—look at the forests. We will build many buildings and tall ships from the wood we take from these forests—what a resource just waiting for our taking." Another man spoke: "What a great sanctuary for our birds and wild animals. We can preserve forever nature's gift to us." A third, the mayor of a town at the base of the mountain cried out: "Oh, the miles of trails for our tourists, and the many beautiful spaces for new apartments—our town can grow and grow and our people will prosper." The fourth spoke: "This mountain is a divine inspiration. Its crags and snow-covered peaks, its rushing streams and misty slopes,—this great stone reaching up to touch God's finger—will be a source of inspiration for poets and artists for centuries to come."*

Each of these on-lookers saw the mountain through a different lens—each had a different set of mental constructs with which to frame his understanding of what the mountain stood for or "meant". Each viewer used his lens to construct meaning—this is, to say: "here is what this mountain means to me, and this is how I plan to act toward it."

There are a great many frames for understanding. Within the context of counselling, the principal frames for understanding used in counselling and therapy are: psychoanalytic, behavioural and humanistic.

The psychoanalytic frame for understanding is built upon the assumption that most of what deter-

mines who and what we are happens when we are children. The 'secrets of the self' are locked in stories and happenings of childhood. The behavioural frame of reference is built upon the assumption that humans are something like billiard balls. They move and rebound this way and that depending upon the conditioning events and forces impinging upon them.

The humanistic frame for understanding assumes that people are like acorns. Given supportive environments, they expand and grow and fulfill their seemingly endless potentials.

In the next section I will briefly discuss how we are undergoing major conceptual transformations or "world-view-shifts" as we move from the 20th to the 21st century. Following that, I provide a rather detailed discussion of the constructivist frame for understanding people and their actions.

Major transformations affecting the lives of individuals

We are beginning to have a more holistic or ecological frame for
understanding ourselves, others and the world.

In the century now ending, several profound shifts in our fundamental frames for understanding the world and ourselves are occurring. Beginning at the basic level of physics and extending outward from that base point into other sciences and the social sciences, a revolutionary shift in both thinking and values is under way. Such major changes in how we understand ourselves and the world are referred to as paradigmatic.

In a very general sense, we are leaving a paradigm of fixed causes, laws, and explanations where the universe and everything in it was construed in more-or-less mechanical terms.

We are entering into a paradigm of flux, in which certainties have evaporated and there are multiple views on virtually everything, even the most basic scientific entities. This shift is from the mechanistic world-view of Descartes and Newton to an ecological, constructivist world-view springing from quantum theory, non-linear systems theory, and postmodern philosophers such as Foucault[1], and Rorty[2].

This means that our basic frames for understanding both the physical and the human world are transforming from a perspective which reduces material and living entities into ever smaller parts and classifications to a perspective which integrates all things into patterns and configurations or networks of meaning and communication. We are beginning to have a more holistic or ecological frame for understanding ourselves, others and the world.

In every field, including counselling, people are struggling to reframe their way of looking at themselves, their work, their relationships with others, and the world around them. This intellectual crisis which began within physics in the 1920s has developed into a much broader cultural crisis today.

Terms such as 'postmodern', 'post-industrialism', 'deep ecology', 'systems view of life' 'human science' and 'new world order' are referring to this revolutionary change in how we think about the human condition. These terms and the intellectual movements to which they refer also give hints about

how, as counsellors, we have a need to re-orient ourselves conceptually. This we must do if we are to respond intelligently, as professional helpers, to our contemporary social life and to the problematic which it poses for people.

We can take Alfred Kuhn's[3] concept of a scientific paradigm and re-constitute it as a 'social' paradigm [for counsellors] as follows: A *social paradigm* (applying to contemporary social life, and therefore to the work of counsellors) is an inter-related configuration of concepts, values, perceptions, and practices shared by a community. This configuration forms a particular vision of reality that is the basis for the way the community organizes itself and the way in which practices are carried out.

The older social paradigm from which we are now struggling to gain liberation, and which had been firmly entrenched for several hundred years had such fundamental tenets as:

1. the universe is a mechanical system, composed of elementary building blocks,
2. a valid metaphor for the human body is "machine",
3. social life is, at its best, a competitive struggle,
4. the category 'individual' is more prized than the category 'community'; the 'self' is a personal, individualistic entity rather than a social or relational being,
5. unlimited material progress can be achieved through economic and technological growth, and
6. a belief that social life in which females are dominated by males is a basic law of nature.

The real violence is the ceaseless and often mindless, frantic activity so characteristic of present-day social life.

The new world-view which is now being put together by a whole range of disciplines, is exemplified by the work of the Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, and his writings on 'deep ecology'[4]. This perspective sees human social life and natural environments as inter-related—together forming a web of life[5]. Naess characterizes deep ecology as a way of "asking deeper questions"—especially about our inter-connectedness with other humans, with other life-forms, and with the surrounding natural world. As an aside, a deep ecological perspective is an invitation to recognize the destructive nature of frenetic social life which propels counsellors and their charges into such behaviour modification regimes as stress management, time management and "power" lunches.

More and more counsellors are drawn into working with the results of overt violence such as sexual abuse trauma, political refugee trauma, and the victims of crime and cultural restructuring. Yet the real violence is one we are all subject to: the ceaseless and often mindless, frantic activity so characteristic of present-day social life. Many people are enmeshed in social activities and work processes which force upon them "tight" schedules, unceasing and intrusive communication, layer upon layer of conflicting activities, worries about surveillance and accountability, and pressures to "outdo"—the "winning is everything" attitude in personal life, worklife and recreation. Deep ecology prompts us to ask deeper questions about why we allow ourselves and others to submit to this kind of unspoken violence against the self.

Deep ecology and its sister disciplines, social ecology[6] and eco-feminism[7] share a common understanding: many of the institutions and practices which are products of the industrial, behavioural world-view are fundamentally anti-ecological. Factory life, corporate life, social life, economic, technological and social structures of the passing century tend to be rooted in what Riane Eisler[8] refers to as the "dominator system" of social organization.

Dominator systems include patriarchy, imperialism, racism, capitalism, corporatism, and slavery—all of which are, in varying degrees, exploitative and anti-ecological.

The new world-view, or frame for understanding, within which constructivist thinking plays a major role, can be summarized and contrasted with the old way of thinking in the following table:

Table of old world-view/ new world-view contrasts

	Old World-View –Thinking–	New World-View –Values–
	ego-assertive	social-integrative
	self-assertive	social-integrative
	rational	intuitive
	expansionist	conserving
	analytic	synthesizing
	competition	cooperation
	reductionistic	holistic
	quantity	quality
	linearity, determinacy	non-linearity
	domination	joint action
	hierarchical	networked
	top-down decisions	deciding by consensus

While not all of these features apply directly to counselling, as we proceed into an examination of constructivist counselling, which is located in the new world view, we will certainly be confronted with the need to incorporate certain of the features into counselling practice.

Building a constructivist framework for informing the practice of counselling in the 21st century.

Constructivist thinking had its beginning with Giambattista Vico, the Italian philosopher of history who wrote *The New Science*[9] in 1725. He was the first to claim that "to know" is "to make". With this assertion he anticipated Piaget's constructivist ideas by two centuries. Later in that century Immanuel

Kant published *Critique of Pure Reason*[10] in which he argued that the human mind is an active organ which captures, moulds, and transforms sensations and the chaos of experience into an ordered unity of thought. In other words he set the stage for the human-as-interpretive-agent who "makes sense" of what is perceived. The "making sense" is guided by the particular cultural lens which the person is gazing through.

The individual is not the sole producer of her life, but produces it in joint action with others and in relations with the physical environment.

In 1924, Hans Vaihinger published his treatise on the philosophy of "as if" in which he argued that consciousness always moulds what it receives. The human mind appropriates and then changes what has been appropriated to meet its own requirements. Not only does the mind receive, but "...it is also assimilative and constructive." Vaihinger argued that the function of ideas is not to "portray" reality— an impossible task—but to be a kind of mapping instrument which enables us to find "our way about more easily in the world."[11]

Frederick Bartlett's *Remembering*[12] which appeared in 1932 was a clear introduction to constructivist thinking but was ignored by researchers in North America as being "outside" of the mainstream of research on cognition and memory.

Jean Piaget[13] was at first more-or-less ignored but later became very prominent in developmental psychology and is one of the most influential twentieth-century constructivists. He never tired of claiming that "intelligence organizes the world by organizing itself." More recently, Hayek's *Sensory Order*[14] stands out as an elegant expression of constructivist theory.

Constructivism is generally held to be a family of loosely associated theories and perspectives across a range of disciplines from philosophy, to psychology, to sociology, to literary criticism, to science and now, to counselling, psychotherapy, pedagogy and research methods. One distinction which is often made is that of *radical* as opposed to *critical* constructivism[15].

Radical constructivists take the position that there is no reality outside of, or beyond that which we perceive. Reality results from our self-organizing capacities to impose order on our experience. The claim that a person constructs her own reality, totally and freely, and then has the ability to reconstruct manufactured reality is similar to what, in philosophical terms, is called *solipsism*. This is the doctrine that people have no grounds for believing in anything other than the contents of their own minds.

However, critical constructivists counter this criticism by appeal to the principles of "implicate order" and "participatory reality" put forth by physical scientists like David Bohm, John Wheeler, and Ilya Prigogine all of whom argue that we humans are part of the whole, and that we always participate in constructing whatever it is that we call "reality"[16].

Critical constructivists, such as Michael Mahoney[17] and Vittorio Guidano[18] do not deny the existence of a physical reality, an "out-there" which does influence us, but make the claim that this external reality can never be directly known. In other words, human realities are metaphorical and constructed—

constructed mainly through the use of language. Processes such as counselling can best be understood as metaphorical processes.

Importantly, critical constructivists stress that individuals "co-construct" personal and social realities, emphasizing interaction and interdependence with surrounding social and physical worlds. For the critical constructivist, the individual is not the sole producer of her life, but produces it in joint action with others and in relations with the physical environment.

Accepting the existence of a world outside of our own constructions does not imply that that world *causes* us to act in certain ways. What it does is place certain constraints on us and thus "influences" what we think, feel and do. Constraints in the world-out-there do not determine me and my actions, but they can render my efforts viable or unviable, as the case may be. The world-out-there *affords* me certain opportunities, which I may or may not take up and act upon—but the world-out-there *does not determine me or my actions*. The world-out-there does present boundaries, affords me opportunities, does (or doesn't) exert influence on me, and will effectively render my adaptive and creative actions more or less viable. However, the world-out-there is never known to me other than through my conceptual, perceptual, and sensory lenses. In every situation, it is my frame for understanding that has the greatest influence on my choices and actions in life. Indeed, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in the stars, but in ourselves."

In counselling and psychotherapy, constructivist thinking is now making a robust appearance[19] after many years in the shadows of other helping approaches. George Kelly[20] initiated personal construct counselling and therapy in the 1950s, but it did not really get underway for another 30 years after that. Within the past 10 years there has been a rapid expansion of publications on constructivist forms of helping of which this book is one example.

Constructivist principles for counselling

I will now describe those constructivist principles which I have selected to comprise a constructivist frame for understanding with reference to counselling. The constructivist paradigm is rich, deep and complex and still in a formative stage. Since constructivist thinking about counselling is in its youthful stages, there is no catalogue of agreed-upon principles which all or most constructivist counsellors and researchers agree upon.

My listing is based on: 1) a four-year research project which I and my associates conducted to assess the status of counselling concepts and practices, especially career and work adjustment counselling; and 2) my efforts to bring constructivist ideas into my own counselling practice and to teach these principles and practices to other counsellors and teachers of counsellors over the last decade.

The research project produced a conclusion that most current career counselling methods are conceptually out-of-date and tied to assumptions about worklife and change which are simply no longer tenable. Our assessment led us to believe that, given the changing social and economic conditions occurring in most of the world, the best source of inventive and relevant concepts upon which to base a new form of counselling is constructivism.

My own experience with constructivist practice—both as a counsellor and as a teacher of counsellors (mainly in Canada and in Scandinavia)—has shown me that this approach is both inspirational and pragmatically useful. The following Table of Principles includes most of the concepts which I currently implement in my own practice and which I encourage others to try in their practice. The listing is rather lengthy and includes a short discussion with each principle. Much of the rest of the book will be devoted to presenting the practical aspects of constructivist counselling and is, in effect, an implementation of these principles.

The principles are not listed in any order of priority. When I use the term "constructivist counsellor" I am well aware that constructivists differ on many points and these statements of principle are only those to which I can subscribe, given my intellectual and practical understanding at this point. I realize that some, but not all, constructivist thinkers share these particular principles with me.

Table of constructivist principles for counsellors

1. A constructivist counsellor assumes that there are multiple realities, rather than one true, objective reality.

This claim often brings on a charge of 'relativism' from critics, but most constructivists are quick to point out that just because there are multiple realities does not mean that all realities are equally useful, or desirable. We simply have to take responsibility for negotiating criteria for making distinctions between better and worse realities.

2. A constructivist counsellor understands that people live in a social world which is "constructed" through interaction, communication and inter-relating. From the basic unit of a 'social relation' outward to family and group norms, community mores, cultural traditions, institutions, policies and laws—all such human phenomena are constructed—more precisely, co-constructed by societal members. The "rules we live by" are the result of human negotiations. Sometimes the results of these negotiations are codified as laws, constitutions and policies and remain in place over centuries. More often they are in effect much more briefly, as in a marriage agreement, a friendship, a business arrangement and a great range of other agreements which make up our social life.

Obviously, it follows from this principle that counselling as a social practice is socially constructed. The relationship which a constructivist counsellor has with the individual(s) she is helping is exactly the one which they jointly construct during their time of meeting.

Of course, each may bring guiding ideas to the meeting and try to implement these concepts in varying degrees. However, these ideas are no more than tools to be used in relationship construction. The relationship they wind up with is the one which they co-construct and agree upon, either explicitly, or implicitly.

This assumption has enormous implications for counselling. It suggests that the principle focus of counselling conversations should be on the on-going life experiences of the person being helped. Or to put it another way, counselling is context-sensitive, or culture-centred. A constructivist counsellor knows that the agentic or personal aspects of the person being helped are certainly important; simultaneously, as a parallel process, the relational, contextual, cultural aspects of the person's social participation are always to be kept in awareness.

3. A constructivist counsellor assumes that language is the key "meaning-construction" tool.

Words do not simply serve as signs of a represented reality, they are reality-construction tools. Words are tools for getting things done and for making meaning. We humans are "pre-wired" neurologically to perceive patterns, to perceive likeness and differences, and to do so linguistically. Human life is linguistic life. Thus "acts of meaning", "stories", "narratives", "metaphors", "constructs" and all the many ways in which meaningful human performance is achieved form the operative basis for constructivist counselling. Practically, this indicates the importance for counsellors in learning how to work with people's stories as a means of problem-solving and the value of respecting the metaphors they use to describe themselves and their lives.

Learn to work directly with the on-going life experience of people—don't treat them as cases, categories, diagnoses, stereotypes, or classifications.

4. A constructivist counsellor assumes that on-going life-experience, as it appears through performance, and as it is expressed as personal meaning, is the medium in which counselling is rooted. What and how a person "means" conjoint with what and how a person "acts" should be always be the principal foci of counselling.

I intentionally use the term "act" rather than behave. To use the word "act" assumes that there is an actor—an agent who interprets, decides, and then acts. With action the emphasis is upon internal initiation and the individual's internal, reflexive frame of reference. By way of contrast, the term "behaviour" which is widely used in psychological science, indicates a "response" to stimulus. Behaviour generally does not imply intention: for example, a billiard ball "behaves" in response to impact by another ball. "Action", on the other hand, always implies intention or deliberation by the actor.

This distinction which I am making between behaviour and action may seem like quibbling to some readers. However, it is a distinction critical to the counselling process for it contrasts a world-view which emphasizes external criteria (for example, testing) for interpreting human performance with a world-view which emphasizes internal criteria (reflexivity) for interpreting performance. In

practical terms what this assumption says to counsellors is: learn to work directly with the on-going life experience of people—don't treat them as cases, categories, diagnoses, stereotypes, or classifications. Regard them as experiencing beings whose lifestyles, for better or worse, are fashioned (constructed) out of their experience in social life.

5. **A constructivist counsellor assumes that there is considerable value in using the metaphor of "self" as a central feature of the counselling process. The metaphorical self is evolving, defined by memory and language, and is multi-voiced. A self is not a "thing" but is a complex configuration of meaning and a metaphorical way of referring to the subjective sense of who we are.**

We prefer that our life have an overall coordinated feeling—that what we do is meaningful and makes sense.

There are many dissenting and conflicted voices in constructivist thinking about the nature of the self. Virtually all constructivists are agreed that whatever the self may be, it is not a thing—the self does not exist as an empirical entity. It should not be reified and is not particularly accessible through testing. As I have already remarked, the self is a metaphorical expression. My own thinking about the contemporary self is along the following lines (see illustration):

The term "self" describes an auto-organizing complex of meaning sub-systems, all coordinated with each other.

The self is organized into four interconnected sub-systems or configurations of meaning, each of which can be "voiced":
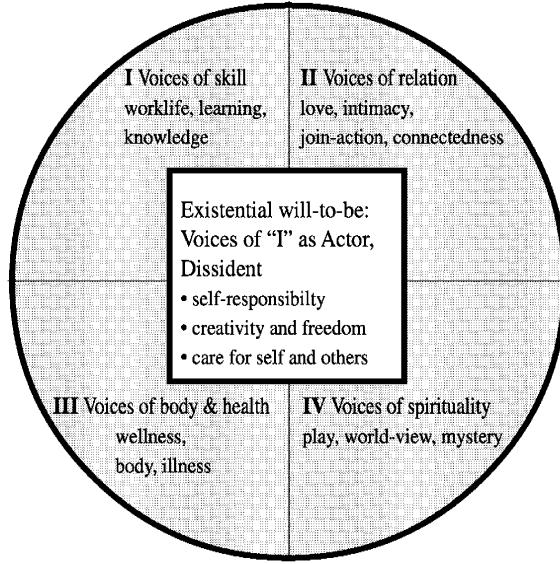
1.   voices of worklife and learning

2.   voices of intimacy and relations

3.   voices of body and health

4.   voices of spirituality-world-view, personal philosophy, transcendental belief system.

These four configurations of organized meaning are organized around *an agentic core* with a capacity to interpret, choose, and act. This existential core (of self) acts as a kind of basic compass or "will-to-be" by means of which the person steers the course of her life and life-projects.

It helps our understanding if we consider talk about the self to be talk on the level of metaphor or analogy. Six more constructivist claims about the self are:

a. Self-knowledge and all other kinds of knowledge are reflexively intertwined. This has two implications for counsellors. First, self-knowledge is extremely important in counselling. Secondly, that any attempt at a complete objectivity—separating self from the facticity of the world is impossible. We can and should try to achieve a degree of objectivity toward ourselves. We can never be other than subjective toward others.

b. We become a self through the innumerable projects which we activate, though our interactions with others and by our own acts of self-reflection. We are literally "created" through our acts. This is why personal projects, described later in the book are a vital part of constructivist counselling.

c. However, it is not just the activity of the project which implements our self. It is also, and equally important, that we become a project through the way that others react to our project implementing activities. In other words our self comes to be through the interpersonal processes in which we participate.

```
                I Voices of skill        II Voices of relation
                worklife, learning,      love, intimacy,
                knowledge                join-action, connectedness

                      Existential will-to-be:
                      Voices of "I" as Actor,
                      Dissident
                      • self-responsibilty
                      • creativity and freedom
                      • care for self and others

                III Voices of body & health   IV Voices of spirituality
                wellness,                     play, world-view, mystery
                body, illness
```

d. We achieve, and attempt to maintain, a sense of continuity as a self, as well as balance and stability as a self, through self-referential synthesis of our projects. This means that we tend, as individuals, toward integration of our various activities in life. We are constantly revising the life story of "who we are". We are naturally inclined toward holism rather than fragmentation. We prefer that our life have an overall coordinated feeling—that what we do is meaningful and makes sense. Of course we often live in social contexts which promote fragmentation, thus throwing our natural tendency to holism out of balance or into conflict.

e. The emotional feelings which we experience in our building, maintaining, and break-up of relationships and in our construction and carrying out of projects is a principal source of energy for constructing and deconstructing our self and our projects. Guidano goes so far as to claim that no human change occurs without emotion. Constructivists tend to place considerable emphasis in counselling on the person's "felt experience" and on emotions as either a lubricant or a glue for social relations.

f. It is very important for individuals to transform their vision of themselves as objects, helpless ones, or victims, into projects. A project is not only something I can know about, it also sets a task for me to do and a meaningful purpose for me to fulfill. In the context of counselling, herein lies the secret of what is referred to currently as "self-empowerment" or self-construction.

6. A constructivist counsellor assumes that individuals are always situated, or are always socially located, in a specific context and thus will give voice to their concerns from that particular perspective.

As contexts changes, stories will change. As situations change, so do we.

This assumption of situatedness is derived from Pepper[21] and provides a basis for regarding storytelling, narratives, and metaphors as essential material to work with in counselling. The counselling session is a context within which the counsellor actively listens to what the other has to say and often helps the other organize and reorganize her stories. This is done by providing clients with a relational and "softly" structured communication procedure that enables the other to express the topics in their life which they are concerned about or want "help" with. Once the concerns are told and "mapped-out" in terms understandable to both the counsellor and the other, the client can be engaged in a process of self-examination and self-confrontation to determine if there are more satisfying actions to take, or perhaps other frames of understanding to use in gaining understanding and clarity about the client's life and trouble as revealed through the story.

As contexts changes, stories will change. This does not invalidate the historical truth of a story, it simply makes the point that as situations change, so do we.

7. Constructivist counselling is a culture-centred activity.

Cultures are designs for living. They are invented and changed by the conceptualizations and activities of their members—sometimes rapidly, but more typically over long periods of time. People who are born into a culture are born into a blueprint for how life should be lived. However, there are many sub-templates in a culture, or, in other words, many paths by means of which a person may journey through the realities of the culture. When two persons meet, their communication will be sensible just to the extent that they share, and understand each other's principal cultural habits and expressions.

Communication is always composed of symbolic elements and these elements are themselves embedded in cultural templates or contexts and therefore are nuanced in complex ways.

Constructivist counselling can become a counsellor's best intellectual and practical method for helping others in the emerging socio-economic context of the 21st century.

To summarize this listing of constructivist principles which make up the constructivist counsellor's frame for understanding:
1. We live in a universe of multiple realities.
2. Our human world is socially constructed.
3. Language is the human medium and supplies us with the tools for constructing and re-constructing personal and social realities.
4. Personal meaning, action and interaction within on-going experience and social life are the main foci of counselling.
5. The concept of a metaphorical self is a central organizing feature of constructivist counselling.
6. Persons are always perceiving and acting within a context of others and environment.
7. Cultures are designs for living. Counselling is a process of helping members of a culture choose, construct and navigate pathways through the culture; and a process of helping members of one culture learn to effect transitions to, and navigate within, a new culture. This includes finding satisfactory social relations and becoming eligible to engage in the principal activities of the new culture such as work, education, politics and recreation.

These seven principles form the ground for a counselling perspective which is designed to meet the needs of people and the nature of social life as we move toward the 21st century.

In the next chapter, I will briefly describe the post-modern, post-industrial context into which many people are now being thrust. It is the source of much insecurity and doubt, and is filled with risk. I will indicate the implications of this scenario for counsellors and will begin to show why I believe that constructivist counselling can become a counsellor's best intellectual and practical method for helping others in the emerging socio-economic context of the 21st century.

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[20] George Kelly has been much criticized for omitting emotions and development from his personal construct theory and therapy. However he did manage to found personal construct counselling/ therapy which is very much alive and well today, especially in Great Britain. One of Kelly's basic tenets is that of *constructive alternativism,* by which he meant that it is a good assumption that all of an individual's present interpretations (constructions) of the world are *subject to revision or replacement.* See Kelly, G. (1963) *A Theory of Personality: The Psychology of Personal Constructs.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. Note: This book is the first three chapters from Kelly's two-volume opus, *The Psychology of Personal Constructs,* which was published in 1955.

[21] Pepper, S. (1942). *World Hypotheses.* Berkeley: University of California Press. Pepper proposes that there exist four "world hypotheses": formism, mechanism, contextualism, and organicism. A world hypothesis is a conjecture about how the world and the people in it operate and understand.

It is based on tacit assumptions arising from common-sense knowledge and understandings. A world hypothesis can incorporate a very wide range of observations. Much of our thinking about social life and organization of the past two centuries has been based on the world hypothesis of mechanism which takes as its root metaphor the *machine.* This implies a world of discrete things, connected with each other in causal relationships. The world hypothesis of "contextualism" is based on the root metaphor of the *historical event* which can only be understood when placed in a context of time and place. Adopting a world hypothesis of contextualism, moves us from a causal framework of explaining things deterministically, into a type of understanding which seeks to understand the patterning, temporality and recognizable organization in the flow of events. *Meaning* changes with context. Thus a story of what has happened as the person understands her life at one point may be told differently at another time or place. The proof of truth for stories is not whether they correspond to what "really" is the "objective" truth, but on the "sense" and coherence they achieve in each specific context.

CHAPTER 3
CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL LIFE
AS A CONTEXT FOR COUNSELLING

As I have already commented upon, and as every thinking person in the world today must know, we are all constantly being bombarded with signals of change. The materials of daily social life are shifting and it is hard to know just where solid ground is right now. This is true in the world of work, in the realm of the family and personal relations, and in the universe of moral and spiritual values. Change itself is nothing new. What is new is the speed and scope of postmodern change. In many respects the computer chip and the microelectronic revolution have shrunk time to nanoseconds and distance to virtual zero. The effects of this transformation are being felt in almost every locale on the planet. Those who have access to television no longer have to wait days or weeks for news of other places. It can be seen today every hour, twenty-four hours a day, and not even the remotest community on the face of the earth escapes notice if any "newsworthy" happening occurs there.

To add to this, in many parts of the world people are on the move, sometimes as a result of war, or stemming from either economic hard-times, or the promise of better lives elsewhere. A city nearby to where I now live has public schools where over 80% of the children come from families where a language other than English or French is the home language of choice.

I live in Canada which is a country made up of immigrants. Canada is known around the world as a culture of diversity. Yet even in the west coast communities of Canada, the influx of immigrants from "Pacific Rim" countries is raising concerns in a populace normally tolerant of cultural differences. Other countries which have long been mono-cultural are finding more and more immigrants and refugees knocking at their doors. As the sociologist Ulrich Beck points out:

> Beneath and behind the facades of the old industrial order, which are sometimes still
>
> brilliantly polished, radical changes and new departures are taking place, not com-
>
> pletely unconsciously, but not fully consciously and in a focused way either. This
>
> centipede non-revolution is under way. It is expressed in the background noise of the
>
> quarreling on every level and in all issues and discussion groups. Consider, for in-
>
> stance, that nothing 'goes without saying' any longer; everything must be inspected,
>
> chopped to bits, discussed and debated to death. Finally, with the blessing of general

dissatisfaction, only because otherwise there is the risk of general paralysis which

no one wants, a decision is made. Such are the birth pangs of a new action society, a

self-creation society which must 'invent' everything, except that it does not know

how, why, with whom, and with whom absolutely not.[1]

Welcome to the risk society. Welcome to the multiple-options society. Welcome to the do-it-your-self society where individuals are more and more on their own and self-responsible for the shaping of their evolving and adaptive selves. Self-referentiality and reflexivity are much more important now than previously in questions of identity-formation, choice, and responsible action-taking.

It is not my intent to provide any type of exhaustive analysis of the contemporary social life which citizens of post-industrial societies experience. Such a task is far beyond the scope of this book and is not what I am interested in doing.

What I will do is present various aspects or themes of contemporary social life that are often associated with the concrete problems in living which people bring to counsellors. In other words I will focus on the social life 'navigation' [how do I stay afloat and get about in this changing context?] problems which people bring to the counselling session. What is it about contemporary social life that counsellors need to especially understand so they can talk sensibly with people whose personal existence is being influenced by the macro changes which are transforming social life?

On a global level, the socio-economic structuring has become experimental—no one can any longer make very good predictions about the future and about what will be the outcomes of various economic and political restructuring. We are all caught up, willy-nilly.

It is as though we are participating in a grand experiment, which is at once our doing, as human agents choosing this and that, and at the same time and to a perplexing degree, out of our control. When the New York stock market falls substantially, or when a great corporation collapses, millions of people feel the chill and thousands may be directly subject to job evaporation. On the other hand when I (and a few million other people) choose to buy shoes made in Brazil rather than in Denmark, then Danish workers are directly affected by my decision.

In the middle of the extremes are the majority of industrialized and post-industrialized citizens who are reshaping the way in which they lead their lives.

A small minority of people are so wealthy that they are largely insulated from the vicissitudes of post-industrial transformations. Hundreds of millions more are so impoverished that our considerations seem more or less irrelevant to them, at least in their daily lives.

However, in the middle of these extremes are the majority of industrialized and post-industrialized citizens who are being buffeted about by changing conditions, who are insecure about their futures,

and who are trying to make transitions from modernity to post-modernity by reshaping the way in which they lead their lives. It is to counsellors who provide counselling services for members of this population-in-transition (and for marginalized people who are looking for ladders upward into this majority population) that the frames of understanding and counselling practices described in this book are addressed.

Alterations in social life— can counsellors help?

Modern institutions differ from all preceding forms of social order in respect to their dynamism, the degree to which they undercut traditional habits and customs, and their global impact... these... transformations radically alter the nature of day-to-day social life and affect the most personal aspects of our experience. ~Anthony Giddens[2], 1991~

It is helpful for counsellors to realize that they, just as much as those whom they try to help, are affected by the transformations of post-industrial life. In a sense, it is only by realizing that "I, too, am feeling affected by the roller-coaster nature of contemporary social life" that the counsellor can become mentally receptive to the uncertainty, ambiguity, complexity, and risk which others feel.

In this chapter, I will attempt to convey a sense of some of the more frequent impacts and experiences on members of contemporary social life, and I will indicate what it seems to me that the implications are for counsellors who try to assist people who are having difficult times navigating contemporary social life.

I am often asked: "Whom do you have in mind when you say members of contemporary social life?" My answer is: "In principle, I have in mind nearly everyone, since almost everyone is under the influence of changing conditions. I should say that some of the influences and changes are salutary— for some, but not all, people. However, the majority of workers in any industrialized or post-industrialized country are negatively influenced at times by job uncertainty, declining earning power, reduction of social nets, and by the increased tempo of everyday living which creates stress, conflict and anxiety.

However, we must proceed tentatively for what is trouble for one person is opportunity for another. In most instances counsellors are in no position to influence the nature of social order itself—that is a matter for politicians, economists, social critics, and other citizens located in positions of significant influence whose actions can bring about social restructuring.

Instead, counsellors work directly with individuals who are caught in disempowering or marginalizing webs of influence. The counselling-work is to fashion (often invent) escape routes, or ladders from positions of powerlessness and non-participation in social life—especially worklife; escape routes which will lift clients to social locations of participation and self-empowerment in daily social life.

Methodologically, a counsellor has three main tasks:

1) to enter into sensible and trustworthy communication with the other,

2) to develop a mutual understanding of the particular difficulty which the other faces, and

3) to plan and construct activity projects which are designed to:

a) increase self-responsibility and personal control,

b) increase the other's meaningful participation in social life, and

c) help the other choose and move toward preferred futures.

Or, to put it differently, the counsellor's task is to cooperate with others in developing different lifestyles or in developing metaphorical selves more capable of interpreting and navigating the evolving social order.

The extent and complexity of the counselling task varies enormously from person to person and from circumstance to circumstance. In one instance a counselling session may be little more than an uncomplicated transfer of information. Frequently, the counselling sessions involve some practical problem-solving. At the far extreme, counselling may extend over a rather long period, either steadily or intermittently, and be an attempt to assist the individual to effect a major re-orientation in life such as developing a new and different life-style, or prepare for an occupation or type of work which is completely different from what the person has done before. How much counselling is given, how often, and how frequently, should be determined primarily by the needs of the help-seeker and not by organizational needs for efficiency.

A high quality of human contact should be present no matter how brief or extensive the counselling. Even a brief, 20-minute counselling conversation can be of very high interpersonal quality.

Choice and decision

Oh, my God! I can see now what I didn't see before. I have a choice—

things do not have to stay this way—I can take a different road, I don't

have to keep on living this way—I have been a prisoner to my own view

and the demands of others for so long. I can't believe it—I simply never

knew I had a choice! ~a client~

Choices and decisions are central to most counselling work. To choose is to take one road and not another. There is always a degree of sacrifice with any choice. That is why some people seem to be stuck, incapable of making a decision and then keeping with it. Yet choose we must. Even choosing not to choose is a choice—albeit often an act of bad faith.

I believe that we need to make a distinction between decisions and choices, living as we do in the era of expert systems. The distinction that I wish to make is that *choice* is a human act. The individual,

as a distinctly human agent, chooses. It is a self-responsible action—only I can "choose" for me. Choosing is infused with the existential values of responsibility, courage, authenticity and agency and lies properly in the realm of human action.

Decisions, on the other hand, are frequently intertwined with expert knowledge. Consider whether or not to have an abdominal cyst removed. It will very likely not be a clear-cut existential choice. Rather, the physician, an "expert", will bring into play various technological procedures and analytic procedures for "deciding" upon whether or not the cyst would be best left alone, or removed. A "decision" will be arrived at based on technical data, the doctor's professional opinion, and, to some degree the patient's agreement with the expert advice.

I can speak of my "choice" based on my own perceptions and interpretation of the data which has been presented to me. However, there is little denying that my choice is strongly mediated by the expert data. My choice can, but is not likely to, contradict the expert decision. Today, decisions are keyed into expert knowledge and expert systems while choices are the property of the individual.

For several years I have been keeping track of choices and decisions which have arisen in the course of my counselling practice with adults—most of whom were struggling with alterations in their social life. This list gives us clues about the ways in which people are encountering the problematic of contemporary social life:

- *I am very worried about my job prospects in the future*
- *In my country of origin I was a doctor, here I am nobody*
- *I am worried about what to eat—there are so many conflicting opinions by experts*
- *I spend so much time at work now, I don't seem to have much life outside of work*
- *I just finished high school and I haven't the slightest idea what I should do or be*
- *Why do I feel so stressed all of the time?*
- *Lately I've been having trouble going to sleep—things in my future are so uncertain*
- *I have a degree from a university, but I just don't have any idea what I should do*
- *I used to get together a lot with friends, now none of us seems to have any time to spend together with friends*
- *At my job everyone is uptight about restructuring, I'm thinking about a complete change, but I just don't know which way to go*
- *I have been thinking about going to Japan and teaching English as a second language but what about my future after that?*
- *Me and my friends just hang out down town every night. I feel that this is not the way I want to live, but what is there for me to do?*
- *I'm from Vietnam. Over there our family had a building business. All I've been able to do since I came here is work in restaurants. I've got two small children now. I've got to do something else, but what? I don't have other work experience or skills.*

Individuals who present the counsellor with issues such as those above often assume that the counsellor will somehow be able to provide them with a satisfying answer. Of course this is most often not

the case. What each person faces is the factor of choice—first of all—and then the initiation of personal projects designed to implement the choice.

We do not live in societies where other people make elaborate arrangements for us through established cultural customs. In post-industrial social life, we have no choice but to choose how to be and how to live. We are in a multiple choice context and each of us has to learn how to check the options implicated in our choice and then construct a life-style which moves us in that direction.

Clients often say that they have no choice. It is much more likely an accurate statement to say: "given your present frame of understanding, you can see no choice." If a change of view is brought about, so that the contemporary context is seen as constituted of a multiplicity of options, the task becomes one of designing projects to actively test out which options contained in social life are possible, rewarding and meaningful.

As a starting point the counsellor might say with any of the previously mentioned life concerns:

Look at what you can do, starting at any time you choose, by making conscious, active choices each time an opportunity is afforded you. It is what you do with these choices (and many other choices just like them) that will determine not only how well each day works for you, but how successful you will be at anything you do.[3]

While the advice given in the preceding paragraph, is seemingly sound, and certainly provides a framework within which the counsellor and help-seeker can work, several factors operate to constrain the practical implementation of individual choice.

The average worker often feels abandoned and powerless.

First, individuals are invariably trapped in daily routines which they have difficulty in getting away from (and may not want to get away from for both conscious and unconscious reasons).

Habit is necessary in daily life, but it also becomes a kind of prison. Individuals are prone to do things "as they have always done them" so to speak. So if one is habituated to seeing an environment as offering no options, then one tends to continue seeing the same, regardless of advice to the contrary. Further, some habits are necessary to support the family culture even though they weigh against the person in other areas of his life.

Second, in addition to the factor of choice, emotional experience potentially outweighs any rational reasons in choice situations. Emotional interpretations can block, complicate, or act to deny reflective and cognitive considerations. Conversely, emotion supplies the energy (passion) needed to inspire, sustain, and fuel one's efforts to choose and act.

Some constructivist counsellors believe that no personal change ever occurs without implicating emotions. In short, although I might consider an option, my considerations may be rendered ineffective due to emotions involved in the choice or in my history leading up to the choice. Or, by contrast, it may be related emotional experience which energizes and enables me to move forward in activity projects which convert my imagined goals into realized achievements.

Third, some options, and the individual's ability to actively pursue the option are influenced by factors far away and beyond personal influence. In short, many individuals are directly disempowered by the flux of contemporary social life, especially the economic sectors of social life.

For example, one of my clients decided to apply for training and employment with the Canadian Secret Service. She had worked as a civilian for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and for several municipal police departments. She chose to apply and went through a thorough security clearance procedure and seemed on the brink of realizing a life-long ambition to be a member of the national investigatory elite.

As a last step, she was told to come to a local office for a polygraph examination. She went without trepidation since she felt that she was clean of any prior history which would block her acceptance and she had finished all the rest of the application procedure.

She related to me that at the end of the test, the administrator asked her if she had anything she wished to confide in him, to which she answered, "no". He then folded up his equipment and said he had a telephone call to make. He returned shortly and said, "You have failed to pass the test, your application is ended." My client then asked what question she had failed to pass and he said: "The question was: 'Are you withholding any information from the examiner."

She said to the examiner that everyone must have minor things they do not reveal in an application interview like "the time I told my mother a lie when I was 10 years old." However, the examiner said "We abide by the determination of the polygraph, and I confirmed this by telephone with my superior [in an office 6000 km away]. Anyone who fails that question is removed from the application process. This decision is final. My client said to me that, "never before in my entire life had I felt so stripped of any control of my choice. I felt completely powerless."

In today's corporatist and market economy, many people feel similar dis-empowerment at the hands of corporate executives, boards of directors, and managers far away and far beyond the influence of the individual. Management decisions about restructuring, downsizing, plant closures, cost-cutting procedures, and cross-national boundary relocations frequently threaten or result in job loss. The average worker often feels abandoned and powerless in the face of such developments.

The constructivist counsellor can enter into the picture and assist the individual in developing a life plan that re-enforces self-responsibility together with strengthened connections.

To be unpredictably moved from the ranks of the securely employed to the ranks of the unemployed, or minimally employed, is a marginalizing and alienating experience. The social implications for the individual are dislocation in social life along with loss of eligibility for active participation in social life. The psychological implications are confusion, anxiety, doubt, uncertainty, and anger.

The factors contributing to social dislocation and ontological insecurity in postmodern society are

many. Migration, economic flux, war, political conflict, infusion of diverse values into cultures through media, risk incurred through technological advances, the shift of society from industrialization to knowledge production and service, change in gender roles, and more, all interweave to produce a complex, unpredictable ambience for individuals to navigate.

The tasks of the counsellor in the social conditions which surround us now are to help people to develop self attitudes and capacities which reinforce self responsibility and constructive activity simultaneously with clarifying and constructing trustworthy relationships with others around us.

It is here that the constructivist counsellor can enter into the picture and assist the individual in developing a life plan that re-enforces self-responsibility together with strengthened connections to others and to the surrounding world. The task of learning how to become a better and stronger author of one's own life can be energized and supported by constructivist ideas implemented through the process of counselling. It is to these topics that we now turn in the second section of this book. As a way of closing this chapter, I will convey some deep and lucid insights about how present-day society is evolving. I first encountered these insights in about 1980. My wife and I had gone to an island in the Agean to spend two weeks resting, walking and sunning. I had with me a small book by Karl Jaspers, *Man in the Modern Age*[4] which I carefully studied for most of those two weeks. I found it remarkable that Jaspers writing in 1930 could so clearly describe societal conditions which were pertinent in 1980 and which remain pertinent for the start of a new century. As an existence philosopher, Jaspers wrote in a vocabulary which many find difficult to absorb. In the following sentences, I will use a somewhat different vocabulary to indicate several of the penetrating insights which that reading revealed to me.

We now live in "mass-order" spread over the globe, sustained by economic imperialism and globalized communications. We are all hurrying along not just because we wish to build a liveable life, but often because we are afraid of the consequences of not keeping up. This technical life-order in which we are now participating has some benefits but these are constantly threatened by a globalizing apparatus which is destructive (or at least antagonistic to) truly human life. We live in an "unsheltered" era in which many are devoid of a spiritual or creative identity—they receive their stamp from the "apparatus".

As we enter into a new century, we do so, for the most part, without guiding visions such as the earlier Christians had, and such as some aboriginal people still have. As cultural groups and as individuals we must allow ourselves to become animated by

the vision that something distinctive can be made both socially and on the level of the individual. On the level of the individual we must accept that we are living in a time and life-space in which 'mental life' has become more and more important. Human physical labour is fading under the rapid advance of the computer chip. What people everywhere face now is how to become more intelligent, how to find a spiritual ground, and how to take advantage and promote creativity and innovation in mental and artifactual life. The most populous countries in the world, China and India, are now rising from nearly universal physical labour to the plane of technology and computerization.

If individuals are to achieve anything like a decisive grasp on their own lives in our present context, then an essential impulse is to reflexively build a self which is at once self-directing, and at the same time is fully aware of the ties which bind the self to others in a trustworthy and respectful way. The individual must recognize that all people more and more must become animated out of their own sources of talent, will and creativity and not out of fear, deprivation and the exercise of power by others.

This is not to champion individualism but to acknowledge that expert knowledge is only as useful as the intelligence of the user, and to acknowledge that it is becoming inevitable that very few means of livelihood remain which are independent of others. We live in a condition of joint enterprise—the question is how to live in this social enterprise in rewarding and meaningful ways. What kind of self can live in harmony with the powers of this world without being absorbed or marginalized by them? Self-hood, constructed diligently and responsibly by the individual is the critical task of our era. For the individual thrust back on him- or herself the only choice is frequently to start anew in conjunction with others with whom a trustworthy alliance can be formed. Every choice and act which contributes to the construction of a meaningful self-hood becomes the seed from which options and even a new life-world can be cultivated.

The prescient Jaspers saw that the tasks of the counsellor in the social conditions which surround us now are to help people to develop self attitudes and capacities which reinforce self responsibility and constructive activity simultaneously with clarifying and constructing trustworthy relationships with others around us. The activity of counselling is exemplary for nearly all walks of life in contemporary social life. It is a modern craft for contributing to and constructing valuable self-hood.

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CHAPTER 4
POSTMODERN VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COUNSELLING: CONSTRUCTING POSSIBLE FUTURES

Introduction

This chapter is intended as an authorial conversation with readers about the project of revising and creating new concepts and practices for vocational development and counselling designed to meet the needs of individuals located in early postmodern social life. Within the limits of my ability to project my vision imaginatively into the next century, I make claims about why our conception of vocational development and vocational counselling needs reconstruction. Further, I present a set of guiding ideas about possible paths for these endeavours in the coming century. My forays into the emerging conditions of social life and counselling are generally "constructivist". Perhaps the most critical theme in this chapter is the need for a conceptual revision of counselling—dethroning it from the bankruptcy of instrumental reason and North American psychology to a new footing in emergent postmodern social life knowledge and cultural know-how. Further I will argue that counselling is one of many social practices of 'helping' and is a constructed interpersonal achievement in which counsellor and client negotiate, construct, and teach each other how to be successful in this achievement. I will convey that contemporary counselling is most usefully located in the observational, descriptive, interpretive flux of everyday experience and social-cultural life with its multiple realities, fuzzy logic, and indeterminacy. Counselling as a profession is not well-served by the pretense that it is a scientific endeavour[1]. Can vocational counselling shed it's outmoded 20th century facade as a quasi-therapeutic, pseudo-scientific undertaking which elevates the practitioner to an expert status (practitioner-as scientist) as a result of what she or he knows from research and theory and tends to place the client in the category of helpless vessel waiting to be filled by expert knowledge and skillful intervention on the part of guidance and counselling professionals?

Ten critical reflections
on social life transformations at the onset of the 21st century

Some individuals who are trying to navigate social life where the virtues of
rationality and economy are shaping human existence have the worst of
two possible worlds.

1. It is now a cliche that institutions and societies all over the world are undergoing, or have already undergone, significant transformations as part of evolution into global, post-industrial, commodified and market-driven societies. Every social structure change has direct and significant impact on the lives of individuals, just as the cumulative decisions of individuals influence the social structures. This is why counsellors should view every personal trouble of the individual as indicative of public (policy) issue and every public issue and policy as generative of personal troubles for at least some people. This suggests the need to develop a sociology of counselling to complement the psychological features of vocational counselling and development. Can counselling be relocated in the *socialis* of everyday social life and retrieved from individualistic psychological theory?

2. While it may be difficult, or impossible, to achieve satisfactory explanations of "why things are not as they used to be", it is essential to realise that all of the present-day macro-transformations have a direct and significant impact on the day-to-day life of the individual[2]. The patterns of influence may be largely invisible and unpredictable, yet they are real and can act as either constraints or niches of opportunity for individuals in their daily social life activities.

3. The influences of the macro (larger social changes) on the micro (individual daily existence) are simultaneously fortuitous for some and harmful to others. Moreover, they are often quite unpredicted and introduce uncertainty into the individual's life. Different individuals—largely due to social location—are affected in different ways by the same macro transformation. For example to become unemployed may have a devastating impact on one person and is an "opportunity" for a change to a more rewarding type of work for another.

4. Post-industrial worklife and, more generally, social life, is more *uncertain, unpredictable*, and *changeable* than was daily existence for the majority of citizens in the factory era of the 20th century. It is not so much that there is now more change—it is that there more different kinds of change and changes occur more rapidly and frequently. In this coming century we face a "multiple choice" existence where no one is a real and lasting expert—where we all are at risk in our conditions of employment, health, and family life. However, we must learn how to navigate unpredictable conditions as we pursue our preferred choices and it is partly the task of guidance workers and counsellors to aid individuals in this

navigation . And it is to be remembered that some people, particularly the marginalized, face mostly bad choices when it comes to finding a niche in those realms of social life where a "good life" can be constructed. Neither the social engineering of cognitive behavioural models of counselling nor the romantic and largely utopian vision of humanistic and transpersonal models of counselling provide very good maps in the uncharted and uncertain conditions of the postmodern.

5. Institutional changes in management and economic policy and modes of operation which are deemed necessary for the economic survival of institutions and corporations may reduce, or eliminate, the individual employee's eligibility to *participate in social life*. For example, a wage-earner may suddenly be dislocated from a position of economic viability (for self and dependents) to a location of near or real poverty. For this person, and his or her economic dependents, the doors to various types of participation in social life may immediately close. Most of the decisions which lead to the dislocation of the individual and the reduction of eligibility for participation in social life are beyond the reach and influence of the individual. Never before have millions of workers been faced with the unpredictable and disruptive hydraulics of the globalizing economy. One of the main goals of new conceptions of counselling should be to assist individuals' in their attempts to gain meaningful participation in social life. In other words, the work of the vocational counsellor includes helping clients find "escape routes" from marginalized status.

6. At the close of the 20th century, most social orders are trying to move toward models of rationality in which the values of efficiency, quantification, calculation, predictability and control are increasingly applied to social life. Ritzer (1992) refers to this encroachment of rationality into the personal life space of individuals as the *MacDonaldisation of Society*[4]. What we now face in the new century is the turmoil created by the lightening fast exchange of information, money and power made possible by the micro chip and the remaining vestiges of "scientific management" initiated by Frederick Taylor and his time and motion studies[5]. The fast-food restaurant symbolizes the cult of machine efficiency. Further, machine-cult values are surrounded by an attempt by corporations and advertising-dominated media to promote the illusion of "happy" consciousness in which everyone is supposed to "have a good day"—even if they have to take tranquillizers to achieve this state. Advocates of this rationalisation of society continue to have the modernist faith in progress so well-described by George Orwell in his *The Road to Wigan Pier*[6]

> *All the work that is now done by hand will then be done by machinery; wood or*
>
> *stone will be made of rubber, glass or steel; there will be no disorder, no loose ends,*
>
> *no wilderness, no wild animals, no weeds, no disease, no poverty, no pain— and so*
>
> *on and so forth... above all an ordered world, an efficient world. P. 189.*

Some individuals who are trying to navigate social life where the virtues of rationality and economy are shaping human existence have the worst of two possible worlds. On the one hand they are subject to unpredictability and uncertainty beyond their control. On the other hand they are caught in a ma-

chine-value world where "life is supposed to be getting better and better" but is definitely not for various groups of have-nots and marginalized people. Further, other-directed niceness (Riesman)[7] and happy consciousness (Marcuse)[8] make authentic autonomy and resistance problematic "because one cannot succeed in getting indignant at the nice and happy in a society based on simulation[9].

Can vocational counselling and development separate itself from the dehumanizing and stultifying influences of Taylorism, behaviourism, and the factory era? The factory, the school, and the guidance services are often all too much versions of the rational models of the efficient and the effective. What about the place of moral reasoning, working together for common good, and respect for others simply because they are human?

One can learn more about America by driving down it's highways than from all of the social science institutes[11] in the country.

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7. It should not be overlooked that present-day social life is so organized that it does produce "good lives" that get better and better for some; it also produces *difference, exclusion* and *marginalization* for others. Present-day institutions hold out the possibility of choice and emancipation; at the same time they create mechanisms for suppression, rather than actualization of self.[10] Perhaps counsellors should disavow the romantic and unattainable goal of self actualization and fulfilment and work instead under the motto of "join us in the struggle for demarginalization status as citizens and humans".

8. Are there escape routes from the ensnaring phenomena of the rational machine-cult values? From the marginalization and exclusion (from participation in social life) that many individuals experience? From the non-emotional style of expression which says "be happy", "I'm fine", "enjoy" in the face of monumental evidence that one should be indignant and resistant? Or are the escape routes territories of exclusion and marginalization themselves simply co-opted by institutions and replaced by simulation?

Is the technicizing of vocational guidance through the adoption of various forms of "computerized" guidance just another way to lure genuine counselling into the maw of the microchip machine? Is vocational counselling something more than rapid and abundant access to "information"? What about moral reasoning and existential pondering of one's fate and choices?

9. Today it is impossible to think of individual existence apart from institutional life. In effect one's life path is a trajectory across institutional contexts. The individual self is more and more by necessity a reflexively organized project. Each person is increasingly on his or her own both in the construction of a personal identity and self and in the navigation of institutional life. We are what we make of ourselves. Of course no one is free to do just what he or she chooses—we all face many constraints and contextual influences. Yet in the end we produce ourselves. Traditional guiding forces (clan, family, church, community) continue to evaporate—to be replaced by electronically-mediated influences. Life planning, risk-taking, trying-out, struggling to formulate paths for colonizing one's future, extending

one's present into an imagined future—searching for escape routes out of marginalization, looking for sources of support—these factors make up some of the issues in forming a self-as-project. And do they not influence the future of counselling models and practices?

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personal identity and self and in the navigation of institutional life. We are
what we make of ourselves. Of course no one is free to do just what he or
she chooses—we all face many constraints and contextual influences. Yet
in the end we produce ourselves.

10. Where and who are we today? Are we for the most part pawns; or do we have choices which are authentic and which enable us to carve out an existence as an "existent being" with a fair degree of autonomy? Do we ask the experts? Not one of them predicted the taking down of the Berlin Wall. Nor the precipitous break-up of the Soviet Union. What about the booming Asian economy of 1995-97 that went wildly unstable in late 1997? Was this widely predicted by economists? Or the crash of the peso in Mexico? Who predicted the phenomenon of AIDS? The increase of experts in medicine, psychology and science leads to an ever greater narrowness of specialization.? Yet everyone of these experts is a lay person in nearly all aspects of social life. In social life we navigate by our cultural hypotheses and our "psychology of the best guess". We solve practical problems by functioning as *bricoleur*. We gather together the material at hand—cultural knowledge—and we invent solutions. Is this not what counselling should be about—rather than trying to fit people into diagnostic categories which serve the needs of the system, but much less the individual in question?. Is vocational counselling not a *bricolage* rather than an expert strategy backed up by formal theorizing and abstract reasoning.?

Jean Baudrillard claims that one can learn more about America by driving down it's highways than from all of the social science institutes[11] in the country. This outrageous statements about the status of the expert in postmodern society escapes proof or disproof. It is reminiscent of Dostoevsky's main character in *Notes from the Underground* who describes people as 'piano keys' and 'doorstops'— earlier versions of the modernist phrase, 'cogs in a machine'. The depictions of society and its members given to us by Dostoevsky and Baudrillard seem to stem from a desire to remain free, to refuse to be pinned down, categorized and pigeon -holed. Such depictions are annoying, confusing and yet they call to our attention that the unpredictable cannot be predicted; that the postmodern world may be little more than a collage of contingent, rootless, swirling fictions. At least we are brought to consider that contemporary social life is chaotic and disorderly even while the deterministic forces of the market and modernity present the illusion (simulation) of rational orderliness, progress, and efficiency.

Perhaps the main justification of a new form of counselling is that those who practice it well may find useful ways of helping individuals to take charge of their own lives (at least to a greater extent than the role of victim or helpless one implies); and find ways of aiding people to construct sustainable patterns and relationships in daily work and personal life. Worn-out models of vocational development

and vocational counselling strategies are concerned with 'predicting' futures. Yet we have more and more reasons to believe that futures (of careerists and vocational workers) are less and less predictable. Can counselling be reformed so as to help people "map" possible futures, even "invent" futures in conditions of uncertainty and rapid social evolution?

Summarizing reflection

If we look forward and into the crystal-ball of evolving postmodern conditions of the present and future, we can visualize forms of vocational development and counselling with very different features from counselling models located in the century just ending. The individual is a project now much more on its own as a consequence of the de-traditionalization impulses in many societies, coupled with the linking of individual life chances directly to the global economy. Further, indeterminacy, chance, and unpredicability require that we question the very concept of "lifelong career" or linear vocational development. Counsellors can no longer present their clients with a stable long-view blue print of vocational development where one proceeds through a predictable series of educational steps to emerge on the plane of predictable and lasting employment. The various "theories" of development which were concocted in the industrial age are now defunct. Counsellors need new ideas about their tasks in helping people whose daily lives are more open to chance and risk, and who face continuously changing conditions of social life. Perhaps it is best to concede that the only "career" left is one's life? And perhaps it is best to see that many counselling theories are little more than constructions by cloistered academics and should be replaced by a conception of counselling which is organized around "life" planning rather than "career" or "vocational planning". This implies models of counselling organized around the concepts of dynamic social life change and the construction of personally meaningful projects and activities by means of which individuals fend off the ravages of marginalization and form provisional but stable identities in postmodern social life.

Ten critical reflections on the transformation of vocational counselling and development

1. The individual, situated in a shifting and uncertain context, must learn to exert direction over his or her life. If an individual fail to take charge of his or her life, someone else surely will. Each of us must see our self as a reflexively organized project[12]. Our self-as-project (life planning endeavor) consists in the construction and sustaining of coherent, continuously revised, biographical narratives. Self-construction takes place in a context of multiple choices in which chance and risk are prominent features[13].

2. If counselling is be relevant to the formation of lives in the new century, it must be willing to submit to transformations. Like a snake it must be willing to shed its 20th century skin, even if that means

being blinded, uncertain and searching for a time. As a practice counselling is rooted in biblical times. As a profession it is hardly more than half a century old. It came of professional age in the era of the factory and evolved as a kind of Taylorized endeavor. Lately counselling has fallen under the sway of accountants and economists; thus subjected to strident calls for more efficiency, more accountability, more specialization, more scientific status. These demands are a function of institutional need and globalizing markets and market competition and have very little to do with good counselling which is a *humane* and not an economic activity. Good counselling remains the one practice within institutions where face-to-face discussion and problem-solving can be carried out on behalf of the interests of the *individual*. It is a shared moral space where doubts, insecurities, plans, secrets, hopes, fears and self-construction can be carried out in emotional safety and relative privacy. Counselling is organized around the 'human face' and not around efficient processes.

We cannot understand intentions if we ignore the contexts in which
they take place[17].

3. A central claim of a revised counselling is that it is a *moral enterprise*. As Rorty[14] states, we have a duty to listen to the stories which people tell us, not because only they can know what they mean, but because *they are human beings like ourselves*. As social life has become more and more technicized, bureaucratized and subjected to institutional influence, counselling remains the one endeavor which can still direct caring attention to individuals and their plights. Yet counselling has allowed itself to be co-opted into the service of institutions and, in doing so is increasingly in danger of losing its value for the individual. There is probably no way to free counselling from the demands of institutional management—however, it is possible to negotiate a more healthy relationship between counselling and institutional management. Before this can happen, however, counselling needs revision to put it into a posture of relevancy with people and how they experience their lives in the present time—how they are located in social life and how they experience the ongoing flux of their life-space experience.

4. Humans live their lives much as stories are written and told; or to put it another way, stories have a very strong—even ruling—influence on our lives and on our societies. Stories and the language tools which are used to articulate them are not only representative of individual experience, they create personal realities and are part of the transforming processes which humans must engage in as they search for sustainable paths through culture. Counselling must move toward knowledge contributions by such disciplines as cultural studies and literary theory and reduce dependence on the iron-cage of scientific psychology. Human lives are better described by Lyotard's metaphor of "world-as-text"[15] than the metaphor of human life as a system of behaviours or system of cognition and behaviours as scientific psychology advocates. Even the endeavor of science can be seen as a kind of conversation and scientific texts have the status of voices in the conversation[16].

5. Any adequate understanding of human action must take into consideration: meaning, purpose, intentions, and reasons. Further, just as intentions are vitally important in understanding human action,

we cannot understand intentions if we ignore the contexts in which they take place[17]. Models of coun-selling and vocational development must find ways to incorporate personal meaning, with purpose, and intention and shift from focus on "behaviour" to meaningful activities which build a sense of self. The question is: Can counsellors and counsellor educators who have been socialized into American-like forms of counselling and models of vocational development find a way to break free from this over—psychologized approach to counselling and construct models of counselling and vocational development which are situated in cultural sensibility and contemporary social life?

Life is a quest (creating goals as it is lived) rather than a search
(for predefined goals).

6. When we adopt the concept of action as a replacement for the concept of behaviour, we place the responsibility for action squarely on the shoulders of the actor (agent). Further we open up access to three important and relevant traditions of thought which can contribute to a new counselling for the coming century.

The first is literary theory (hermeneutics) as developed by Paul Ricoeur[18] who claims that meaning-ful action can be considered as a text, and vice versa. Meaningful action shares three constitutive features of a text. First, it becomes objectified by inscription (to set down in words so as to form a public record) and thus liberates it from the subjective grasp of the individual. Second, meaningful action has relevance beyond its immediate context of occurrence. Third, meaningful action can be read as an "open work" or set of performances. This extends the theory of interpretation to the field of social sciences and pragmatic practices like counselling.

The second important tradition which meaningful action opens for use by counselling theorists is phenomenology, introduced into the social sciences by Alfred Schutz[19] and his students Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman[20]. Phenomenology opens the door to study of direct, lived and reflected-upon experience. The ability to describe and interpret lived experience lies at the heart of the counselling process.

The third relevant tradition is the sociocultural approach to understanding humans and their ac-tions. This interdisciplinary approach brings various threads into a loosely knit area of study which includes the activity psychology developed by Russian theorists such as Leont'ev[21]; "socialized" psy-chology as advanced by the American sociologist and pragmatist, G.H. Mead[22]; symbolic interactionism (Howard Becker[23]; Norman Denzin[29]); ethnomethodology (Harold Garfinkel; Harvery Sacks); and the discipline of narrative (Jerome Bruner; Donald Polkinghorne) and voice (Michael Bahktin). What these disparate scholars share in common is an understanding that human action originates in cultural, social, communicative/linguistic processes. Through contextualized and personally meaningful acts, people produce their lives. Can counselling and vocational theorists move in these intellectual direc-tions?

7. To view human life as a voiced, narrative structure grounded in the actions of an actor-as-text requires unpredictability. This, according to MacIntyre[30] should not be regarded as a flaw but as a virtue since the kinds of explanations which a constructive, narrative approach offer fits perfectly the kind of phenomena which they purport to explain. Most importantly, unpredictability does not imply *inexplicability*. Humans can *account* for their actions. All lives are lived with goals—which are created in the living. The most important aspect of goal-directed living is not so much the achievement of the goal, but the formulation and reformulation of goals. Lives are not defined at the outset, nor do they assiduously follow the directions (goals) provided by others. MacIntyre refers to the circular teleology of the lived life as the *narrative quest*. Life is a quest (creating goals as it is lived) rather than a search (for predefined goals).

According to Jerome Bruner, the method of negotiating and renegotiating meanings by the mediation of language is one of the crowning achievements of human development. In empirical science, explanations are achieved by recognising an event as an instance of a general law or as belonging to a certain discrete category. Narrative knowing, on the other hand, achieves explanations by relating events to human projects. Narratives *exhibit* an explanation instead of demonstrating it. Structurally, factual and fictive stories are similar. Their respective value or usefulness is situationally negotiated. Contingency, aesthetics, politics and plausibility all play a part in the negotiation of value with regard to narratives. Yet we can see that in everyday life people relate and cope with each other largely through the exchange of stories. How can we redirect the attention of counselling away from behaviour and rationalistic thinking and toward text, voice, story, narrative, and the realm of personal meaning?

Do two speakers (counsellor and counsellor) ever understand
each other completely?

We may have to rethink the concept of empathy and the goal of mutual understanding which has become the sine qua non of all counselling. For example, if we take up Bakhtin's[31] notion of permanent dialogue, we find more and more reasons to doubt the adequacy of empathy. Insightful communication may depend more upon preserving a certain gap between speakers than urging the achievement of "mutual" understanding. Do two speakers (counsellor and counsellor) ever understand each other completely? No. In fact much of the value of their conversations consists in recognizing differences. Good communication does not pretend to find a perfect fit between speakers—it respects boundaries and sharpens the points of difference as well as commonalities. Thus conversation becomes, under a Bahktinian influence, a negotiation or social reality constructing process in which neither party ever knows exactly what the other means. Empathy must be reconstructed to contain at least constitutive elements. One of these is the search for mutual understanding—a kind of emotional knowing. Just as important , however, is the need to include the struggle to articulate differences. Further, empathy rests on a human "witnessing" of the other as human. Seeing, hearing and non-intrusion in the process

which the *human other*. Finally, empathy requires that the individual who is engaged in acts of empathy be capable of reflexivity—is able to bear witness of his or her own self and mental processes. To reconstruct empathy along these lines is to rescue it from the instrumentalism of the cognitive-behavioralism where it was launched in counselling as a skill-one amongst many.

From such a social construction perspective, the counselling conversation (and the development of vocation) are characterized most of all by the notion of *developing ideas* as they are hammered out in the linguistic environment of counselling conversation specifically, and life-planning conversations more generally. This perspective is rather close to Vygotsky's view that humans are best viewed as constantly constructing their environments and their representations of this environment by engaging in various types of activity. The reflective, active , social constructionist process which Vygotsky postulated is as much concerned with the individual's transformation of reality as it is concerned with the reception of information[32]. If counselling and vocational development seriously these alternative ways of describing human conduct in which voice, social location, self-construction, meaning and impermanence become part of the counselling theorists intellectual resource, counselling will take on an aesthetic stability within a cultural sensibility rather than presenting itself as a scientific behavioural expertise.

Psychological knowledge can make an important contribution to counselling—as can other formal disciplines— but it should no longer dominate *the practice of counselling.*

8. With reference to a given historical event, there can be an infinite number of stories (versions) portending to explain the event. It is not possible to use a criterial method to categorically declare one version more true or better than some or all of the other versions. There is no way of deciding among them except by negotiation. When working with narratives and stories, one is not able to eliminate "error" and uncertainty by recourse to mathematical analysis or criteria. Instead one must use negotiation—which is itself contingent upon context. One may use reasons, evidence, statements of value and belief, and temporal ordering to achieve a negotiated consensus or agreement. Certain influences can be discerned, and connections identified. But in the end, narrative knowing leaves open the exact nature of influence and connection. Determinacy cannot subordinate indeterminacy; causes may be inferred but not proven. Narrative knowing can bring counsellors close to life as it is lived, not life as it is calculated. Is not counselling really a *bricolage* utilizing a strategy of the "best guess" rather than a quasi-science of behaviour?

9. Counselling implies that the practitioner have *sociological competence*[33]—this enables the counsellor to perceive that a personal problem is almost always also the flip side of a public issue. Problems do not reside in the heads of individuals, but are to be found in the relational webs which we commonly refer to as social life, or, more broadly, culture and society. A redesigned counselling model can help individuals to perceive that, for the most part, "problems" can be recognized and ameliorated

more effectively when they are taken to be part of the intertextual web of existence, and not as entities residing inside the individual's head.

10. Counselling is by nature a culture-centred practice[34]. People seek the help of a counsellor when they are confused, thwarted, or hurt by social practices. Basically, they want help in answering the question, "What is going on here", where *going on* refers to social things—patterns, processes, frames, relations—and *here* refers to their immediate ongoing life space, context, situation or social location, all of which are culturally defined. For the past 50 years counselling has been under the domination of individualistic, behavioural psychology. Counselling is culture-centred, and it is a specific social practice with its own competence. Psychological knowledge can make an important contribution to counselling—as can other formal disciplines— but it should no longer *dominate* the practice of counselling.

Concluding reflections

I hope that some of the changes which I believe must be made in order for vocational counselling and development to resonate with human needs under conditions of postmodernity, will come into effect while I still live.
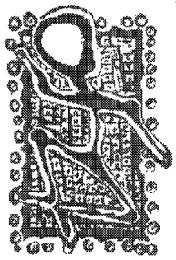
In this chapter I have raised a number of ideas which are intended create tensions in the minds of readers. My chief claims are:
- Social life is undergoing many transformations and postmodern trends
- Models of counselling and vocational development are rooted in the industrial age and are becoming defunct as we move into the 21st century
- New intellectual sources are needed to revise and invent new forms of counselling and models of worklife which are congruent with contemporary social life
- Newly *developing ideas* in counselling and vocational development include narrative, voice, multiple realities, difference, social construction, and non-predictability. In other papers I have made an initial attempt in *SocioDynamic Counselling* to build a new form of counselling by drawing on these *developing ideas* . I am now in my 70th year. I hope that some of the changes which I believe must be made in order for vocational counselling and development to resonate with human needs under conditions of postmodernity, will come into effect while I still live.

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REFLECTIONS...

Section II
CONSTRUCTIVIST-BASED COUNSELLING PRACTICE

Foreword to SECTION II

In this section of the book I will be presenting and describing the practical tasks of the constructivist counsellor and the tools to use in performing these tasks.

I have already pointed out that constructivist counselling does not operate by means of a "cookbook" of formula responses. Instead of providing formulas for counsellors, a constructivist perspective legitimates and encourages counsellor and client use of creativity, intelligence, respect, and innovativeness as a method of working to help clients with their concerns.

In order to use formulaic interventions, one must assume that people are very much alike, and that they experience difficulties pretty much the same way. Another assumption required by formula responses or interventions is that the counsellor always has superior knowledge and expert status in reference to the client.

From the perspective of constructivist counselling, the counsellor does have expertise in life-space clarification and mapping: and in some aspects of communication. However, the client is the expert on his own life experience and may be more knowledgeable than the counsellor in terms of cultural knowing. Assumptions of superior knowledge and expertness are shared by counsellor and client in constructivist counselling.

A constructivist perspective is built upon the recognition of, and appreciation of, difference as well as similarity. Each individual is:

* Like all other people in some respects,
* Like so many other people in some respects, and
* Like no other person in some respects.[1]

For example all people are alike in that they need food, water and sleep and have a need to love and be loved.

Each of us uses a particular language (or languages) and thus holds membership in a language community shared by many other people. Yet nearly every day we encounter others with whom we do not share the same language. We are like many other people in terms of gender, yet very unlike others in this regard.

Yet each of us is unique in certain views which we hold, in our physical character-istics, and in our ways of being. And no one ever quite has the same experience as another individual—there is inevitably a degree of uniqueness in the life stories of each individual. The life-space "signature" of the individual cannot be copied.

There is no such individual as the "average" person. Average is a statistical con-cept and blurs what it means to be a single human being. All categories, classifica-tions, typifications and averaging fails to capture what is meant by "this is who I am." While classifications and categories have value for other considerations, they are distortions of uniqueness and particularity and should be avoided as much as possi-ble in the work of constructivist counselling.

A constructivist frame of understanding is also built upon the assumption that there are multiple realities. This has an enormous value as an assumption in counsel-ling in that, from the outset, the counsellor is prepared to recognise and appreciate difference in many dimensions of human existence. This means the recognition, for example, that every individual is culturally bounded (another constructivist assump-tion) and will inevitably see, hear and construe the world from eyes, ears and brain that have been trained to interpret from that particular cultural perspective.
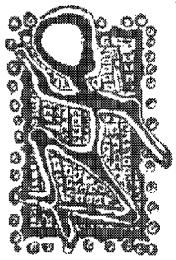
Counselling is construed as a general process or method which encompasses mul-tiple views or options. This reduces the need to build up a multitude of specialities in counselling around topics such as "rehabilitation" counselling, "educational coun-selling", "career counselling" and so on. A more holistic conception is implied which confronts each individual in his or her wholeness and not as a set of roles, traits, parts, or fragments.

Of course there is an obvious need for information and data which are relevant to a specific context—such as labour market information, health information, educa-tional information and information specific to other contexts in which the counsel-ling is occurring. What this implies is not that we need many counselling roles, but that every counsellor should strive to be context and culturally sensitive.

A fourth assumption which is key in the constructivist perspective as applied to counselling is that of social construction. We humans produce our lives, we make our meanings, we build our family and community networks and traditions, we are the "culture-makers", we construct our lifestyles, our selves, our projects, our relation-ships. Of course, for the most part, we also make our problems, and our solutions.

These four assumptions: the assumption of multiple realities, the assumption of uniqueness, the assumption of context or cultural boundedness, and the assumption that we construct our personal and social realities are lynchpins in the constructivist frame for understanding. It is important to realize that all practical applications of constructivism in counselling will rest upon these assumptions, together with other assumptions presented in other portions of this book.

The first, and most encompassing tool which a constructivist counsellor uses is a **constructivist frame for understanding**. This perspective is a map which engenders and values such life-space features as respect, differentiation, meaning, appreciation, letting-be, care, responsibility, courage, choice, autonomy, trustworthiness, and cooperation. The constructivist lens tries to read directly from life experience. What is sensed and perceived is filtered reflexively through the assumptions mentioned above and diffused outward as communication which is sensitive to the life-space features which I have identified.

REFLECTIONS...

Chapter 5
ENTERING THE LIFE-SPACE

He kept looking at me, as though he was trying to be sure that it was

all right to be speaking to me.

Some years ago I was spending the summer in Calgary, Alberta, teaching a course in group counselling at the University of Calgary. My classes were held in the morning and shortly after lunch each day I would walk the three miles to where I had rented a room in a friend's house. The day I am remembering was a hot, sunny day. I left the campus and began to follow a trail across a pasture to the new housing subdivision where my friend lived. This was on the edge of the city and on prairie land which had been rural until just recently.

As I walked along the prairie trail in the hot, still day I could hear birds singing and noticed several rabbits scurrying along the trail ahead. Otherwise the fields were empty except for a few cows. In my mind I was going over the events of the morning class. After about half an hour I noticed a man coming down the hill on another trail toward where I was walking.

He looked to be about 20 years old and walked with a kind of stumbling gait. My first thought was that he had been drinking or perhaps was on drugs. Then as our paths came together and I could see him more clearly, I realised that his gait was that of a person with cerebral palsy.

We came together and we spoke to each other. He was plainly dressed, with old shoes and threadbare jeans. He wore glasses and they were slightly crooked. He looked quickly at me and then away. He greeted me in a low voice. I replied, "You going my way?" He answered, "Yes." His speech was rather difficult to understand. "Yes, I'm going down there to the clinic," he said and pointed to some red buildings about a mile ahead along the trail.

As we walked along we spoke of how hot it was and how this field would soon be gone to the house-builders. He kept looking at me, as though he was trying to be sure that it was all right to be speaking to me. Soon we were in conversation and this is what he told me.

As a small child, he had been diagnosed as a mentally retarded child and for a while was even in an institution for children too crippled to be taken care of at home. His family was poor and when he was about five years old, his father left the home. They lived in an old rural cottage about two miles up the hill on the edge of the open pastures where we were walking. His mother had refused to accept that he had to live in a home for the retarded and when he was about twelve had somehow managed to get him home again. The two of them lived in the cottage and every day she went into the city by bus to work as a laundress.

At this point he interrupted his story and blurted out, "This is the best day of my life!" I was amazed by this outburst and asked him how this could be. I noticed that his eyes were filling with tears. He then continued. "Today is the day I start to school," he said, "and today is the day I can get new glasses and get my teeth fixed". Tears were now running down his cheeks. I listened and watched in amazement.

Again he repeated, "this is the best day of my life."

After these many years his mother had finally found out how to get him into the clinic (the red buildings ahead) for treatment and rehabilitation. She had apparently tried numerous times but for some reason had not been successful until just recently. He pulled a crumpled paper from his shirt pocket and handed it to me to read. We had come to an old log. I suggested that we sit and rest and I could read the paper. I had a ham and cheese sandwich in my pocket which I pulled out and offered him half of it. At first he refused and then said, "Well, I am kind of hungry," and took my offering. As I read the letter and clinic form I saw that it was indeed an official appointment letter for the purpose of diagnostic and treatment at the Rehabilitation Clinic. The letter indicated that an eye examination and glass prescription, together with dental work would be available with the presentation of this letter, and that arrangements could be made to start an educational program based on his needs, and that family counselling would also be given if needed. As we ate our tiny meal together, he continued to tell me how his mother had not been able to get off work today but had given him instructions on where to go and what to say. He also told me that he could not read much, if at all, that he had always dreamed of being able to go

to school and that he hoped that he would soon be able to read. "Then," he said, "I

can find a job and help my mother pay for things." Again he repeated, "this is the

best day of my life."

Needless to say, I was profoundly moved by what I was learning from this young man. I held out my hand to help him up as we got ready to continue on down the trail. Now we walked side by side as I listened to the rest of his story. When we came to the clinic, I asked him if he knew where the entrance was and he said he did. His face was smeared with dust and tears. I put my arm on his shoulder and with my other hand I took out some kleenex I had and wiped off his face. He told me that he hoped I didn't mind what he had told me, and that he had never talked about it before to anyone except his mother. I assured him that he had told me a wonderful story and that I believed that he was on the way to having a better life. We briefly touched hands again and he turned away to enter the building.

Several weeks later, as I was preparing to return home from my summer job, I stopped in at the clinic to inquire about my friend. Sure enough he was there, now studying in the literacy program, he had new glasses, and his teeth had been cleaned. He was pleased to see me and wanted to show me what he was learning to read. We shook hands once again and parted company.

This episode happened 35 years ago. It seems only yesterday. This was a temporary and profound meeting on a prairie trail—an improbable meeting, yet a meeting that exemplifies what it means to "enter into the world of the other", the first task of the constructivist counsellor.

This temporary relationship was co-constructed by the other and myself as we walked and talked. I will identify ten contributions which I made to our evolving relationship which helped me to gain entrance into the life-space of this person. In each of these contributions action, meaning and value are intertwined.

For these brief moments we were companions on his deeply important and
valued life journey that made an indelible imprint on my memory and life.

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1. I approached the other with alertness and interest. I stopped thinking of other things so that I could be fully receptive to this person.
2. I had self-knowledge of my pre-suppositions (drinking, drugs) and put them aside so that I could see the other as he "really" was.
3. I actively, but respectfully, engaged the other in the activity of conversing, using his level of language and refraining from any attitude of superiority.
4. I was prepared to listen with amazement.
5. I credulously received the other's story. I adopted an attitude of "not knowing" and allowed myself to learn from him.
6. I walked side-by-side with the other as an equal deserving of my respect, compassion and attitude of cooperative companionship.

7. I participated in a "common-ground" activity with the other (eating).

8. I allowed myself to be "touched", both emotionally and physically.

9. I underscored and affirmed the value and personal meaning which this day and this experience had for the other. I further confirmed the value of the other and his experience by a later visit.

10. I did my part in co-constructing a distinctive human contact by showing respect; engaging in the empathetic, receptive activities of listening, speaking, and keeping silent; by confirming the other; by being touched and heartfelt; and by engaging in other acts of care—sharing and eating my food together, cleansing his face of tears and dust. For these brief moments we were companions on his deeply important and valued life journey. For me, this brief encounter made an indelible imprint on my memory and life.

Life-space: meaning and nuances

I will begin this section by explaining why I use the concept of life-space in my thinking about counselling. Many years ago when I was a university student, I attended a seminar led by a former colleague of Kurt Lewin's[2]. It was there that I encountered the idea of "life-space".

According to Lewin, each of us inhabits a mental space which is both psychological and sociological and which is named "life-space".

It is a kind of circumambient template by means of which we perceive and interpret the world, ourselves and our relations with others and it also serves as a cultural compass which guides our actions. It is constructed from experience and is made up of our ideas, prejudices, assumptions, beliefs, values, habits, and learned skills which we use in navigating social life.

Our life-space has different four semantic regions: 1) relationships and intimacy; 2) work and learning; 3) health and body; and 4) spirituality. It nonetheless is a total space—a gestalt of our personal world. The four "regions" interconnect with each other and with a central core which is the acting, choosing, agentic "I".

A life-space may be rather rigidly constructed and defended, it may be fluid and changeable. It may be transparent to others and easily accessed by them; or it may be opaque, hard to gain entry into and difficult to understand.

Following Lewin, there are numerous features of the life-space which are relevant and important to counsellors:

1. The individual's actions, values, and knowledge are inextricably linked together. If a change is called for in how the person thinks, values, or acts, then it is a mistake to ignore one element and only concentrate on the other(s). For example, if it appears desirable for a father to adopt a different set of actions toward his child, then is not sufficient just to try to bring about a change in the behaviour. It is equally important to consider his perceptions of fathering, parenting, family and so on. It is very helpful to elicit an understanding of the value of these roles to him, and what he believes about fathering in terms of his cultural teaching; and then to keep all three factors in mind

as being important in his life-space and thus in his conduct. This is the principle of holism.

2. Perception and personal meaning guide social, psychological, and physical action. In other words, "meaning" is what we usually are referring to when we use the term "motivation". We are "seekers after meaning" and "makers of meaning".

3. New information or data will not necessarily change prejudices or replace old, incorrect or irrelevant information or knowledge. One of the reasons that information-intensive counselling is often disappointing is that while the individual may "receive" the information, he does nothing with it. To be valuable, information must be translated into knowledge and action, and must be integrated as personally meaningful.

If a change in knowledge, sentiment, value or perception is to occur the individual must be participating actively in the process of change or problem solving. This is why it is important to achieve an activity-based counselling[3], or a co-construction method of counselling as much as possible. Changes in life-space content, contours and boundaries are most likely to come about when the individual is participating in personally meaningful projects, either singly or jointly with others.

It is especially important that persons from another culture, and who are trying to find footholds in a new culture, are able to participate in groups and in activity projects jointly with members of the new culture. This enables questions of "why do you do it that way" and "how does this work" to come into discussion and thus allow an opportunity for new knowledge to become actively assimilated and digested by the person in her life-space.

What is most important of all is to be receptive to the other's teaching you things you need to know in order to make the counselling communication go more smoothly and with respect.

The notion of "habitus" as put forth by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu[4] is somewhat related to the concept of life-space. "Habitus" expresses the result of an **organising strategy** within the individual for coping with whatever is going on at this moment in life. It expresses a way of being. It has a meaning close to "habit-state", disposition, tendency, or inclination. It is a system within the mental process of the individual which enables the individual to cope with ever-changing circumstances and events. The strategies which habitus "manages" are both relatively stable (based on integration of cultural experience including values, assumptions, and taken-for-granted knowledge) and at the same time "ad hoc" because it always is encountering a particular social or cultural situation. Habitus follows a "fuzzy logic" of the more-or-less and is not neatly laid out in terms of variables or traits. Instead it is suggestive of inventiveness, and embeddedness in on-going life experience and experience of social life.

So, as a counsellor under the influence of concepts such as life-space and habitus, what should guide me in my practical relations with clients—with others seeking assistance from me? What kinds

of knowledge and skill do I call upon to help me approach the other if I assume that the other is inhabiting a life-space or is an agent expressed as habitus?

I have already indicated some of the key tools which a constructivist counsellor can use with my example of meeting with the young man in the field. I will close this section by emphasising more elements which constitute a counselling strategy for gaining entry to the other's life-space.

1. Preparation. It is important to:

a. Accept in advance that the other may be very different from yourself—different in need, disposition, emotional state, status in society, and perhaps different in cultural expectations and cultural communication.

b. Do the best you can to arrange for a meeting place which is free from distraction—telephones, interruptions, noise, other intrusions. A place for counselling should be inviting and have a friendly atmosphere as much as possible.

c. Take a moment to review your own mental readiness. If you already have impressions of this person, remind yourself to exercise restraint so that you can have a fresh view of the person.

2. Use cultural awareness in greeting and initiating rapport.

As much as possible be familiar with the type of greeting ritual which the other is accustomed to. There are significant cultural differences in how people greet each other, how they wish to addressed, and the level of formality which they expect. In Canada, for example, members of the dominant culture expect a handshake to be firm and show strength. Amongst native people, in contrast, a firm, strong handshake signals aggressiveness and insensitivity. It is more culturally appropriate when greeting a native individual to offer a gentle hand, more like laying your hand in the other's.

3. Apply the person first, problem second, principle.

What this means is that it is important to recognise the person by asking about family, or health, or in some way recognising the other as a legitimate person who exists apart from whatever difficulty that the individual is experiencing and which has brought them to counselling. Again there are cultural variations. In some cases, the individual will want to almost immediately begin to talk about their concern. Other individuals will want to establish a sense of common ground, or will have to test out the degree of trust which they sense in the counsellor before bringing up the problem topic. In any event, it almost always better to spend a few minutes getting a sense of the other's comfort, degree of trust, and personal attitude toward the counselling situation and yourself before starting problem-talk.

4. Use language and vocabulary appropriate to the other's social location in society.

Generally speaking, this means to use the language of the everyday free from specialised concepts and professional or bureaucratic terminology. Use language which points to the concrete (specific examples) rather than the abstract (theorizing). Use language which describes what is going or tries to get descriptions from the client rather than language which conveys judgements or conclusions or

encourages the clients to resort to judgmental language. How is that for you?", rather than "That does not seem to be a good thing to do."

5. Do whatever you can to develop common ground with the other.

It may be appropriate for you to admit that you too, are fallible, and don't always have the best solution for life's problems. Sometimes there are commonalities in life experience which provide a kind-of "I've been there, too" tie-in with the other. Dress, food, everyday customs and rituals, manner-isms of speech, and common aspects of world-view are all possible sites for establishing common ground with the other. If the person with whom you are meeting speaks a home-language other than your own, it is not reasonable to expect that you can quickly learn that language. However, it is helpful to learn a few key words such as a greeting, how to say "thank you" etc. Perhaps what is most impor-tant of all is to be receptive to the other's teaching you things you need to know in order to make the counselling communication go more smoothly and with respect.

6. Use what I refer to as "diversified communication".

What I mean by this is that your communication with another person should be guided by recogni-tion and respect of differences which exist between yourself as communicator and the other as com-municator.

You should exercise patience and careful observation. It is important to be able to speak as a "turn-taking" conversationalist, always leaving space for the other, and helping the other, as needed, to express what they have to say; and to be able to listen and remain silent. Speaking, as I have already suggested, is best done in the non-specialised language of the everyday. Listening should be credu-lous—that is, you should listen attentively to the other, taking what they say at full value, as their view of things.

7. The importance of not-knowing.

My final point about gaining entry into the life-space of the other is that it is important to take the stance of "one who does not know" and be able to let others teach you about themselves, their situation of concern, and their needs which they hope to meet by talking with you. For counsellors who have come to see themselves as advisors, or who are attempting to portray images of themselves as experts, this is a difficult stance to achieve.

However, if you take seriously the observation that every person inhabits a particular life-space, and that social and cultural locations do matter and carry implications for the individuals occupying those locations, then is becomes essential to effect an attitude of openness toward the inhabitants of those spaces and social/cultural locations and to allow them to teach you how it is to live there.

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CHAPTER 6
LIFE-SPACE EXPLORATION AND DESCRIPTION

Contemporary society, with its demand for efficiency, its institutional
density, and rapidly shifting markets, imposes all kinds of controls and
constraints on the individual. So, in one sense it seems like the individual
has less and less freedom.. But this is only half of the story. One is no
longer born into social location. Now one must do something, make an
active effort to achieve social and economic advantages and desirable
status in society.
"The normal biography has become an 'elective'... 'reflexive'... do-it-
yourself biography. It is also a 'risk' biography. If individuals are to
succeed, they must plan and adapt to change; they must organise and
improvise, set goals, recognise obstacles, accept defeats, and attempt new
starts, undertake new projects. What is required is initiative, tenacity,
flexibility and tolerance of frustration.
Opportunities once pre-defined by the family, church and village
community must now be perceived, interpreted, processed, and decided on
by the individual.   ~U. Beck.~

When individuals stand before a counsellor, it is invariably because something is not working in their social life. Individuals are aware—sometimes only dimly, sometimes vividly—that a need which they have is not being met. There is an enormous variation in the concerns which people bring to the counsellor. It may be little more than a piece of information which they do not have and believe that the counsellor will be able to provide. Quite often, it is some type of choice or decision which they are uncertain about. It may be a request to help repair a relationship, or it may be a need to be "heard" by an understanding person. Quite often it is some facet of a person's lifestyle which is not working to the individual's satisfaction. In an increasing number of instances, due to increased migrations and

numbers of refugees, the trouble which a person experiences is lack of fit between old and new cultural experience—which, of course, is one kind of lifestyle concern.

In exploring and clarifying the life-space of a client, the constructivist counsellor has various tools to use. I will describe six tools which I have found useful in constructing life-space understandings.

- Dialogical conversation
- Questions which elicit life experience
- Metaphors
- Life-space mapping
- Explication of critical life experiences
- Counterfactual experimentation with the unique.

Dialogical conversation

A genuine conversation gives me access to thoughts that I did not know myself capable of, that I was not capable of. ~ Maurice Merleau-Ponty~

Counselling is a communication process and **conversation** is the most important component of that process. However, the conversation in constructivist counselling has the special characteristics of dialogue.

First, counselling conversation always has the primary goal of achieving understanding. The understanding to be achieved is, in most cases, mutual. Dialogue is a form of communication which seeks common ground and does not foster the superiority of one communicator over another.

Second, **listening** is a key ingredient in dialogical conversation and the listening in dialogue is credulous and empathic—that is, it seeks to understand the other and the other's meaning from the other's frame of reference. In dialogue, one listens with amazement, with wide-awakeness, and attempts to restrain one's own assumptions and prejudices from interfering with the incoming messages.

Dialogical conversation is empathic. What this means is that the counsellor listens in amazement, watches the other in a wide-awake mood, and listens as well to what is not said, to silence, and to what always shows itself in the messages of the nonverbal—gestures, facial expressions, posture, and bodily movement.

Perhaps what is most characteristic of dialogical conversation is that in order to participate fully in dialogue, the person must enter into it already prepared to be changed by what is heard. The communication of the speaker and the listener form an interpretative horizon within which each contributes according to his will, knowledge and ability. Out of this fusing of words and meanings given and heard, a new understanding arises. It is no longer "I understand my way" and "You understand your way," but now the two understandings have merged or fused into a new understanding which "we" are

both able to grasp as "mutual" and which did not exist before our co-construction through listening and speaking together in dialogue.

One seldom engages in dialogue and remains unchanged. Of course individuals vary greatly in their ability and will to engage in dialogue, and different situations call for other types of communication as well. Most of the time, if the counsellor enters into communication with the other in the spirit of dialogue, the quality of the work done in the counselling meeting will be greatly improved.

Last summer I was meeting with a small group of government employees for the purpose of teaching them some counselling skills. They were a mixture of job classifications all the way from janitorial staff to management. One of the group members was an immigrant from Czechoslovakia. Toward the end of the meetings he came to me at a lunch break and said:

> *I think that you are trying to show us something much more than simple conversation. You are trying to show us that when people talk there is always a much deeper meaning than it seems on the surface, isn't that right? I think you are trying to show us a way of being with each other which deeply respects and understands the other person in his unique existence, is that it?*

I listened to him in amazement. Here was an immigrant, not very well educated and working as a janitor who had grasped the secret which I had been trying to impart and which several other group members, much more sophisticated than this man, were having a very hard time trying to grasp—in fact were rejecting because it did not fit with their bureaucratically re-enforced need for speed and efficiency in communication.

Dialogical communication is a way of being. It is a way that accepts the other as a partner in joint communication where neither is to take an impositional or dominating stance, and where each shows a respect for the other and the differences which they pose for each other. Out of dialogical conversations will come meaning which is fresher, brighter, deeper, mutual, and which tells much about the way a human life is being experienced.

Even when the other person is not able, or willing, to enter fully into such conversations, and only the counsellor takes a dialogical stance, one of the general goals of counselling—clarity—is still achieved. Further, the act of listening fully and with compassion is, in itself, a way of providing support and hope to the other. The act of dialogical listening is often the best service a counsellor can provide to the other, for the experience of really being listened to not only has an immediate benefit, it often is the basis for energising the other for practical problem solving activity in a longer term perspective.

Recently a woman came to me for counselling about her anger and bitterness toward her mother, whom she felt had never cared for her and who never gave her credit for making anything of her life. In our first counselling conversation she expressed her strong feelings and became very emotional and blaming toward her mother. For the most part I simply provided her with a safe place to tell me her story and have the experience of really being listened to. After she left, I made a note to myself that

next time we should begin to explore ways in which she can outgrow her bitterness and move on in her life. When she returned the following week, this is what she had to say:

> *Last week I felt so tense when we talked, and I was surprised, even*
> *horrified at what I said to you. But you know it was so good to tell*
> *someone all my bad feelings, even though you were a total stranger*
> *to me. I have never had anyone listen to me that way before—most*
> *people just try to make me feel guilty for how I regard my mother.*
> *During the week I could not stop thinking about our conversation.*
> *I have decided that I can not change her, but I can maybe get a*
> *different attitude. I don't need all that resentment in my life any*
> *more. I've been thinking about how I can get on with life and that's*
> *what I'd like to talk about today.*

This example points out how respectful listening can start the wheels of change in the other. This woman came back having already started on a plan for altering her frame for understanding her relationship with her mother. She had used the experience of the first interview to start gaining more control over her own life. She was already on a problem-solving journey when she came to see me the second time. Now she and I could work hand-in-hand to develop a project which would enable her to achieve her goal of accepting her mother and at the same time get free from old resentful feelings. She was on the road to re-writing her story, or, to put it another way, to reconstructing an aspect of her self.

Questions which elicit life experience descriptions, distinctions and meaning

A deconstruction question is one which tries to uncover assumptions or taken-for-granted beliefs that the person holds and which are interfering with the person's search for solution or seem to be impeding decisions.

Most people who have had counsellor training have been taught to ask questions sparingly so that counselling does not become a kind of interrogation. This type of

questioning has two undesirable features: first, it tends to make the other defensive, and secondly, it places the conversation under the direction and control of the questioner.

Counsellors are generally taught to use "open-ended" questions such as "What kind of situation are you coping with?" This type of question allows the client to say as much or as little as she wishes, and leaves the specific content of the talk up to the speaker's choice. The open question is contrasted with the closed question which is mainly a way of getting information, for example: "When did you leave school?" to which the client can answer with one word. Closed questions do not promote continuation of conversation, while open questions do.

Usually, counsellors also learn to ask What, How, and When questions instead of Why questions. Questions such as "How is this separation affecting you?" or "What stands out for you in this conflict?" are designed to elicit descriptions of experience from the other. This means that the other tells how he is experiencing, or being affected by his experience, rather than trying to give reasons or explain why he is having this experience.

Consider the following example:

Client: *Well, I found out yesterday that I no longer have a job.*

Counsellor 1: *How is that for you?* (question to elicit description of experience)

Counsellor 2: *What was your reaction when you heard that?* (question to elicit description of experience)

Counsellor 3: *Why did that happen?* (question which invites the client to justify, give reasons, or theorise)

Open questions and questions which elicit descriptions of experience from others are valuable and often helpful in the task of exploring and gaining a common understanding of the other's life-space. However, constructivist questioning goes beyond these forms of questioning. I will briefly identify and give examples of constructivist questioning.

Questions that challenge assumptions, i.e., "deconstruction" questions.

A special category of questions are those which can be thought of as deconstruction questions. A deconstruction question is one which tries to uncover assumptions or taken-for-granted beliefs that the person holds and which are interfering with the person's search for solution or seem to be impeding decisions.

Example: *You seem to believe that your educational plan will get you where you want to go in life. What is your thinking behind that belief?*

Questions that establish context.

Example: *You are worrying about whether or not you should move to another community. Who else would be influenced by your decision to move?*

Questions that temporalize.

These are questions that set the discussion of the problem in a time context. Relationships between now, the past, and the future are established.

Example: *You are concerned about your boy who is in the 5th grade now. How long has this worry been plaguing you?*

Questions that seek to establish life-space relations.
Example: *How might your experience at work affect how you see this conflict in your family?*

Questions that directly request descriptions.
Example: *How would you describe the place of religion in your life and in your family?*

Questions that search for possible futures.
Example: *What are some of your expectations about this program if you are successful in applying?*
Questions that highlight a person's strength.
Example: *You say that this is not the first time you have had to find a way to move your family to a new community. What were you able to do that enabled you to make the move?*

Questions that help a person take the role of the other.
Example: *You have explained how you and your sister fight a lot and you are filled with resentment. From your sister's point of view, what do you think would need to change between the two of you for her to have a more friendly attitude toward you?*

Questions that help the person see multiple realities.
Example: *Given your understanding of the importance of having healthy eating habits, what are some different ways that you think it might be possible to have healthy eating habits?*

Questions that help people make personal meaning.
Examples: *Now that you have started the new course, what is your perception of your work?*
How does your cooperation with your new neighbours fit in with other things in your life?
You get a lot of meaning out of reading to your children. What other steps could you take with them that you would feel good about and they would like?

Questions that contribute to people re-defining themselves.
Examples: *What do you think about the picture of yourself as someone who has the courage to go through with this procedure?*
When you think of yourself three years from now, what do you see?
What can you see yourself doing that would make this problem go away?

In asking questions similar to the examples above the constructivist counsellor is opening up possibilities for individuals to see things differently, get at assumptions underlying their beliefs and per-

ceptions, looking for what has not yet been discovered in the life-space, and helping individuals see patterns and connections between different aspects of their concern or their situation, or between themselves and others. Questions which are respectfully posed, and not imposed, also are a way of expressing genuine interest in the other and can help to build a spirit of mutual inquiry and working together.

Metaphors and counselling

I have already suggested in the earlier portion of this book that counselling is a metaphorical process socially constructed by the counsellor and counselled. Within the counselling conversations, there are many occasions when it may be helpful to encourage the use of metaphor by the client. Metaphors are powerful tools for taking something which we already know, or even dimly grasp, and articulating it in different words and symbols.

If a counsellor experiences beneficial results from using metaphors to explore her own experience, then it is much easier for her to encourage clients.

In this process aspects of meaning which were not revealed in the old way of expression become more accessible to exploration, perhaps more clear, and often create a shift in perspective. Metaphors also can bridge gaps between the literal and the imaginative and can sometimes bring about an intuitive grasp of the whole which is missing in literal descriptions. Several examples of metaphor in the counselling conversation are:

Counsellor: *You say that your child is difficult to keep track of, he runs this way and that when you are shopping, and he is always hiding out behind the shelves, etc. I wonder if you could find a way of saying just what your experience of trying to care for your child is like at that time?*

Other: *I feel like a bunch of rubber bands, being pulled in all directions at once.* This new language frame, "a bunch of rubber bands" provides a new perspective which the counsellor and client can now use for further clarification and discussion.

Counsellor: *So what would you say your life has been like over the past few weeks?*

Other: *Well, I guess that it's been a lot like taking a ride on a roller-coaster.*

When the counsellor uses the word "like" she is asking the other to provide a metaphor which captures the essence of the event, experience, or problem under examination. People vary a great deal in the extent to which they are responsive to metaphors. Some use them constantly in everyday talking. Others are much more literal and seldom use metaphors. Others may even reject any request that they attempt to use a metaphor.

It is usually quite helpful if counsellors will practice using metaphors while they are training so that they feel familiar with their use. Also, if a counsellor experiences beneficial results from using

metaphors to explore her own experience, then it is much easier for her to encourage clients to work with metaphors.

Life-space mapping

Counsellors who have practised mapping aspects of their own lives and

experiences will usually find that their experience gives them confidence

in guiding others.

Mapping is one of the essential tools for the constructivist counsellor in helping clients explicate their life-space, describe their concerns and in searching for solutions. Mapping refers to some method of drawing, diagramming, or even doodling, by means of which the client or the counsellor and client together place the client's ideas and feelings into visual forms. Benefits of mapping include:

1. It is a method for making the self "visible".
2. It provides an opportunity within the counselling session for the counsellor and client to work together cooperatively in a task that has meaning for both.
3. It is activating for both client and counsellor.
4. It produces a tangible product from the counselling session.
5. Mapping enables both client and counsellor to clarify and explicate the meaning of a life-space. Mapping can bring into view:
   * patterns of interaction in the client's life-space
   * key features of the client's life-space or concern
   * obstacles, strengths, and needs
   * voices of the self.
6. Making a map enables both counsellor and counselled to grasp the whole context of the concern and the dynamic features of the life-space.

In a counselling session virtually anything that can be talked about, and some meanings which the client is unable to express in words, can be mapped—life-spaces, concerns, relationships, conflicts, plans, family patterns, roles, problems and so on. The counsellor guides the mapping process and the client provides the content (her own experience) so that both contribute to the mapping process.

Again, not all people will easily participate in mapping and must always be ready to do so before the mapping activity is undertaken. Counsellors who have practised mapping aspects of their own lives and experiences will usually find that their experience gives them confidence in guiding others in the mapping process.

I use sheets of paper and a pencil or coloured pens to map with. After I have begun to get a word picture of the difficulty which the other is presenting to me, I say something like:
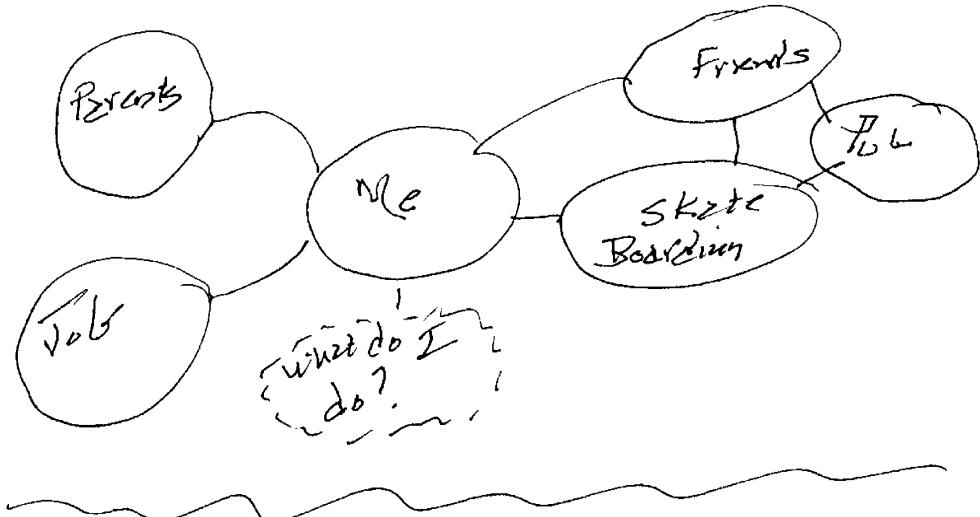
- *If we drew a map of your situation, it might get clearer to both of us—does that seem like a good idea to you?*
- *If the other agrees, then I take a sheet of paper and ask the other to think of the whole sheet as her present life-space. I then ask her to draw a small circle somewhere on the page and label it "self".*
- *Then we proceed to make a map of what is going on in her life that seems to have relevance to the issue she is confronting. We sometimes trade the pencil back and forth so that we get the feeling of "working together". Other times the other does most or all of the drawing and occasionally I will do most or all of it myself. We map out experiences, events, people, relationships, needs, voices, obstacles, possibilities and information. Depending upon the propensities and skill of the other, we use drawing, images, symbols, words, and sometimes colours to indicate meanings.*

As we are mapping we are also talking to each other about what should go on the map and what the meaning is of the various features of the life-space map. We try to give every element a name—to name a piece of reality is to gain some mastery of it.
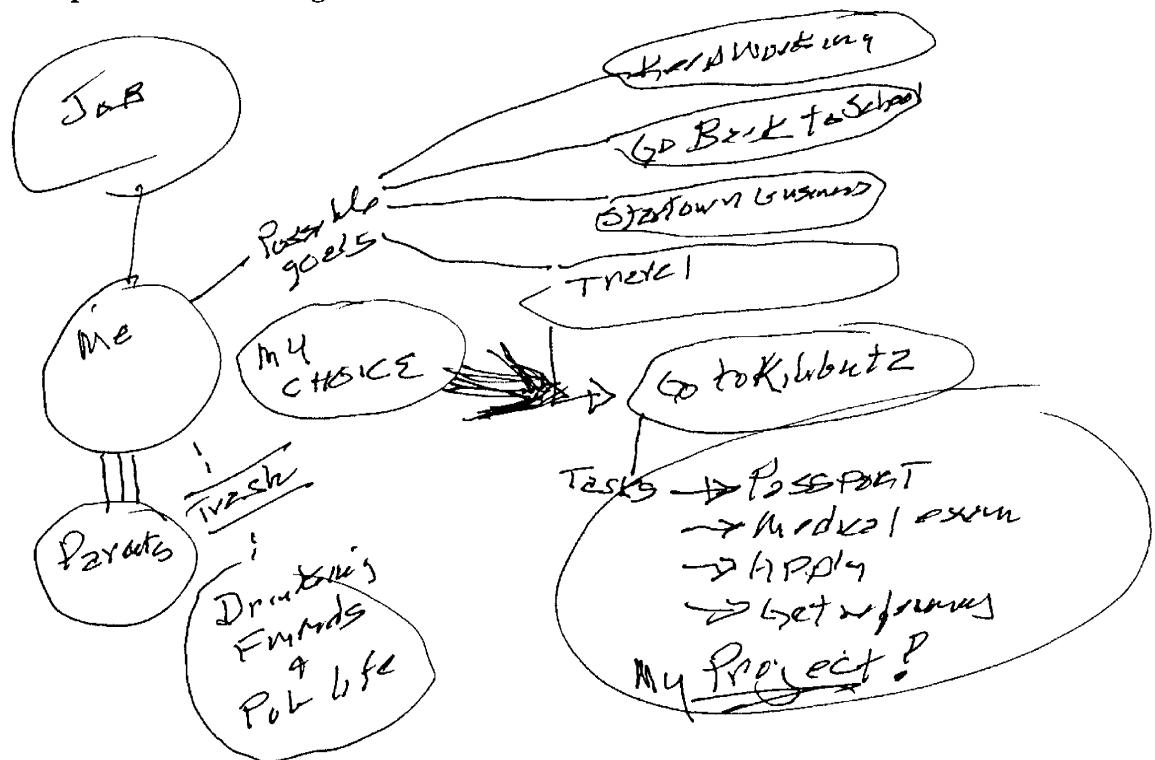
On the following page a map produced by a client and myself shows what his life-space looked like at the beginning of our counselling process of three sessions. The client is a 19-year-old youth who had been referred to me for career counselling because he was "confused about his future." After three counselling sessions in which mapping was a major activity, the client had constructed a new life project [going as a volunteer to a Kibbutz in Israel]. At the onset of our counselling, Mark worked as a janitor and spent most of his time with friends either skate-boarding or drinking beer at nights in pubs. He carried through with his project and is now in his second month on a Kibbutz as I write these lines. I spoke with his mother just this morning and he is planning a trip with new friends through Jordan, Syria, and Egypt. His life-space has changed.

Diagram: Life-space maps for Mark

Map 1: first counselling session

Map 2: third counselling session

Explication of critical life experiences

*What, if anything do you think you learned from that experience which had
a real impact on how you are now?*

To explicate means to unfold the meaning or sense of something. It means **to make distinctions which
clarify** whatever is being observed. I like the concept of explication because it infers a kind of careful
seeing and hearing, being observant so as not to cloud what is seen and heard with one's own biases,
yet giving a detailed and clear account of whatever is under observation and discussion.

There are many ways of explicating in an on-going conversation. When a person reiterates, that is,
reflects or paraphrases what the other has said, the effect is an explication. In effect, the reiteration is
saying: *You are saying this meaning*, and, by extension, *not that meaning*. When a counsellor asks a
question is designed to direct the other toward her own life experience and gets a description of that
experience, personal meanings are quite likely to be described, hence explicated.

A tool for the counsellor to use for explicating the important life meanings of the other is what I call
"explication of critical life experience procedure". It can be applied to a single event in the life of a
person such as a marriage break-up, or getting into a new occupation; it can also be applied to certain
periods in the person's life or even to the individual's life as a whole. Of course this procedure must be
flexible and used in a sensible way with each individual. The general procedure is as follows.

1. Say to the other that you think it might be helpful to both of you if a few key parts of the difficulty
(or life) (or period in your life) could be picked out and examined in some detail. If the other seems
willing and ready to take part in this exercise with you then you can:

*[In the following illustrative example, the other is a 39-year-old man who has been unemployed off
and on for the past 10 years and does not seem to be able to find any work which he can stick with, or
for which he is able to get training]*

2. Let's draw a line and divide your life into 5 year periods (or three, or ten—depending upon the
age of the other). Ask him to take a pencil and make a line across the page the long way and then divide
the line as:

0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	now

You can ask him then which part of his life interests him the most. Suppose he says 30 to 35. Then
you ask him what some the highlights of that period of his life were or outstanding difficulties he
faced. Once he has chosen a period of his life, then guide him in plotting the events on the line.
Suppose that he puts down three critical events: his only love affair, the best job he ever had, and the
death of his mother. In a dialogical conversation mode, explore several of the critical events with him.
Listen in amazement and ask experience-clarifying questions such as:

- *What is the most outstanding part of that experience for you?*
- *What have you chosen to bring from that experience into the* present?
- *What, if anything do you think you learned from that experience which had a real impact on how you are now?*
- *When you look for a job now, what is it about your experience of the best job you had that can guide you in looking for better work now?*

Of course the questions to ask depend upon the person, the critical experiences, and on how much time you have for this life-space explication. The potential benefits for you and your client are:

- Common knowledge of the other's life-space is developed
- The counselling relationship is improved and deepened
- New openings and patterns in the other's life story are found
- Personal resources and strengths which the person may have are discovered
- Perceived obstacles to the person being able to move forward in life are identified
- Other new life materials and insights for inventing a solution may be discovered.

It is the task of the counsellor to work through the medium of
dialogical communication.

By way of concluding this section on critical life experiences, I suggest that you consider the other's life-space as a kind of workshop which you have gained entry into (metaphorically). The other who inhabits that space and who works in the workshop needs a helping hand. He has many materials to work with. The most important ones are his own strengths, experiences, skills, know-how, perspectives, inventiveness, and self-knowledge. Often many of these materials, while close-at-hand, go undetected. It is the task of the counsellor, together with the other, to try to detect these materials by exploring the life-space of the other and, explicating critical life experiences, and doing most of this work through the medium of dialogical communication.

Counterfactual experimentation with the unique

As I have already stressed, the constructivist counsellor approaches the other prepared to be surprised, even amazed. While people are similar is some ways, they are also unique in various ways. Not only do they have unique features as human beings, they construct and live lives with unique features. If we were all the same and if the situations we live in were the same, then there would be no need for counselling for there would be predictability and regularity in all human behaviour and living. Of course that is not the case.

Human experience is layered and patterned. It is both wide and deep. It is non-linear and linear; predictable and unpredictable at the same time. While the constructivist assumption is that we create

social life, society and our selves, we still remain in a tension between compliance (with dictates, customs, social rules and market rules) and creativity (making the new). Not only is this true for the artist but for the everyday person as well.

Not infrequently, the counsellor and client must engage in unique experiments (you don't know what the outcome will be, or even if the experiment will have any value). By "experiment" I am referring to a method or procedure which is invented on-the-spot as a means of gaining a better understanding of the person, the person's life-space, or the person's concern; and possibly inventing a solution to the problem. One of the best approaches to constructing a unique experiment is through the use of metaphors, described above, or through the use of <u>counterfactuals</u>. To use a counterfactual is to pose a condition which is not the case (against the facts) in order to gain a different or new perspective. Counterfactual examples tend to pry individuals loose from their allegiance to "facts" which are determining what they can, or should do—so they can perceive the new and re-construe their experience.

An example of a counterfactual in use is the "magic wand" thesis. For example, a client may say: "Oh, I am too old to start over again, there is simply nothing I can do." Then the counsellor says:

> *I am going to give you a magic wand. It is just in our imagination, but let's see what it can show us. You take this magic wand and then you have the power to change things. You can't change physical things like your age, but you can change mental things and you can change life situations. So consider that you can bring about what you would like your life to be, what would you change. Think for a moment, if you could change all kinds of thinking and feeling, and rearrange life situations, where would you put yourself? Who else would be there? What would you be doing? How would you be living? How would you view this problem you are facing now? Etc.*

Of course you would not ask all of these questions. However they give an idea of how a counsellor can loosen the constraints of supposed necessity and compliance in an imaginary way so that the client can begin to think about his situation in diverse ways, in ways he has never dared to think before. He is invited to think counterfactually about what he perceives to be the "facts" of the situation.

When counterfactual statements are used at the right time, and with sensitivity to the other's readiness to engage in this imaginative experiment, then the results often bring new possibilities, new data, and new perspectives forward for discussion. Clients will often make remarks like "I never thought of this before"; "I have never dared to let myself think like this"; or "I didn't realise how much I was keeping myself in my own jail." Potential benefits of counterfactual experiments are:

1. Introduction of new perspectives
2. Increased awareness of assumptions
3. Tests the "reality" of reality.
4. Helps distinguish between imagined and real constraints.
5. Promotes creativity in designing a possible future.
6. Helps clarify obstacles—is this an obstacle or an inconvenience?
7. May turn up cultural differences in thinking.

8. May help identify gaps in knowledge.

9. May bring out for discussion either underestimation or overestimation of own capacities or potentials.

10. Sometimes will inspire unusual projects for trying to move toward the magically created "best of all possible worlds".

Other types of counterfactual experiments are: asking a person to put themselves in the shoes of another (strictly speaking an impossibility) and see the problem through the eyes of the other; using tantalising but implausible examples as thought experiments: Imagine that you are going to be thrown overboard and that you find yourself alone on an island, what skills or attitudes do you have that would help you survive? Imagine that you were preparing the text for your obituary, what would you write? Imagine that next week you were going to start doing the kind of work which you have always secretly dreamed of being able to do. What would you be doing and where would this happen?

Of course we all must recognise and cope with real restraints and constraints in our lives. Unfortunately, many people are imprisoned in constraints borne of habit, prejudice, lack of knowledge, or adherence to assumptions or self-limiting ideas. Counterfactual experiments and questions can influence these "mental" constraints. Occasionally, counterfactual thinking can stir us to do something about physical or environmental constraints as well.

CHAPTER 7
WORKING WITH STORIES

Implicit in everything we do is a longing for synergy... if you look at
unfolding lives, you immediately become aware of the processes of
redefinition... it is possible to propose a search for benefits in every
problem... Each of us constructs a life that is her own central metaphor
for thinking about the world... the compositions (stories) we create in
these times of change are filled with interlocking messages of our
commitments and decisions. Each one is a message of possibility.
~Mary Catherine Bateson[1]~

In order to exist in social life with a degree of personal comfort and stability, and a sense of being competent, a person needs to have a coherent life story which is constantly being revised as she moves through life[2]. Our life story expresses our sense of self, how we got to be who we are and where we are in social life, and ties together the myriad of experiences which we have as we go about our daily life.

While the counsellor may not always be interested in the overall life story of the individual, the numerous scenarios, sub-stories, and episodes which the other recounts in the counselling conversation are of the utmost interest and value to the counsellor—and to the other.

The "story" is the basic means used by people in communicating with each other, both in and out of counselling. Upon a moment's reflection, almost anyone can recognise this. When you meet a friend or colleague, and ask how they are or what they have been up to, you will get a story from them. If the story you listen to is coherent—and not all stories are, then you will be able to discern the holistic meaning of the story. In a coherent account not only will the various parts of the story have a sensible relation to each other (such as beginning, middle and end; but the various figures in the story are functionally related to one another). The overall impression you get from the story seems to hang together. If both of these features: a sensible relation of parts and holistic meaning are present then you

will have the experience of having heard a coherent story and you will have an understanding of the other's life, or some portion of it, that you could get no other way.

Within the boundaries of an overall life story there are a great number of sub-stories which are usually organised around specific experiences and told from the point of view of the story teller situated in a specific context.

In this chapter I keep referring to the "stories" which people tell as though each individual would produce a full-blown story. Of course this is not the case. Often what the counsellor hears is only a fragment from a story, or a sub-story, or just a sentence or two. However, it is important to recognise that whatever the quantity or quality of the client's conversational account, the client is always giving you an aspect of a larger story. Some of the stories (there are many more) commonly heard by counsellors who know how to listen for them are:

1. Stories of **subjugation** (how the individual feels controlled either by circumstances, people, or both).

2. **Problem-centred stories** (the individual's story is organised around a concern or difficulty which the individual is experiencing.

3. **Future self stories** (an expression of hope, aspirations, dreams, and possibilities).

4. **Victim stories** (stories in which the individual positions himself as facing insurmountable obstacles, unfairness, or constraints which seem overwhelming).

5. **Alternative stories** (This refers to the construction of stories which are possible alternatives — new, better, different—to the current story which a client brings to the counselling process. These tend to be stories of empowerment, planning, experimentation, courage, revision, strength-gathering, skill and ability development, and stories about increased eligibility to participate in social life).

Every human being is a complex compendium of stories. Some stories are old stories that live on, others are new or just being assembled as the person narrates. Some stories are quickly built up and may just as quickly disappear. The most important points about stories are: 1) they define who we are; 2) they guide us on our pathways through culture and social life, and 3) they are always under revision.

Rorty[3] writes:

> *All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives… they are the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives.*

In a positivist frame of understanding, people's stories are just stories, they always have to be assessed against "the facts". The positivist is constantly thinking, "how do I know whether or not what you are telling me is 'true'?" This kind of thinking assumes that there is a general standard for truth—a universal guideline or one true reality against which everything can be assessed. This is a claim which constructivism rejects.

Constructivists favour the multiple realities assumption. So, constructivist listening is credulous

listening. The assumption is that what a person says, the story they tell, the personal account they give, is true for them. It expresses some aspect of their personal reality.

Of course there are instances of deception and memory can be faulty. However, from a constructivist perspective, in a preponderance of instances, the best way to find out what is going on in a person's life is to ask them. And, when they tell you, listen to their telling as they tell it without simultaneously trying to judge its veracity. From a constructivist perspective, an individual's telling should not be taken as an account of "truth" or a statement of objective facts, but as an interpretative account of the "meaning and sense of my life".

Generally speaking, most people who seek counselling do so due to the fact that they are partially or wholly denied membership or satisfactory participation in some aspect of social life.

What the constructivist tends to believe is that our best hope for a better life, solution, or self is to redescribe our lives and concerns through stories which employ new words and which make new meaning. New stories may lead to new actions. Through the telling and retelling of stories, we may be persuaded to make non-linguistic changes. Our words and stories become incarnated in body, empowering of action and cultural forms. In other words through the reflective telling of stories [this is what is happening for me] not only can individuals come to different perspectives and ways of understanding, but they may also perform new actions, produce more and better products, and even come to use their bodies differently.

Practical tools in working with stories

I will begin this section by reminding readers of the need to be cautious about searching for a formula method of working with clients, especially in regard to working with client stories. It is well to keep in mind that clients are unique in many respects, they are changing in their own ways of living irrespective of whether or not they are in a process of counselling, and they are under the influence of many cultural influences outside of counselling.

Counselling is primarily concerned with matters of choice and responsibility, values and perceptions, information and self-knowledge. Most problems in counselling arise as an aspect of connectedness and relation.

Generally speaking, most people who seek counselling do so due to the fact that they are partially or wholly denied membership or satisfactory participation in some aspect of social life. They wish to change their status from "one who can't" to "one who can" be an eligible participant. They hope that the counsellor will be able to do something with them that will result in their being able to participate more fully or satisfactorily in some aspect of social life. Often this means something like gaining entry

into a training or educational program, becoming eligible for financial assistance, gaining a place in the job market, achieving a satisfactory relationship in their family, or in some other way gaining more, or better, eligibility to participate in social life. I will describe some of the specific procedures which a counsellor can employ when working with client stories.

Procedure I: Extend empathic understanding.

The most important precondition of all for working with clients and their stories is the counsellor's commitment to the importance of reflective self-knowledge in solving problems—not only for clients but for herself also.

Counsellors should show a keen, intelligent interest in their clients, but should refrain from theorising or intellectualising about the clients' problems. It is essential to try to convey or even teach an attitude to the client—this attitude **must truly be the counsellor's own. The attitude is one in which a broadened understanding of oneself is encouraged.**[4]

The counsellor's own interest should be directed to what the client is experiencing and conveying through her story. Not only _what_ the client is experiencing but _how_ the client is experiencing her life and concern and how the client is interpreting her own experience. The counsellor should guard against beginning to think about "how is this to be 'fixed'?" for such thoughts will only close off attempts to understand what is going on for the client. Even more importantly, rushing to "fix" closes off the client's impulse to understand her own concern.

Generally, extending an attitude of empathy requires that the counsellor refrain from either blaming the client or praising her for what she thinks, feels, does, or says. Rather, the counsellor should encourage the client to reflect on the **advantages or disadvantages of the mode of functioning being discussed.**

> *Can you see any differences in the way your child acts when you speak either softly or loudly to her at bedtime?*

> *When you go to a job interview and say to the interviewer that you don't have any work experience, how do you think that affects your chances in the job application?*

Asking clients about advantages and disadvantages (as they see it) and about assumptions on which they are basing their expressions are ways of helping them to achieve useful self-insights and knowledge of their own actions in a specific context.

People often dimly know things about themselves or their relationships that they have never before put into words. Verbalizing previously unexpressed self-knowledge makes that knowledge more avail-

able for use in coping with worldly concerns. In this way not only does the client begin to get a better understanding of her situation but so does the counsellor.

A kind of **friendly bond** can be achieved between counsellor and other through the **articulation of self-insights**. This establishes the basis for working on the specific problem which the client is describing in her story. The client gets an "ally" who understands her—who she is, what she is, what she is struggling with and trying to achieve, and how she functions in her everyday living.

In building an extended attitude of self-understanding, the counsellor must exercise caution and refrain from trying to persuade the client that she is a) someone she is not, and b) that she can do something which she believes she cannot do. Imperatively, the client needs the counsellor's (unspoken) permission to accept who she is—at the moment. Further, on the grounds of this acceptance, a counsellor can nudge the client to appreciate how large a task self-acceptance often is, but how important it also is in laying the groundwork for moving forward in life.

> *Certainly you are feeling uncertain and confused. But uncertainty is not necessarily*
>
> *a bad thing. We can take steps toward sorting out your confusion and see if you can*
>
> *get some benefit from it. This is something we can work on together.*

By offering herself as an ally, the counsellor is making an authentic gesture and not just remaining indifferent or playing the empty game of "togetherness". In order to form a partnership based on empathic attunement, the counsellor must take a modest view of her own potential influence on the client's problem, beyond establishing the conditions for empathic understanding and must be prepared to make mistakes and tolerate uncertainty herself about what is best for the client.

Perhaps the most important precondition of all for working with clients and their stories is the counsellor's commitment to the importance of reflective self-knowledge in solving problems—not only for clients but for herself also. Certainly there are other important ingredients in problem-solving—accurate and useful information, new skills and concepts, more effective relationships, cultural knowledge and others. Yet the value of all of these, and the extent to which they will be utilised, rests upon a foundation of sensible and accessible self-knowledge.

Procedure II: Mapping influences of the problem on the client and vice versa

One of the efforts of the constructivist counsellor is to convey to the client that **the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem!** Problems influence the person, and the person can influence the problem, but problems are seldom an intrinsic aspect of the person, or an aspect of the personality of the individual. In fact many times, what keeps an individual from taking steps to extricate herself from some difficulty is exactly that she thinks (construes) her own personality to be inadequate or deficient is some crucial respect. A few sentences which indicate this are:

> • *Something is the matter with me, I always make the wrong decision*
>
> • *No matter what anyone says, I just don't think I am up to learning*
>
> • *When anything goes wrong, I always feel I am to blame*

Instead of seeing the problem as a thing in itself, the individual internalises the problem and makes it part of self.

Externalising

One strategy for counteracting this disempowering manoeuvre on the part of clients is called "externalising"[5] the problem. Externalising means to encourage individuals to "objectify" their problems and place them (imaginatively) at a distance so that the client is more free to talk about how the problem can be influenced by their own thinking and actions, and, conversely, can gain some insight into how the problem is influencing them.

One way I use externalising is to say to a client:

> *Let's make a map of you and your problem and life situation. Put yourself here on*
>
> *this piece of paper. Now put your problem somewhere on the paper. Now fill in other*
>
> *people who are involved in your concern.*

As the mapping proceeds, the other often sees that the problem is not inside of themselves but in a relation with others or some aspect of the environment. The mapping process itself is a tool for externalising.

Another way I use externalising is to say to the client:

> *Well, we seem to have a pretty good idea of your concern and what you have tried to*
>
> *do so far. Now I wonder if you could do a little experiment. Let me tell you what it is*
>
> *and then you can decide whether or not you are ready to do it. What I would like to*
>
> *see you do is imagine that you are a person from Mars who has been listening in on*
>
> *our discussion. This Martian (which is you) is one smart fellow. Now what does the*
>
> *Martian have to say about this situation of yours which we have described?*

Or alternatively I may say:

> *You've done a really good job of telling me about the trouble you are trying to deal*
>
> *with, yet neither of us seems to know just what to do. I wonder if you could try an*
>
> *experiment. You know, you are more familiar with your situation than anyone else,*
>
> *including me. The problem is, you feel so wrapped up in your concern that you can't*
>
> *think about it very well. What I would like you to try is this. Using your imagination,*
>
> *place yourself outside of the situation in the role of a witness. You know what a*
>
> *witness does, watches carefully and sees all of the important details and then reports*

*them. However a good witness is kind of objective and doesn't get emotionally in-
volved in the scene. So try to take the role of witness and look back on your situation
without feeling overwhelmed by your own feelings... Just notice what is going on,
what seems to be helping and what isn't. Then you can come back and make a report
to us.*

---

*Recall the bitterest failures in your life and examine each of them. See
that... these failures are not your own self... see to it that you are free from
them... Only when you can relinquish them can you really be free and no
longer assailed by them.*

Or alternatively, I say:

*You have mentioned several times how irritated you feel when your mother calls you.
You just can't seem to stop that critical voice in your head from making you say very
unpleasant things to your mother. You'd like to get along better with her, but between
her acting so much like a "mother", which irritates you, and your reaction to her,
you can't figure out how to get off on a better foot with her. You can see that the
irritation is the main influence on you—the question for you is: What do I do about
this irritated feeling? What I'd like you to try for the moment is this: Imagine that
there is nothing at all wrong with you except that you keep losing the battle with that
devil, irritation. What I'd like you to consider doing is tonight, when you are home,
take out a piece of paper and write a letter to "irritation". You can think of it as
something in itself, not a part of you. Tell it what you have always wanted to get
across concerning this irritation. Tell it whatever you like, how you plan to get the
best of it, what you are going to do, how you will feel once it is gone, and how you
think getting rid of it will influence your relationship with your mother. You might
also try telling irritation that since you have decided that you are able to more or
less accept your mother the way she is, there is no basis for the existence of irritation
any more and you are ready to throw it away. I wonder it you are up to writing such
a letter?*

The procedure of externalising is similar to Robert Assagioli's concept of 'dis-identification'
in which clients are encouraged to withdraw ego-investments in certain kinds of problems. This allows

them to deal with problems at arms-length and thus to be in a better position to both resist the influence of the problem and to exert influence on the problem.

I have heard it argued that externalisation is contradictory to the notion of self-responsibility, that it encourages individuals to disclaim responsibility for their problems and their actions. I have not found this to be the case. When externalisation seems appropriate, and when the person is ready and willing to try the procedure, my experience in using it has been just the opposite. What I have found is that when the client is able to "externalise" the concern, the quality of the client's critical thinking improves, the client is enabled to say things she has wanted to say but feared saying, and the effect on the client has generally been empowering and disentangling.

I am reminded of what the Vietnamese author Thich Nhat Hanh[6] has written about separating yourself from your difficulties in order to gain freedom to act:

> *Recall the bitterest failures in your life and examine each of them. See that... these*
>
> *failures are not your own self... see to it that you are free from them... Only when you*
>
> *can relinquish them can you really be free and no longer assailed by them.*

Procedure III: Use mindfulness as a counselling stance when listening to stories

It is all too easy for counsellors and other helpers to get in a rut and take too much for granted about those they help. Counsellors may be rushed and expected to do too much, they may become tired and discouraged and not have opportunities to re-fuel their energy, and they may simply lose sight of what their mission is and succumb to pressures to be "processors" or "administrators" rather than counsellors.

Under this mental condition, there is a strong tendency to operate from a single perspective, get trapped in categories, and display "automatic" behaviour that does not adjust to differences. I have heard counsellors say: "I just don't have time to listen to clients' stories. I have to get them in and out of my office". To me this indicates not a counselling stance, but a processing stance. A shorthand way of describing this type of mental state is "mindlessness"[7].

A mindless perspective cultivates a number of undesirable effects. First, it contributes to a narrow self-image by adopting a single category description of self—"I am only a housewife", for example. Mindlessness also allows us to compartmentalize uncomfortable thoughts—"after all she is only a little girl, she will soon get over her parents' separation." Mindlessness can contribute to a loss of control. The alcoholic who claims that drinking is 'genetic' is giving up any personal control he might exercise over his addiction.

Finally mindlessness leads to a failure to utilise resources (they are not noticed due to a single-minded attitude) and stunted personal potential—"Oh, I just know that I could never do that!" A single

perspective often results in premature or habitual cognitive commitments—the doors of the mind are closed because alternatives are foreclosed rather than searched for.

By contrast, I will elaborate on Ellen Langer's[8] concept of "mindfulness" which is a frame for understanding which is quite compatible with the constructivist perspective and which can help counsellors remain alert to the client's story. Mindfulness is a perspective or state of mind which characterises a "wide-awake" counsellor and which the counsellor can promote with clients. Under ideal conditions, both counsellor and client approach each other as well as the client's story and problem mindfully.

"Why is it that there are so many people in the world who are expecting
me—and trying to make me—to be somebody other than who I am?"

I will identify five principal elements of mindfulness and suggest their value in counselling—especially when working with clients' stories. Remember that mindfulness is a state of mind which I am advocating for counsellors. It is also a state of mind which counsellors can model and promote for clients.

1. **Active creation of new categories** [descriptions, meanings or actions—for example, an illness may be "painful and worrisome"; it may also be an opportunity for a "fresh start"].
2. **Openness to new information** [especially the willingness to be receptive to new information which is in conflict with already held information or knowledge].
3. **Considering alternative views** [this is complementary to the constructivist perspective of multiple realities].
4. **Recognising contextual influences and connectedness** [this leads counsellors to ask such questions as:
   Who else is involved in your decision? When do you experience this as a problem? Can you fill me in on the bigger picture? Are you trying to solve this by yourself, or there other people in on it too?
   [This element reminds us that we are always situated in a specific context and that will have an influence on how we define a problem, as well as what we try to do about it; and it indicates important constraints, resources and opportunities which are implicated in our concerns and which we should try to recognise. Perhaps more than anything else, the counsellor should note that each client story arises out of the client's perception of the situation in which the concern or story is located].
5. **Valuing process over outcome** [most counsellors are familiar with clients who are so fixed on getting to a certain goal or outcome that they literally cannot see the steps which are most likely to get them where they want to go; or cannot see the futility and impossibility of trying for the fixed goal they have chosen even before seeing the counsellor].
   The task of the counsellor is to respectfully and patiently try to bring their attention to the process of problem-solving. How is the client experiencing this concern; what are some alternative routes; what are advantages and disadvantages of various steps which might be taken; are con-

straints identified; where is the client now in relation to where she wants to be—and what lies between these two points as a process with small steps, experiences, and adjustments. Of course it is important to have a reasonable goal—however, it is equally important to pay attention to the ways in which the goal can be achieved, especially with reference to the client's skills, values, perceptions and life experience].

6. **Respecting individual differentness and cultural diversity**. [I remember reading a line in a novel once in which the speaker says, "Why is it that there are so many people in the world who are expecting me—and trying to make me—to be somebody other than who I am?" One of the unfortunate outcomes of much psychological training of counsellors and other helping professionals has been to teach them to use classifications (usually denoting deficit or abnormality) and to teach them to think in terms of averages (especially in psychometrics). I realize that I am repeating what I have said earlier, but one of the most profound keys to successful counselling is become evermore sensitive to individual differences. Often the most minute difference or distinction which the counsellor perceives turns out to be the most important factor in both a better understanding of the other and the development of more valuable solutions.]

I will have more to say about the issue of recognising, and appreciating cultural diversity later on in the sections on "culture-centred counselling" and "counselling First Nations people".

Procedure IV: Work with the client in a cooperative way to edit (reconstruct)(re-author)(make) revised or new stories which are preferred alternatives to old stories

Not long ago a client of mine who began our counselling process with the following story (in a nutshell):

> *I am an immigrant who cannot find employment in what I was trained for in my*
>
> *country of origin. I have gone to school and learned a new occupation. However, I*
>
> *seem to have failed in that also since I have recently been laid-off. I am very discour-*
>
> *aged and don't know what to do. I have a partner and a small child and have saved*
>
> *up a little money but I seem to find a blind alley wherever I turn. What do I do?*

This is definitely a story of discouragement and marginalization. We had several counselling sessions in which she and I reviewed her critical life experiences and developed a map of where she is now, where she would like to be in the future and what were some activity projects she could do to move herself in that direction. Her parting story to me was:

> *I know how frustrated I have been about not being able to pursue my original occu-*
>
> *pation but I have to move on. What I know from that period in my life is that I have a*

good ability to study and to write. What I realise from looking over the highlights of

my life is that ever since I was a little girl, I have wanted to be a writer—someone

who could write technical reports, maybe fiction. My family would not let me and

insisted that I go to school and learn an occupation with a guaranteed income, which

I did. But I really did not want to do that and anyway it has not worked out for me as

an immigrant. When I look ahead, I can see myself as a writer and I am able to learn

more about how to write now. I have a little money to spend on training myself and

my partner has an income to support us. This is a chance for me to try and realise a

dream I have nursed inside of myself for many years. It may or may not materialise,

but at the moment that is not the most important thing. What is most important to me

is that I get started in a direction that has a strong personal meaning for me and

which I can put myself into.

This second, alternative story has been re-constructed from one dominated by discouragement to one in which hope, personal meaning and new direction are prominent. In support of this story the client and I had constructed three personal activity projects for her to do. There is a writer's guild in the city and they have a group for beginning writers. She made an arrangement to begin attending the guild meetings and arranged to meet one of the group members (whom she already knew) for coffee before attending the first meeting. Her second project consisted of making arrangements for enrolling in a writing course in a college in the community. Her third activity was to take the map and critical incident list which she and I had developed in the counselling sessions and use them in discussion with her partner so that she could confirm his support and understanding of how her new future was shaping up.

I will conclude this chapter by describing some guidelines for the counsellor to consider following when working with clients to reconstruct their stories (or fragments of story).

Am I able to carry on a conversation with this person and allow my view

of her to change as she tells me her story, or have I already made up my

mind about her and her concern and what she should do? I wonder what it

is about myself that makes me need to have these firm views of her?

Guideline 1: Maintain your attentive interest or curiosity in the client and what the client is saying.

It is helpful and liberating to realise that the client actually knows much more about her life than you do, and that you can be in a stance of "not knowing" and remain receptive and open to being

"taught" by your client and her stories. Enter into the conversation with acknowledgements: *[that must have taken a lot of courage to do that] [that is something from your own original culture that you are not sure what to do with here];* and with meaning-generating questions: *[So what do you think you learned from the last job interview that will help you in your next one?] [I'm wondering, you say that you may put your child in daycare, what does that mean for you and the rest of the family?]*

[You say that you have lost your job but have not told anyone in your family. How is that for you, keeping it a secret?] [Earlier in your story you mentioned your sister, where does she fit into this picture?]

Questions such as these can help fill in missing pieces or meaning in the story. They also cultivate a bond of common interest between you and the client.

It is also very important to frequently paraphrase or recap what you have understood so far from your client. You do this by saying something like: *I want to tell you what I understand from you so we can both see if I am getting your story the way you mean it*—and then give a brief and concise summary of the main ideas, incidents and feelings your client has given you. You can almost always tell if you are on your client's track by the way she responds to your paraphrase. If you client replies with "yes, that's it", or "exactly", etc., you know that have captured the essential meaning of her story. You must be prepared to be corrected by your client if you have not quite gotten it right and adjust your understanding according to what your client tells you.

Guideline 2: Maintain a respectful, compassionate attitude toward the client.

With some people this is easy; and with others it is very difficult. I have found the following ideas helpful to me in my efforts to remain respectful and compassionate:

- Remember, how anyone is, is how that person has learned to be. If I can know the kind of life experiences this person has gone through, I may be more compassionate and accepting of his ways.
- I don't have to approve, or even like, another to maintain a compassionate and respectful attitude toward that person.
- Why am I coming to such a quick conclusion about this person—could it be a blind spot in myself?
- Am I able to carry on a conversation with this person and allow my view of her to change as she tells me her story, or have I already made up my mind about her and her concern and what she should do? I wonder what it is about myself that makes me need to have these firm views of her? Remember that the nature of dialogical conversation is that both parties must be willing to be changed by what is said and heard.

Counselling at its best is an empowering process. The client is enabled and strengthened in his search for solutions and greater eligibility to participate in social life.

Guideline 3. Treat everything as information.

It is essential to notice much more than just what the person says when talking with you. Notice the silences (and respect them), notice how things are said—tone of voice, unusual words, facial expressions, hand gestures, body posture. Also notice appearance—clothes, jewellery, physical conduct in the counselling space, and so on. Does the person act with deference, aggressiveness, withdrawal, suggestively, with a willingness to engage with you in conversation, or is she reticent and unwilling, or cautious about speaking. Sometimes when I sense that the person is hesitant about talking, I will speak a little about how I often feel out-of-place in strange surroundings and ask the person how he feels about coming to my office. And rather than moving right to the client's concern, I try to have some conversation about other things which I imagine the client is more willing to talk about—family, how the client got to my office, a recent event in the community which everyone seemed to be interested in, etc.

Guideline 4. Do not interpret a client's refusal to enter easily and quickly into conversation with the counsellor as "resistance".

From a constructivist point of view, the concept of "resistance" is not useful. In conventional counselling and therapy literature there are numerous discussions about what to do with the resistant client or the reluctant client. Instead of thinking of a client who is unwilling to engage with you as resisting, it is more productive to assume that they are not ready for engagement and turn your attention to redefining the counselling session as one of the client not being ready to engage and **try experimenting with ways of helping the client to get ready for engagement**. When persons are suspicious of you as a counsellor or do not wish to converse or act cooperatively, they always have good reasons for acting this way—reasons based on their previous life experience.

Generally, they have learned to be cautious in situations and with people who attempt to impose behaviours, information, and requirements on them. They may well imagine that is exactly what you intend to do. Unfortunately, that is just what many counsellors proceed to try and do. When the client is non-responsive, then the counsellor is tempted to label (blame) the client as "resistant".

A much better interpretation is to assume that the client is only acting sensibly, based on their life experience, and is not ready for engagement. Then the counsellor can turn her attention to the dynamics of helping the client to become ready. This is fostered by a respectful attitude on the part of the counsellor, perhaps a prudent self-disclosure about how new situations are often threatening to her also, and a willingness to search for common ground which the client is willing to become engaged in. Sometimes sharing tea, coffee or a coke prior to taking up the client's concern will help with readiness. Also admitting that the situation is not easy for either the client or the counsellor is sometimes useful.

This is another variation of the "person first, problem second" principle. The counsellor should use her self-awareness to sense any feeling of "win-lose" attitude toward the client and not contribute to a pointless oppositional dialectic in which the counsellor tries harder and harder to get through to the client and the client tries harder and harder to see that this does not happen.

Guideline 5. Be constantly on the lookout for client strengths.

Counselling at its best is an empowering process. The client is enabled and strengthened in his search for solutions and greater eligibility to participate in social life. A "diagnostic" attitude on the part of counsellors and other helpers tends to reinforce a search for deficits, limitation, things about the client or the client's ability or attitude that are not adequate, or may even be pathological. Our best stepping stones and what we can build on in life are our personal resources and experiences where we have been successful and adequate to the requirements of a particular circumstance or challenge. There is an old cliché: "If you think you can, you very likely can; if you think you can't, you almost certainly can't."

It is absolutely essential to keep in mind that no matter what happens in the counselling session, when the client leaves and goes out into social life, whether or not he is successful in applying what he and the counsellor have agreed upon in counselling will, in the end, depend upon the client's resilience, persistence, desire for change, and cultural common-sense. It is the client who actually has to implement, negotiate, and persist in effecting solutions, applying insights, and coping successfully in social life. Therefore the more the insight or plan which the counsellor and client work out together is rooted in the client's strengths, and culturally sensible ways of behaving, the more likely are chances for adherence and success.

Some self-reflective questions to help the counsellor remain vigilant for client strengths are:

- *Am I listening for client failures or client successes in life?*
- *Who are some other people in this person's life who may have witnessed this person coping successfully and may recognise her strengths?*
- *Am I acknowledging any "good" experiences which the client is telling me about?*

A counsellor should be careful not to translate a client's story

from everyday vernacular into professional terminology.

Guideline 6: Asking meaning-generating questions.

Generally, we can ask people about the actions which they take in life, or which others take toward them; and we can ask them about what actions, events, and experiences mean to them. Meaning-generating questions can be directed toward the past *[So, when your brother left home, what did that mean for you?]*; toward the present *[Now that both you and your husband are working, what does that mean for your relations with your daughters?]*; or toward the future *[if you were able to get a job braiding hair which you learned to do from your grandmother in Senegal, what would that mean for you?]*. Other examples of meaning-generating questions are:

- *Your husband's parents are coming to live with you. What are the implications for you?*
- *You may have to take a course in computing. What would this mean for you in the rest of your daily life?*
- *So your son may have to go to school now in another town. How will that effect you?*
- *What does having to have an operation on your thyroid mean to* you?
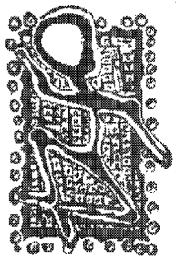
Guideline 7. Using language that is sensible for your clients.

A counsellor should be careful not to translate a client's story from everyday vernacular into professional terminology. It is best to stay, as much as possible, in the everyday vernacular. For example if a client says: "I have to wash my hands many times every day," the counsellor should not say: "Oh, you are an obsessive-compulsive." It is more sensible to say something like: "What makes that necessary?", or "How do you account for that?" It may well be that the individual is simply concerned with cleanliness during food preparation or is working at a hand-soiling job like auto-repair.

In addition to using everyday vernacular, the counsellor can make generous use of questions that ask for examples: "And what is an example of the conflict you are telling me about?"; questions that ask for a description of function: "How does that work in your family?"; questions that ask for metaphors: "What is your job like—can you think of a word to describe your experience at work?"; and, of course, meaning-generating questions.

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REFLECTIONS...

CHAPTER 8
DECIDING, PLANNING, AND
CO-CONSTRUCTING PERSONAL PROJECTS

Rather, the important thing is to see the old in a new light. ~M. Balinit~

The objective is to find self-help strategies which are acceptable and practicable. ~N. Peseschkian~

Once a client and counsellor have explored the client's life-space and a common understanding has been reached about the client's concern, Once a counsellor has gained entry into the life-space of the other, and a common understanding has been reached about the client's concern, then the task begins of working toward a solution, resolution or way of coping with the trouble which the client is experiencing.

Typically, this search will have two parts. First will be the arriving at a choice or personal decision about what route or strategy to take in moving from the situation which the client is now in to a more desirable or preferred future situation. The second part will be the planning and constructing of a personal project which designed to aid clients in moving towards their preferred goals. I use the word "personal" deliberately to emphasise the point that clients should be empowered by the process of designing and implementing a project. This means that a project must be meaningful, sensible, and one to which the client can feel committed and believe that he or she has the ability to carry it out.

The importance of personal projects and activities

Once a decision/choice (or tentative choice) has been reached, then the individual and counsellor must plan, and organise or "construct" a personal project for the client to carry out and which will move the client toward her preferred future.

A personal project is an activity or set of activities which the client engages in to make progress toward her goal. "Activity" can be either mental (such as thinking or reflecting) or action (such as reading a book, going to a job interview, learning to use a computer, or discussing with colleagues). Many projects are both mental and physical. For example, an individual may decide to re-arrange the furnishings in her home. The decision is a mental activity. Suppose that she then draws a layout of where she wants the pieces of furniture to be moved. This is both mental (visualizing) and physical (making a design), and finally she moves the furniture (physical). Of course, values and emotional feelings are also very much a part of deciding, planning and acting.

Conversation and reflection are two important activities by means of which client and counsellor construct the interview and carry out other activities which are in the best interests of the client.

The value of personal projects and activities is supported by the constructivist assumption that it is through meaningful acts that a person creates both self and relationships. Further, it is through meaningful activity that information is converted into useful knowledge.

One of the purposes of counselling as defined in this book is to <u>activate</u> clients—that is, to assist them in finding and creating meaningful activities by means of which they can become more eligible to participate in some aspect of social life such as work, learning, health maintenance, leisure, training, and family life. Personal projects are the primary method for revising clients' stories about what their difficulties are and what they wish to achieve that will be in improvement in the way they are experiencing their lives.

Before going on to a discussion of how to co-construct personal projects with clients which they can carry out outside of the counselling sessions, I wish to say a little about the activities of the counselling session itself. First, counselling as a process is a co-constructed project—an attempt by two people to work together in order to solve problems in living which one is experiencing. Second, probably the single most important activity of the counselling interview is "helpful conversation", or "counselling dialogue".

Typically the counsellor has more linguistic proficiency and is more reflective than the client. Nonetheless, both client and counsellor must contribute to the conversation in order that meaningful exchanges can occur. It is largely through the conversational activity of the counselling session that relevant personal and social realities are formulated, articulated, negotiated, and understood. Clarifying questions, articulation of emotional feelings, unambiguous descriptions of episodes and situations, differentiation of needs, developing common ground and common understanding and the production of stories—all are made possible through the conversational activity of counsellor and client.

A second important activity of the interview is reflection. This is an activity which is mental, but which can be greatly influenced by another person. For example, the counsellor can prompt reflectiveness on the part of the help-seeker by asking questions such as:

How does the information affect you personally?

And the meaning of X for you is?

When you think about making that decision, what comes into your mind?

The counsellor can also support reflectiveness by underlining the value of self-knowledge and by the tactic of pointing out incidents in her own life where her reflections were very important and helped her in making decisions or in planning. To recap, conversation and reflection are two important activities by means of which client and counsellor construct the interview and carry out other activities which are in the best interests of the client.

Decision-making and planning

In developing personal projects, two important preliminary activities are decision-making and planning. A choice or decision—I am using the term "decision" as synonymous with "choice" in this discussion—is a kind of psychological motor. Once a person decides on a course of action, the natural result—if not blocked—is movement toward a preferred goal or purpose and movement away from other less desirable goals or states.

People develop a knack for postponing decisions—they can think of a

thousand ways to procrastinate or of leaving things up to chance or fate.

A choice of a particular goal always cuts off other goals which often entails some degree of sacrifice. For example, if a client decides to take a training course at night, this means giving up time with family. Or if a person decides to move to another community, this often means giving up close friendships. It is extremely important to realise that a choice always provided both impetus toward a goal (motivation) and pain or loss—something must be given up. This is why so many people cannot bring themselves to make a choice and adhere to it. They want the advantage of what the choice may bring, but they are loathe to give up what the choice demands they sacrifice. The result is a kind of decision-paralysis which the counsellor and client must try to identify and work through.

Decision-making is both an art and a science—it helps to use both intuitive knowledge and rational thought in making decisions. The person who actively decides is exerting some degree of control over her own life. Of course some decisions result in good outcomes, others not so good. Certain people develop a knack for postponing decisions—they can think of a thousand ways to procrastinate or of leaving things up to chance or fate, as they say.

There are several ways to judge whether or not a choice seems to be sound or good. One way is to consider whether or not a decision is sound is to ask: "Does this decision appear to make sense in the context of the person's overall situation and life story?" Or does it seem out of place and not related to the purpose which the individual wishes to pursue?

A second way to evaluate the soundness of decisions is the common-sense method of waiting to see what kind of result comes from the decision. One drawback to the wait-and-see method of evaluating a decision is that it is often difficult or impossible to make a clear link between a specific decision and outcome. Any outcome in life may be the result of a host of influences, not just the decision alone. Also it often takes a long time to determine the value of the result of a decision. One may decide to marry, but the result of this choice may not be known for many years. Further, results may change. What seems like a good decision to marry after a year of blissful marriage, may be seen as a terrible decision five years later—after four subsequent years of marital turmoil. Although the procedure of measuring the goodness of a decision by its apparent result is often flawed, this is the method most people use.

If decision-makers take risks into account, a poor result
from a decision is something they are usually able to live with.

Another, and perhaps more effective way to judge the soundness of decisions, is to evaluate them in terms of the processes used in making them. From this perspective, a "good" decision is one in which most or all of the relevant aspects of the problem which fosters the need for decision have been considered. In other words "good" decision-makers carry out most, or all, of the essential steps in sensible decision making and do not use an unreflective or hit-and-miss approach to making important choices.

Unsound choices often result from 1) failure to recognise and use important information, knowledge or skills; 2) overlooking alternatives; 3) failure to commit; and 4) mis-interpretation of important factors in the problem situation for cultural, ideological, prejudicial or other reasons. This fourth factor especially can lead to failure to recognise obstacles which a specific decision and resulting action will very likely encounter.

A fifth factor which is important in some decision-making is the ability and willingness to recognise risks incurred with a decision. In spite of taking all the right steps sometimes a risk can materialise and render the decision invalid. If the decision-maker has thought of the risk beforehand and has proceeded anyway, then the fact that the decision was derailed by the risk materialising is usually not so traumatic for the risk-taker. If, however, the risk materialises 'out-of-the-blue' so to speak and is a total surprise, then the effect on the decision-maker may be rather devastating.

If a decision maker does not consider risks at all, then a bad outcome may result in the decision-maker feeling guilty, remorseful, or putting the blame on someone else for the failure of the decision. However, if decision-makers take risks into account (and even have contingency plans) then, a poor result from a decision is something they are usually able to live with. They knew the risk and chose to gamble. They are not surprised or made to feel stupid by not having anticipated the risk. They have fewer negative emotional reactions to cope with when things don't turn out as they prefer.

Tasks of sensible decision-making

What is meant by "sensible"? To be sensible, a decision must be:
*   personally meaningful to the client and to the counsellor,
*   be within the range of the client's ability and need,
*   formulated in terms and practical steps which are clearly understood by both counsellor and client,
*   linked to a hopeful, preferred future chosen by the client, and
*   open to revision and re-planning as may be required
*   formulated in terms which are clearly understood by both client and counsellor—using normal, everyday language, linked to the hopeful future of the client, and sense-making within the overall story of the client.

Task 1: Life-space exploration.

The first task of the client and counsellor in effective decision-making is to make sure that a general exploration and understanding of the client's life-space (context) has been done. The most frequent mistake I have observed in supervising counsellors is the tendency to move to decision-making and problem-solving before gaining an adequate understanding of the client's situation, including both personal and environmental influences. The "rush to solve" is a major deterrent to effective decision-making and planning and frequently results in a decision which the client cannot live with.

Task 2: Accepting the challenge of deciding.

When a person seeks a counsellor for the purpose of solving a life problem, the individual is often ambivalent, or unready to make a decision although at the same time the individual often says that "I must decide". In general, the counsellor can help by asking questions that prompt the client to test out her readiness to decide. Helpful questions are like the following:

What are the advantages to you of deciding? The disadvantages?

Do you have the time to discuss your decision now?

Have you had this kind of decision to make before in your life? What

happened then?

Do you feel ready to start looking for alternatives?

What seems to be holding you back from deciding?

Of course it is extremely important to disabuse the client of notions which he or she may have that the counsellor is going to make everything all right; that the counsellor is going to fix or solve the problem which the client is concerned about.

Task 3: Generating alternatives.

Sometimes the client will have already thought of several possible alternatives, other times the client will have only one possible decision in mind or will have nothing at all in mind. While the counsellor should exercise restraint and not impose alternatives on the client, there is nothing wrong

with the counsellor making suggestions about possible alternatives and their advantages and disadvantages. Remember that the counsellor and client are working in cooperation on this task and in the end the decision must be one the client can live with. Again the counsellor can ask questions like:

What are your goals in this problem—what would you like to happen?

Would you like to hear one idea I have?

Would you be interested in hearing how another person in a situation similar to yours came to a decision that worked for her?

When a counsellor has in impulse to make a suggestion to a client, it is essential to check with the client first. Find out if she wants to hear a suggestion before giving it. If she is not ready or doesn't want suggestions, then respect her wishes. The concept of "client-readiness" is a very good one to keep in mind during decision-making and problem-solving conversations.

Another mistake that can be made in the decision-making process is to evaluate alternatives prematurely. Ideally, it is better to first identify a number of options or alternatives, and then evaluate them. Evaluation of a single alternative tends to close off consideration of other options. Most experienced counsellors are all too familiar with clients who are fixed on "one-only solutions", or who tend to engage in black and white or "fixed" thinking to the detriment of mindfulness and examining a range of options.

Acting as a channel to useful information and resources
as the client has a need for new or more accurate data is a decision-
related responsibility which the counsellor should assume.

Task 4: Supporting client ownership and commitment to a decision.

Once a tentative decision has been reached or the most preferred option has been selected, then the counsellor and client should explore the degree to which the client feels that this is a sensible road to take and examine the degree to which the client feels that this is "my decision". To help in this testing of commitment, the counsellor may ask questions like:

What do you think the impact of this decision will be on you personally?

Who else is likely to be affected by your decision? What do you think their reaction will be?

If you go for this, how do you think you will feel about yourself as having made this decision?

Is there anything worrying you because you think it might get in your way and keep you from carrying through with your decision?

Suppose you take this decision and for some reason it doesn't work out. Have you thought of what you might do then?

Deep down, does this feel right for you?

To finish up this discussion on decision making, I will make a few more suggestions for the counsellor.

- Remember to keep a degree of tentativeness on your part.
- Any decision is up for revision or putting aside if warranted.
- No decision is forever. It is good to promote an experimental attitude with clients.
- Remember that you and your client are working hand-in-hand and you should do what you can to support the client's feeling that the decision is essentially hers. You can take credit for the process of decision-making but the credit for the decision belongs to the client. If you make a decision for another person and it doesn't work out, then you will quite likely be blamed—and rightly so.

    As in all other aspects of counselling, your best counselling tools are:
- careful, mindful listening
- respect for the other
- a cooperative relationship, and
- dedication to promoting self-responsibility.

Acting as a channel to useful information and resources as the client has a need for new or more accurate data is also a decision-related responsibility which the counsellor should assume. A counsellor cannot be expected to always have the best information immediately in hand. However, a counsellor should know where to find the information or what resource to refer the client to so that the client can secure the needed data.

Tasks of sensible planning

Deciding and planning go hand-in-hand. To plan is to organise a method (usually a set of activities) for carrying out an action or achieving a goal. Some people don't do much planning—they just leap. This is not a method which can be strongly recommended. At the other extreme are the over-planners who attend to so many details that they seldom get to a point of action and this approach does not come highly recommended either. Fortunately, over the years, we have acquired good knowledge of many of the characteristics of successful planners. Effective planners tend to:

- utilise both intuitive common sense and rational thinking,
- realistically determine that there is an actual opportunity to carry out their decisions and plans,
- have self-knowledge about their own personal resources, skills, knowledge and experience,
- have awareness of potential pitfalls and roadblocks to their plans,
- show a willingness to learn new skills and knowledge which decisions and plans may require,
- innovate and try something new rather than insisting on sticking to the "tried and true",
- value self-responsibility for choices and actions,
- try to have contingency plans in case the a decision or plan does not work out, and
- recognise that values and emotional experience are important factors in deciding and planning.

Many decisions and plans which are highly objective, logical and fact-based do not, in fact, work out. The person does not have a good "feeling" about the plan or is not emotionally invested in making the plan work; or the plan contradicts a basic life or cultural value of the individual.

Every plan is unique in some aspects. In fact the counsellor who develops skill in helping clients customise plans to fit their own particular needs, values, and experience will quite likely have quite a lot of counselling success. There are guideposts for a counsellor to follow in helping clients make plans. Guideposts are not fixed commands, nor should they be followed in lock-step fashion; they should be followed in a flexible and adaptive way. Over the years I have developed a set of questions which act as guideposts to help counsellors and clients move through decision-making and planning in a thoughtful and mindful manner. I may not use the exact words which I have written below, but the questions help me remember to cover these points with clients and to keep them in mind for myself.

WHAT IS YOUR PRESENT SITUATION?

If the counsellor and client have done a good job of exploring the clients life-space and the counsellor has listened to the client's story before getting to the point of trying to make a decision or plan, then the present situation should be known to both and understood by both in more-or-less the same way.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO BRING ABOUT?

What options have you already considered? What is your main goal? How would you like your life to be different? What kind of future do you prefer? (For example, a person who has just been laid-off from his job—does he want to undertake job search, training, apply for benefits, relocate, return to formal schooling, retire?)

WHAT ARE YOUR PERSONAL RESOURCES WHICH YOU ARE BRINGING TO THIS SITUATION?

What life experiences have clients had which might be useful now? What skills and training can they bring to bear in making plans and in carrying them out? (This is where having heard your client's story in some detail can help both of you to carry out an informal estimate of your client's personal resources and prior, relevant experience.)

WHAT OBSTACLES ARE YOU AWARE OF WHICH MAY INHIBIT YOUR EFFORTS TO CARRY OUT YOUR DECISION AND PLAN?

Environmental obstacles such as distance, lack of resource, no housing, etc.? Financial barriers? Prejudice—gender-based, ethnic, social class, race, age, disability? Barriers to action within yourself—lack of confidence, doubt, confusion, lack of cultural know-how, language, fear? Do you have past experiences, attitudes or ideas which are getting in your way and seem to be keeping you from moving ahead—and which you might be better off if you put them in a "trash bin"? Do you have self-defeating ideas which keep you from doing things on your own power? Some common self-defeating ideas are:

- I'm too old to learn new ways
- I have always done it this way, I'm not about to change
- I want you (the counsellor) to tell me what to do

- It's too late—there is nothing that can be done now
- No one understands me or my difficulty
- I've tried everything—nothing works
- No one ever gives me a fair chance
- If I just wait, things will get better sometime
- "They" won't let me
- I never do anything right.

Such self-defeating ideas contribute to feelings of hopelessness, victim stance, procrastination, drinking and drugs, and feelings of depression and worthlessness. Part of the counsellor's role during decision-making and planning is to be on the lookout for ways in which the other is using assumptions or self-defeating ideas to block progress in deciding and planning. By respectfully challenging such defeatist ideas, the counsellor can nudge clients into interpreting their situation and their own potentials and capacities differently. In this way the door can be opened to more alternatives and to the design of a plan more likely to be successful.

The client should be able to say, "I like this plan, I believe that the experience I have in carrying it out will be valuable for me, and I am willing to put myself into it wholeheartedly."

WHAT IS MISSING?

What do you need to do, find out, learn, acquire, in order to get from where you are now to where you want to be? Do you have the skills needed to achieve your goal? Is there a gap in your cultural know-how? Are you not able to sustain satisfactory relationships? Would it help to find other ways to interpret your situation? Would more social contacts, or community contacts, be helpful? Do you experience a lack of support for what you wish to bring about for yourself?

DOES YOUR PLAN MEET THE 3-P TEST? IS YOUR PLAN PREFERRED, POSSIBLE AND PLAUSIBLE?

One of the main obstacles which counsellors face in helping clients to devise workable plans is that the counsellor may either subtly or directly make a suggestion to the client which does not really fit the client's needs or abilities, but which the client nonetheless agrees to—for the moment. Subsequently, the client does not adhere to the plan—it was not a plan which the client owned as "her plan".

Decisions and plans should be "preferred" by the client over all other alternatives, if at all possible. This is why it is important to:

- cooperate and work jointly with a client (we are in this together)
- help the client to consider both advantages and disadvantages of all possible plans including the preferred plan,
- review with the client if she has both the personal and material resources needed for fulfilling the plan, or knows how and where to get them if they are obtainable.

Certainly not all decisions can be implemented nor are all plans feasible. Is this particular plan "possible"? Counsellors should take up this question carefully, and be aware that their own worries may cause them to be too conservative and end up telling clients that they have to be more "realistic". Sometimes a plan which does not seem possible to a counsellor turns out in fact to be possible for a certain client.

The realism of decisions and plans should be explored, however, in enough detail to satisfy both client and counsellor that the line of action which has been chosen can be seen as feasible. At a minimum this means that there is an actual opportunity to carry out the plan, that the plan is within the client's experience and ability, and that the plan is organised in a sensible manner.

Finally, we should ask of a plan: "Is this plan plausible". Some plans are possible, but not particularly plausible. A plausible plan: 1) suits the needs of the client; 2) is acceptable to the client; 3) has positive personal meaning for the client; and 4) is one which both client and counsellor find praiseworthy. Plausibility means that the client should be able to say, "I like this plan, I believe that the experience I have in carrying it out will be valuable for me, and I am willing to put myself into it wholeheartedly." It is not always easy to come by such a plan!

I will now describe the practical procedures which I use in developing a plan with a client—keeping in mind that the client's decision and plan together constitute the client's personal project.

Before beginning to design a plan, I try to make sure that the client and I have more-or-less the same understanding of the difficulty or dilemma which is confronting the client. In other words we have the client's story, or that portion of her story which seems relevant to our focus, in hand. It is very important to make a written record of the plan. It is possible to simply write the plan down in short sentences and notations. However I prefer to make a diagram or map of the plan. If the client seems willing I give her a piece of paper and pencil or pen and then we work our way through the following steps. If the client is unwilling or unable to do the paper work, then I do it myself—sometimes we trade back and forth. It is not necessary to follow a given order in doing the steps, and sometimes several steps will be made at once. The actual procedure should be adapted to the client and to your own communication style.

It is very important that when the planning discussion is completed,

the client has a clear understanding of what her next step is in starting

action on her personal project.

Step 1. Give a page of paper to the client and say, "In the middle of this paper, draw circle and put your name in it." This is where you are right now.

Step 2. Next I say the client, "Let's give your decision a name and put it in a circle on the paper also, and connect the two circles with a line."

Now we can begin to make a plan which you can carry out as a way of trying to reach your goal. We will try to show most of what decide about on the paper so that you and I both have a map to follow in implementing your decision.

Step 3. Next, I say: "You have a goal, what you would like to achieve, bring about, or a way in which you would prefer to be. Somewhere on this page, draw a circle and briefly write your goal in that circle. That is your preferred future."

Step 4 and 5. Next I and the client identify both the resources which the client has that would help achieve the goal, and the resources that are missing. More-or-less at the same time, we try to identify the obstacles which the client is likely to face. As we identify each resource and each obstacle, either the client or I place it somewhere on the map, and where appropriate, connect the item to other related items on the map.

Step 6. When we have mapped the goal, resources, obstacles and any other factors which either of us thinks important and relevant to the plan, we have a discussion about the realism of the plan. Is this possible, preferred, and plausible.

Step 7. When we are agreed that we have designed the best plan we can, and have constructed a "doable" personal project, then we agree on "the next step". It is very important that when the planning discussion is completed, the client has a clear understanding of what her next step is in starting action on her personal project. It should be one she wants to do, agrees to do, and has the ability to do. Counsellors should keep in mind that an individual can only do what he knows how to do. A person will sometimes agree to do something which, in fact, he does not know how to do and therefore the seeds of failure are sowed even before he leaves the counselling session. In addition, there may be a next step for the counsellor also. Sometimes a counsellor needs to get certain information, make a telephone call as an advocate for the client, or perform some other activity which is related to the facilitation of the client's project. This should be noted on the map also.

Step 8. When the planning discussion is completed, I then make a copy of our co-constructed plan (map) so that both the client and I have a copy to keep and use in future discussions as needed.

I will close with a few more suggestions for the counsellor which may help make the decision-making, planning and project co-construction sessions successful.

- Remember, you and the client are partners, you are in this together, you and your client are putting her decision and plan into a personal project which she prefers, which is sensible and feasible, and which she will have to be able to carry out. The client needs your assistance and your support, but in the end she must adopt and carry out the project herself.

- A plan is not a complete blueprint of a person's life—it is a sensible map of the key factors to be considered as you and the client understand the client's life situation, and indicates the next steps to be taken.

- Plans do change. Both counsellor and client should be prepared to make alterations as new events in life occur and should be prepared to get and use new information as needed.

- As a counsellor you should be able to adjust to both intuitive thinking and rational thinking. Some counsellors tend to over-rationalise planning. Too many details and too much insistence on logic. Individuals vary along this dimension and there are also cultural differences.

- Important considerations in planning are the degree to which the decision and plan are empowering, meaningful, and owned by the client. If you and your client have developed a plan based on a personal choice which the client sees as her own, and the plan included activities which are meaningful for the client and clearly related to the goal she is trying to achieve, and if she has the ability to carry out the activities, then you and the client have made a personal project which will have a good chance of meeting the client's needs and will give you the satisfaction of feeling that you have done a good job of counselling.

CHAPTER 9
A CONSTRUCTIVIST COUNSELLOR AT WORK:
A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT

By 1985 I began to have some doubts about both the models of counselling
offered to students and the way in which counselling was taught in most
university programs.

I became a counsellor in 1953. During my career as professor, researcher, and leader of the counselling programs at a Canadian University, I taught a variety of courses to counsellors, served as supervisor and mentor to persons studying for master's and doctoral degrees in counselling. I was editor of academic journals and wrote many articles and several books on counselling.

By 1985 I began to have some doubts about both the models of counselling offered to students and the way in which counselling was taught in most university programs. My doubts about counselling centred on the following two points. Counselling had become 1) dominated by individualistic, behaviouristic psychology, 2) and dominated by a Tayloresque perspective which stressed efficiency, reductionism, and the teaching of skills (Taylor's one-best-technique attitude). I saw that counselling as a practice was more and more taught along the lines of behaviour technology and bureaucratic efficiency. Teachers of counselling as well as the researchers on counselling, unwittingly endorsed a conforming, factory-like world view. Constructs such as meaning, consciousness, existential premises, cultural differences, and sociological perspective were non-existent in programs of counselling.

Most of the models of counselling and much of the teaching about counselling was firmly entrenched in North American middle-class values, the values of instrumental reason, and ethnocentricity. Most of the teachers of counsellors had been born into, and perpetuated, these same values, albeit unwittingly.

Meanwhile, the world around counselling was undergoing many rapid transformations. Intercultural contact was rapidly increasing. Old notions of progress and certainty were evaporating. The view that science would provide a good life for all and was the only accepted way to "truth" was crumbling.

Instead, more and more scientists and others were recognising the multiple realities principle and were beginning to see that truth is always partially constructed, not "found" and universal. Technology was making the basis of "factory-thinking" obsolete—although factory thinking continues to flourish to this day.

Flaws in behaviouristic thinking had become all too apparent to me. The reductionistic preference for micro-skill training and behaviouristic-oriented interventions seemed less and less appropriate given the kinds of clients and social worlds which confront counsellors in contemporary social life.

Meanwhile, counselling was continuing on its way, plagued by demands that it be more efficient, more economical, more attuned to market values, and more conformist. I began to think "something is wrong with this picture." When I attend professional and academic meetings, I am quite disheartened by the tenor of the discussions which I hear.

I have continued to work on a revision of counselling to make it more in tune with contemporary social life. I call this the New Look in counselling.

For example, I attended a meeting last year in which academics from all across the country had convened to discuss *important* issues in counselling. I could hardly believe my ears as I listened to the discussion of obsolete topics. What I was hearing was the same tired old refrains that I had been dissatisfied with nearly 30 years ago. Discussions concerning the definition of counselling; concerning the relation of counselling to clinical psychology and psychotherapy; concerning the pros and cons of certification of counsellors. While there may be some merit in such discussions, it is a bit like discussing what to have for dinner in the ship's salon when the Titanic is sinking.

There are dissident voices speaking for a reformed and revitalized counselling. Some of the dissident voices are also suspect (at least to me) for they seem to be enmeshed in perspectives such as transpersonal theory, new-age philosophizing, and popular psychology. These perspectives escape the confines of quasi-scientific, factory-like thinking but, from my point of view, they tend toward narcissism, fantasy, and often suffer from entrepreneurial zeal. Often they are exclusive and expensive and only provide temporary respite from stress-filled lives.

However, another more serious and promising movement toward reform of counselling is the attempt to use alternatives to psychology and to the "old science" paradigm as devices for informing the practice of counselling. Cultural studies, including interpretive interactions and reflexive sociology, literary theory in the form as advocated by Paul Ricoeur, philosophical thinking as advocated by Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Rorty and Charles Taylor and phenomenology which directs attention to "lived experience" are excellent sources of ideas for transforming counselling into a practice which is relevant for the 21st century.

Narrative methods of analysis and the use of "voice" also are beginning to appear in social science studies and some counselling journals. Thus there is a growing group of dissident voices which are beginning to tell new stories about counselling and how it should be practiced.

In the past decade I have continued to work on a revision of counselling to make it more in tune with contemporary social life. I call this the New Look in counselling or, SocioDynamic Counselling. In the paragraphs which follow I will describe a counselling scenario as a way of introducing some aspects of SocioDynamic Counselling, I will present some reflections which indicate more about how I think counselling must develop and why a revision is necessary. The reflections give some hints about how I have come to think about counselling from a New Look perspective. I will do so in a personal style, mostly describing what I think, and do, as I meet with a client. I will present several episodes in our counselling process, explain what transpires, and then reflect further on the episode. Of course much more is left out than presented. Perhaps a good title for this section is "To Know, and To Do."

Mikes meets a constructivist counsellor

(As you read the following, keep in mind that the terms:"New Look", "SocioDynamic", and "Constructivist" are used interchangeably and mean the same thing in this story.)

Episode 1

It is evening and I am in my study writing a report on a project for the Yukon Territorial Government. I hear the gentle falling of rain outside my window. I think "It's about time to quit for the day and go out onto the deck and see if enough rain has fallen for my garden" when the telephone rings. I answer and a man's voice says: "I have a friend who knows you and says that you might be able to talk with me about a problem I am having." I ask him what kind of problem he has and he says that it is about his work and future. His name is Mike. We talk for a moment. I explain how to get to my house and we agree to meet tomorrow at 10 a.m.

Reflection on Episode 1

Already a web of mutual influence has begun. I live in a city of over 200,000 citizens. Someone who knows me (former student? client? friend? colleague? neighbor?) has spoken to Mike and Mike has decided to speak with me. Humans are bound together in a web of relationships. We are who we are and what we are is largely due to the influence of the web of relationships of which we are an intricate part.

The fact that I am a person who will get a telephone call from someone who is looking for personal help is largely possible because of the many interlocking webs of relations which make up my history as a social being. My teachers, co-workers, writers, clients, family—all have had an influence on who I am and what I can do.

*I have learned that counsellors and psychologists who study case notes
too carefully and who try to get "background" information before seeing
clients are more likely to be bolstering their own assumptions, biases and
theoretical notions than preparing to meet the client with an open mind.*

For his part, Mike has acted—he has made a telephone call to me and by this act he has started to construct a relationship with me. As a self-responsible agent he has made the first negotiation move which will eventually bring us into a cooperative, working alliance. I, in turn, acted by offering a time and place for us to meet. Before his act we were total strangers. His initiation and my offer are examples of a relation "under construction."

Already three things are clear. First, I know that Mike will come into my sight as a focal point in a web of relations—whatever Mike and I come to in our discussion, I must remember that behind and around Mike are a community of others who influence and are influenced by whatever it is that Mike decides and does. I will take Mike to be a social being at least as much as a psychological being—just as I see myself as a social being with a particular social location (status, voiced position) in social life.

Second, Mike and I have the joint task of constructing a counselling relationship. We will do this as we speak and listen to each other. It is not possible to say ahead of time just what our relationship will be like, or should be like. What we construct will depend upon our intentions, our language ability, and our mutual capacities to carry on a conversation which focuses on Mike's trouble.

I know from my own experience that a great many influences will be at play when Mike and I negotiate our relationship: our respective social locations (statuses); our cultural memberships; our initial appraisals of one another; our respective sociological competencies (how astute are we in understanding social things which are at play in our lives and meeting?); our expectations of what can be done through counselling; our abilities to understand each other no matter what form of communication we use, and so on.

What I do know, without doubt, is that whatever relationship we achieve (and it is an achievement) will be exactly the one we construct.

Third, I know that Mike has encountered some aspect of his social life which he interprets as lacking solution and that the topic or problem seems beyond his ability and personal resources to repair. He has decided to seek help. However, I have no idea what he imagines "help" will be like.

My experience tells me that a great many people believe that someone else will be able to advise them or present a solution which will be useful to them and that they can receive help in a somewhat passive way. Of course I do not know if this is Mike's case. I try not to speculate about how Mike will be as a person and as a client. This way I maintain fresh eyes and fresh ears for my encounter with Mike. I have learned that counsellors and psychologists who study case notes too carefully and who try to get "background" information before seeing clients are more likely to be bolstering their own assumptions, biases and theoretical notions than preparing to meet the client with an open mind.

They also run the risk of seeing a "file" client rather than a living client.

Episode 2

At a few minutes after 10 a.m. I hear a car drive up and the sound of footsteps on my deck. The door bell rings as I go up the stairs from my study. I open the door to find a youngish man standing in front of me. I say, "Are you Mike?" and offer my hand for a handshake. He says, "Yes, I am Mike" and shakes my hand. I invite him in and we go downstairs to my study. I gesture to the chairs and sofa in my study and say, "I'll sit here by the computer and you sit where you'd like—either on the other chair or the sofa." We have taken up our face-to-face negotiation of how we are going to relate to each other. I try to offer a respectful and democratic arrangement. I choose my chair and he can choose his.

As I look at Mike he seems to be about 30 years old, with dark hair and dark eyes. His clothes are clean and simple—jeans, a short-sleeved shirt and a worn leather jacket. He does not sound like an original English speaker, but I am uncertain where the non-English accent is from—I imagine perhaps an Arabic country or Mediterranean.

Some people, and especially North Americans, like to immediately go into a discussion about what they want help with—others, such as aboriginal, Chinese, and some South Americans like a warm-up time of conversation first. I sense that Mike is watching me closely and perhaps it is best to build a bridge of some trust with him before we take up his concern. I ask him about what part of the city he lives in, something about his family, and how it was that he decided to call me. He asks me if I have a family and where they are. We are investigating each other, finding out some of our differences and perhaps some similarities.

In the process I find out that Mike is a Moroccan. His family of 12 brothers and sisters still live with his mother in Marrakech. His father, who was a house-builder, is dead. Mike immigrated to Canada eight years ago and has lived in Montreal, Vancouver, and this city. He lives alone and has worked in several restaurants as an assisting cook. In Morocco he had gone to technical school and studied engineering. He has had many different types of jobs, both in Morocco and in Canada.

In return for what I am getting from Mike, I tell him that I grew up on a sheep ranch in the United States and immigrated to Canada as a young man. He asks me if I am an "American." I say "no, I am a Canadian and this is my home." This brings a smile to his face but no words. I also tell him that I studied engineering for a while and worked as an assistant surveyor for the National Forest Service before I came to Canada. We speak a little more about each other's family. I tell him that my grandmother was Portuguese and we exchange a few comments about Portuguese and Moroccan food.

Reflection on Episode 2

These few minutes of conversation have been a negotiation of common ground (social reality) between the two of us. This has given me a chance to show a genuine interest in Mike as a person and has allowed him to see something of my personal side also. We have also had a chance to laugh together at several comments which we thought were funny. It is very important to me that Mike see that I live in everyday social life, just as he does. We also find out that Mike speaks French fluently, English less fluently, while I speak English fluently, French much less fluently. We are continuing to

negotiate our working relationship, constructing it with interpersonal attention, shared cultural knowledge, and felt trust.

Episode 3

I say to Mike, "Perhaps it is time for us to look at why you came to see me, a counsellor." I ask him is he has ever been to see a counsellor before. He says no, not in Canada. I briefly explain that it is my role to listen to his story, ask questions that will help us both understand how he can find a way to improve on his difficulty. I also say that he has a role of telling me what he thinks is important to know about his situation and his concern. I also say that we are in this together and that "two heads are better than one."

Mike is silent for a moment and then he says, "Well, you see, I've been in Canada for almost eight years now and I am not sure about my future—I don't know whether to stay here or not." I then say that it might be a good idea to map out the jobs he has had in Canada and that we can do this on a piece of paper. This will give both of us a picture of his worklife. He says that he is not much of an artist and doesn't think he can draw. I tell him it is not really drawing, it is more like making a diagram, putting circles and lines on paper. He agrees so I put a piece of paper and some coloured pens on the table in front of us. I then ask him to take one of the pens and draw a small circle somewhere on the page—"the small circle stands for you and the whole page is to be a map of how and where you have lived in Canada."

It is desirable to have a freeing encouraging perspective about mapping.
Sometimes only objects such as circles and squares are used. Other clients
like to use words, symbols, sentences and different colours for different
parts of the map.

Mike draws a circle near one edge of the paper and writes "Mike" in the circle. I ask him to draw another circle indicating where he lived when he got his first job and to give the job a title. In the next 20 minutes, Mike has produced a map of all of his jobs and the various locations he has lived in while working for the past 8 years. In front of us we have a web of Montreal, Quebec City, Edmonton, Vancouver, Whitehorse, Fairbanks, Alaska, and Victoria with jobs including five restaurant jobs, taxi driver, employee in a small electronics shop, and part-time employee in an immigrant settlement centre. While the map focuses on jobs and locations, it has a rich amount of other information such as comparative meaning of each of the jobs, reactions to living in different regions in the country, response of other people to his Moroccan ancestry and so on.

In a short time Mike and I have produced a tangible map of his "Canadian experience." It is only a

bare-bones picture, but it gives both of us a frame of reference about Mike's work life in Canada—a coherent frame of reference which neither of us had prior to the dialogue-cum-mapping activity.

Reflection on Episode 3

I am often asked if I always use mapping in the counselling session. I only use mapping when I sense that the client is ready and potentially interested in using this way of describing his situation. Otherwise I simply get the client's oral story. The more I have used mapping as a counselling procedure and thus gained confidence and experience with it, the more often I find that clients are able to join in a mapping activity. Now I seldom have a client who is unwilling or unable to do mapping.

I have found the activity of mapping to be extraordinarily valuable in counselling with nearly all clients. There are occasional clients with whom it has no application, but the majority find the activity both insightful and interesting. Some of the main values of mapping are:

- It is a way of making a public record of the self and activities of the self
- It is a cooperative, meaningful counselling activity
- It "activates" both counsellor and client
- Mapping produces a tangible "product" in the counselling interview
- Both client and counsellor achieve a clearer and richer picture of the client's life-space and the meaningful dimensions of that life-space including people, relationships, achievements, experiences, and activities
- Patterns of activity and relationships can be illuminated
- Obstacles, strengths, resources, and needs can be identified
- Various "voices" of the self are located.

It is important to recognise that virtually all aspects of a person's life, experience, or context can be mapped. Problems, relationships, the past, the future, needs, and many other features of social life can be mapped.

In mapping, the role of the counsellor is to suggest and guide the process of mapping. The role of the client is to provide the data—life information. Together the client and counsellor do the mapping activity.

Occasionally a client will not want to map but will provide the information if I do the actual map-making. I simply ask the client what to put on the paper, the client tells me and I do it. However, my own experience with mapping is that the process and the outcome are more valuable if the client places the information on the paper. When the counselling session is over, I urge the client to take the map (product)—if I want a copy, and I usually do—I make a photocopy for myself.

It is desirable to have a freeing encouraging perspective about mapping. Sometimes only objects such as circles and squares are used. Other clients like to use words, symbols, sentences and different colours for different parts of the map. I assume that every act which the client makes in mapping has meaning. I often ask questions such as "What does this line mean?" Or "Why are you using green for that object?" Together, the client and I investigate his life-space .

I have come to construe myself and my client as partners. We are in a problem-solving process together. We are actors in a cooperative endeavor. Each of us has something to contribute. The client

brings his life (present, past and future) with him to our meeting. He is the undisputed authority on his own life and all of his experiences which have formed who and what he is. He is an expert on his life. This does not mean that he is necessarily articulate or even fully conscious of all of his life experiences. It does mean that he is the source of meaning which we can utilize in our discussions.

On the other hand, I am the expert on the process of counselling. It is up to me to guide our investigation and our planning. With Mike as the carrier of his own life knowledge and myself as an expert on how counselling process can be achieved, we are equipped as a team to investigate and construct possible solutions to the problems he is confronting.

Episode 4

I now say to Mike, " This is a good map we have put together—it tells us at least part of your story of where you have worked and what you have done". You spoke earlier about being uncertain about what you should do and what kind of future you are wanting. Maybe we can turn to that and work from the map we have made." Mike says, "Yes, that's what I want to do—there are so many things to think about. I feel like I've got to decide." After a long pause he says, "I would really like to stay in Canada, but things have not been going so well for me."

The act of goal formulation means to me that one is in an active dialectical relation with one's context—being influenced by circumstances, attempting to influence circumstances and re-orienting yourself—which is usually continuing to change.

Reflection on Episode 4

In my early years as a counsellor and counsellor educator, I—like most other colleagues—gave lip service to the goal of self-responsibility and the importance of the client becoming more and more independent. However, I—and most other counsellors and colleagues—did not act so as to actually promote these goals. Counselling and the role of the counsellor were elevated to a professional, expert status. Counsellors learned about various personality theories and counselling and therapy models. In the process, they acquired a vocabulary (professional-scientific) which would alienate them from large numbers of clients.

In North America, most counsellors were socialized into an image of themselves as "scientist-practitioner". This image required allegiance to objectivity, rationality, control, testing, use of theoretical, abstract models of behaviour and personality, and reliance on "research results" for legitimization of counselling outcomes and procedures. Further, most counsellors took themselves to be experts in psychological problem-solving. This image still dominates counselling and counsellor training today.

In my counselling with Mike, I have a very different picture of what I am doing. Certainly I act professionally, in that I try to use all of my ability and knowledge to inform my counselling. I believe that I have an ethical responsibility to see that my client is not harmed by counselling—indeed, that he is given the best possible opportunity for improving his life situation or problem. And I believe that I have an ethical responsibility to establish a cooperative relationship with Mike which respects his privacy and integrity as a person.

I no longer think of myself as a practitioner-as-scientist. I now believe that counselling, just as most other activities and practices in social life are best guess activities. If we are serious about what we do, we gather evidence and data, consider them carefully, pay attention to what our experience has taught us, realise that there are very few or no absolutes in life, and then we make the best guess we can about what to do next, or what seems sensible for the person in trouble to do.

If we are honest, we admit that our practical hypotheses are not based on science nor are they completely rational. Instead we use cultural hypotheses. We draw on our biographical experience and our ability to observe important and meaningful elements of the situation under investigation.

Instead of scientist-practitioner as an image for the counsellor, I now believe that a better image is that of the "bricoleur". A bricoleur is one who carefully observes the situation at hand, takes the materials that are available, and then invents a practical solution. A bricoleur is a kind of professional jack-of-all-trades. Counselling then becomes bricolage, a process of organizing, planning, utilizing what is available to build a sensible solution.

Perhaps the most important perspective I carry into counselling encounters is: the counselling/communication process is an interaction achievement to which both I and my client contribute. We are not in an expert-dummy game, we are partners. Sometimes the client is slow to become a partner. He may have expectations which frame me as "Mister Fixit", or he may be suspicious or threatened by the counselling situation or by me. Occasionally a client will be deliberately deceptive, or seductive, or insist on being a victim or helpless. In the face of this self-presentation, I try to keep in mind:

- Whatever a person does at any point in time is what he or she "knows how" to do
- However a person acts, he or she acts from his or her own interpretation of the context and in this sense, acts "sensibly"
- I can understand another's actions or utterances without having to agree or approve of them
- Whatever a person does, he or she does it in the interest of emotional safety and self-protection;
- One of my interpersonal tasks is to help keep sorted out who has responsibility for what in the context
- I must do my best to maintain conditions of respect for the other and for myself.

Part of my contribution to the achievement of a good counselling process is gauging the degree of cooperation which the client is ready for and gently encouraging his participation within those limits. Cultural knowledge is very important here. Some cultural conditioning will produce the perception that one must accept, and expect, levels of authority in matters of advice and will not easily enter into a democratic relationship. The rule I try to follow is: accept the client's perspective; don't ignore or push the client ahead of the client's readiness; treat this person as the unique individual he is.

Counselling is not a process where I apply various idealized skills and techniques which counselling school taught me; nor is it a place where I single-handedly do something to, or for, another person. Mike and I are in this together, we must build a process which will enable us to invent and put together a project[4] which is both meaningful and feasible for Mike to carry out so that he can move in the direction he wishes to move.

First, we must find out what direction or directions he does wish to move. It is this formulation or construction of goals which is of vital importance. Many persons, especially counsellors, are over committed to goal attainment. The basic formula which most have adopted is 1) define an achievable goal, 2) make an action-plan, and 3) evaluate the outcome. This formula stresses the outcome. This, alas, is factory thinking. Not that it is unimportant to be concerned with the direction one takes in life, and certainly one should use creativity and intelligence as power for moving in that direction. However, it is the formulation and re-formulation of goals which is most important. Needless to say, the task of constructing goals is a never-ending one. The contexts we live in change and as they change we must flex with them.

When I was 19 years old I formulated a goal for myself—to be a writer. I had that as a distant, and probably unreachable goal—but it was a very important formulation for me. I still have the letter in which I wrote to my girl friend and told her of my wish to become a writer—I also said that I had no idea how to do that, nor was I even sure what a writer did to make a living. At that time I was a truck-driver, hauling cattle and sheep for farmers. This was not a context which would have a niche for writers but the formulation was of great importance to me. It took more than 40 years to reach the goal of becoming a successful writer and in the meantime I did many other things and had other goals.

The act of goal formulation means to me that one is in an active dialectical relation with one's context—i.e., people, events, experiences. You are being influenced by circumstances and you are attempting to influence circumstances. You are re-orienting yourself according to the context you are in—which is usually continuing to change.

Mike has spoken about his uncertainty and at the same time his felt need to make up his mind. What kind of a future does Mike want? I have discovered that future-oriented thinking is quite valuable, even when the person is not in very good circumstances. I have a kind of formula in my own thinking about futures: Is this your preferred future? Is this a plausible future? Is this a possible future?

Assume that you can overcome any constraints which might get in your
way. What would you be doing? Where would this be? Who would be
involved beyond yourself? Why is this the future you choose?

Sadly, often people "settle" for much less than their preferred future. This may be because they have not even sorted out just what their preferred future is. Or they may not have realised how they might go about achieving it—thinking it is beyond their ability or means. Frequently, other people talk them out of what they would really like to do.

Preferred future means "this is how I would like to be living—how I would like to have my life going." It is well to keep in mind that what is a preferred future one time may be meaningless at another time in life. The term preferred implies that the person has grabbed hold of their own life, that they are choosing who they want to be and what they want to do. Choosing a future is a step toward self-responsibility. It is important also to recognise that futures are of various kinds: short term, long term, temporary, evolving, trial, invented—the very idea of "future" differs from person to person and is often culturally influenced.

Plausibility means "Is this a sensible future for me at this time in my life?"; "Does this future have credibility—is it superficial or more deeply considered." An original meaning of "plausibility" is "Is it worthy of applause?"

Possible future implies that there are no constraints such that this future could never be. It is possible—that is, it is feasible, it can be constructed and attained. This is what people are usually meaning when they ask "is it practical?", or "is it realistic?" It should be kept in mind that futures that are possible at one point may not be so at another point.

Of course some futures are no more than illusions or fantasies. Yet my experience with clients is that more often, possible futures are overlooked or abandoned not because they are impossible but because they are not understood well enough. Or, more frequently, others talk the person out of possible futures by over-stressing the realism of choice.

I tend to avoid the vocabularies of practicality ("Is this practical?") or realism ("Is this realistic?"). Instead I try to help clients to consider "advantages and disadvantages" of *any* future under consideration.

Episode 5

I ask Mike if he is willing to work on another map. I explain that this time we can construct a map which reveals his present life-space and his preferred future life-space. He says, "yes, the first one was really interesting." On a paper I ask him to draw a circle in the centre and label it his present self-situation. I then explain to Mike that a person often has more than one future self-situation and also sometimes it is helpful to recognize a past self-situation which has relevance at the present. I suggest that we spend a little time first fleshing out his present self-situation. Aided by my questions and comments, Mike constructs a pattern of the important people in his life and their relation to him, what his work is like now, and other meaningful elements in his present life.

After a few minutes, I suggest that we try the following experiment.

"Assume that you can overcome any constraints which might get in your way, that you have the time and resources to use as you need, and imagine what your preferred working situation would be. What would you be doing, where would this be, and who would be involved beyond yourself? Why is this the future you choose?"

Mike draws a large circle on the upper part of the paper. He asks, "you mean without limits?" I

reply, "well, maybe you don't include the completely impossible, but you ignore some of those things which either you or your family or friends see as big barriers to you doing what you really want to do."

Mike laughs and then says, "Here goes, God willing." The story which his future map tells goes like this:

What I really like to do, and what I have done the best since coming to Canada is to cook Moroccan food. I learned from my mother and I really enjoy doing it. I have worked in Montreal and in Vancouver as an assisting cook. Now I have a café where we serve only Moroccan food, but I have some problems. I am working about 16-17 hours a day. I cook, I buy the food, I keep the accounts, I even clean the café. I have a lot of people coming for lunch but not so many for dinner. I had some money saved up to start my business, but I am still not making a profit with my café and if I keep on going all of my savings will be gone. So I am doing what I want to do, really, but I have problems. Sometimes I think that I will just pack up and go back to Marrakech where the rest of my family lives; on the other hand, I still want to stay in Canada. I just don't know what to do.

What I would really like [Mike's preferred future] *is to have a successful café which was in a community where enough people who like to eat Moroccan food so that I am not always skimping to get by. I would like to have one of the best small cafés serving Moroccan food in Canada. I would like to be able to hire help so that I can mainly cook with a good assistant cook and then other people to clean and do the books and so on. I am very proud of my food and I use the best vegetables and meats. I prepare every dish from start so that my servings are always fresh. People who come to the café tell me that my food is the best; I would just like to have full servings so I make enough money to do even better. I would like to live where North Africans came to eat as well as other people. I guess that I have a clear picture of what I want for myself, I just haven't found out how to make it happen.*

Reflection on Episode 5

From Mike's mapping of his future we both can see that he is highly motivated to achieve the goal of a successful ethnic café. He has the basic skills needed for this work and he is proud of what he does. We also begin to see some possible clues for projects which might help him to gain a better work situation.

We identify some barriers to his success: 1) lack of customers perhaps due to location, or advertising, or diversified menu, etc., 2) he has not had business planning advice—would that be helpful or not? 3) he may not be in the right community with a large enough North African or Mediterranean population to support a "purist" café which offers only Moroccan food.

In the process of mapping we have also identified personal resources which Mike is bringing to his work including cooking ability, willingness to work hard, business management skills, pride, and worklife focus.

The map that Mike and I have created enable us to grasp and discuss a fairly coherent picture of Mike's current work situation as well as what he sees as his preferred future.

As Mike and I map and discuss, we are utilizing our sociological competence. We are attempting to describe the web of influences which Mike is a part of, and which are both constraining and supporting his efforts. Clearly Mike is trying to integrate parts of two cultures. He is navigating Canadian (busi-

ness) culture and he is strongly influenced by his Moroccan cultural knowledge. Sociological competence refers to knowledge (both explicit and tacit) of how social things work. Relationships, status, cultural habits and protocol, the exercise of power and influence—these are "social", not psychological, things.

By now, Mike and I have co-constructed a working alliance by means of which we have investigated and developed a coherent understanding of Mike's present situation and preferred future. Of course we have only touched a fraction of the elements of Mike's life-space , but we have an adequate picture from which we can work for improvements.

It is very important to realize that Mike and I are using: our powers of observation and description; our memories as a source of relevant experience; and our imaginative capacities. In a most fundamental sense these are our counselling tools. We are not dabbling around in personality theory, nor are using testing devices. Instead we are working in the realm of everyday life. We are studying and understanding Mike's participation in social life. By using our communication capacities, we are building up a common ground on which to stand (mentally) and from which we can engage in bricolage. We are not resorting to theoretical models but are working with everyday cultural understanding. We are closer to using what some call "common sense" than we are to using abstract reasoning and rational calculation. However, we are not just using common sense because we bring our collective experiences to bear in this discussion and our experiences include not only cultural experience but also various kinds of specialized experience. Also, we are engaging in reflection. In typical everyday conversation, people often do not exercise much reflection—that is they do not think back upon what has been said nor do they try to dig out unstated assumptions and implicit meanings. Mike and I are attempting to develop knowledge and meaning not only on the explicit level but also implicit or tacit knowledge and meaning. Constructivist counselling emphasizes reflection as an important tool for both the counsellor and the client. We can describe the Constructivist counsellor as a "reflective practitioner".

By now I have presented enough episode material so that I can differentiate some of the elements of SocioDynamic counselling.

- **Observation.** This implies that the counsellor and client have their eyes, ears, memory and imagination to work with. I was once told by an Elder: "The more you use your eyes and ears, the fewer questions you will have to ask. You will already know the answers". From a constructivist point of view, self-observation is the single most powerful tool the counsellor and client can use. This means being aware of your own actions in the situation—how you converse; how you listen; what your assumptions and biases are; being able to notice both your physical and your emotional-mental reactions in interpersonal relating. As a counsellor I believe that it is quite important for me to maintain a high level of self-consciousness as well as looking and listening to the client with "fresh eyes and ears". I also serve as a model of self-observation and attempt to teach the client about his or her own self-observation ability. Guidano believes that self observation is the single most important factor in good counselling—and it is for both counsellor and client.

- **Life-space investigation.** This is a central concept in SocioDynamic counselling. This is done though conversation (listening, speaking, taking turns, questioning, respecting silence, remaining

open to patterns, relations, and how the different elements of a person's life are linked in webs and networks. Life-space investigation requires an empathic ability and brings one sociological competence into play.

- **Using a culturally sensible vocabulary.** This means using language and communication which makes sense to the client. It means discerning the individual's social location and using a fitting vocabulary and way of speaking. It means realizing that language and culture are tied into a knot—each requires the other. As an English speaker, it is not feasible to learn a new language each time I face a client whose ancestry is in a non-English speaking culture. However, what I can do is pay very close attention to the individual's manner of communicating, both verbal and non-verbally. When I don't understand, I take that as a point of interest and try to investigate by saying what do you mean by... or how can you say that another way... or try to find out what the other's utterance implies. I try to open myself to learn and be taught by the other about his or her cultural ways and knowledge. Foods, artwork, humour, family relations, protocol, daily news, sports, clothing and dress customs—all make for culture-learning discussions. SocioDynamic counselling is culture-centred.

- **Counselling is Conversation.** Counselling conversation should use everyday language and avoid professional jargon. Often a counsellor may not have success with a client because the counsellor has too rigid an idea about the "interview" and his or her role in it. I no longer use the word interview because of the implication that one person is doing something to another. Instead I speak of counselling encounter, session, meeting or conversation. Of course a counselling conversation is not just any old conversation. It has a purpose which is, or should be clear to both conversation-alists. It is marked by a greater effort on the part of the counsellor (and sometimes the client) to be self-observing, to pay attention to the structure and direction of the conversation and to use knowledge about the make-up of conversation. This means making sure that turn-taking occurs, that one person does not talk over the other, that listening is at least as important as speaking, and asking questions that clarify and create meaning as well as help to repair difficulties in the understanding which my break down in conversation.

  A conversation should be based on some common ground—which has to be negotiated and constructed by both parties. A conversation may or may not lead to common understanding. It is not desirable to think that good counselling always leads to a fully mutual understanding and agreement about topics and issues.

  Often the value of the conversation is in making explicit and clear the differences in knowledge, perspective and thinking which the two conversationalists contribute. It is a paradox that good conversations will simultaneously differentiate and produce consensus on some points and differences on others. What is desirable is clarity about both. Counsellors and clients often have different interpretations of issues and situations. The counsellor has a responsibility to strive and make the discussion a fair and democratic interaction, without exerting power on the client due to their difference in social status within an institutional or cultural hierarchy.

- **Stories in counselling.** In New Look counselling, the counsellor is getting stories from the client rather than gathering "facts" by interview. I often say to clients, "What is your story about this?" or

tell me your story about how this problem got to be a problem?" Switching from quizzing to story elicitation in counselling is another way in which SocioDynamic counselling is more closely associated with how social life is lived. When people meet each other their contact is nearly always the trading of stories about this and that. Story, or narrative is the main way we seek to be understood, and how we are able to understand others.

Sometimes you can meet another person and the other asks you a long series of questions—a kind of interrogation. This is very frustrating for at least two reasons. First, many of the questions are not within a context and are actually very difficult to answer except in the most superficial of ways. And no topic can be taken up in any depth because there is always a new question coming. Second, a question-asker is controlling the direction of the conversation which means that you can either be a passive answer-giver, or you have to engage in a power struggle within the conversation to open up what you wish to talk about. This is exactly the case in directive or fact-finding counselling interviews.

By now Mike and I have a fairly rich overview of what he is doing in his work life, what he would like to do, and what some aspects of his difficulty are. We can say that now we know quite a bit about Mikes life-space . One of the assumptions of constructivist counselling is that meaningful activity (practice) is what changes things. Our focus can now become: "what project(s) can Mike and I invent or assemble which will guide Mike's actions toward the future he has in mind. He clearly wants to be a café owner-cook, but he is on shaky ground right now. What can he do which will address his "problem".

Episode 6

We laugh together, for it seems that we are both aware of the
indeterminacy and contingency of everyday life from our own cultural
experience.

Mike and I make a list of possible projects:
1. move to a more ethnic community
2. attract more customers
3. change his café's offerings
4. give up the café business and look for another type of work
5. return to Morocco.

After a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of each of these, Mike decides that he should concentrate on attracting more customers, but how?

Reflection on Episode 6
A project should be: personally meaningful to the client, designed with a goal or purpose; within

the client's ability to carry it out, and based on "best guess" knowledge of what is relevant and potentially useful in moving the client toward amelioration of the problem. Most projects are not pre-packaged. Instead they are constructed by counsellor and client and their understanding of the client's need.

Personal projects are infinite in their shapes and sizes. The self is a project. We are who we make of ourselves (with a little help from our friends!). When I begin thinking about how I want to work for the next several years, I am beginning a project. When I was told that I have prostate cancer, my project became: "becoming educated about prostate cancer". The word project is important: it implies construction, something which can be organized, planned, carried out, built. It also implies orientation toward the future—people seldom try to initiate projects into the past.

The greatest value of a project lies in its formation as a set of activities. Reading the newspaper to find houses for rent; writing a letter; discussing with a colleague; working at a machine; using the computer; sewing a piece of clothing; cooking; looking up information in the library; making a map in the counselling session; playing in a sports game;—on and on. By our actions (activities) we make ourselves, our relationships with others, products at work. Meaning and action are two sides of the same coin. Meaning without action is passive; action without meaning is senseless. The term "action" applies to physical actions such as hammering a nail; speech utterances such as saying "Yes I will," and applies to the mental and emotional domain as well. Words and sentences are tools. When we speak, the act of speaking is putting the tool to use.

Episode 7

Mike and I proceed to design a project in relation to his difficulty—specifically the problem of lack of customers. In fact Mike had two projects: one to try to investigate why there were many customers at lunch but few at night; and the second project became a gathering of information about typical restaurant advertising procedures—especially those which he could afford to use.

The first project consisted of:

- making up some customer satisfaction cards to put on tables with questions such as "how satisfied are you with this meal?" ,"would you recommend this café to your friends, yes or no, why?, "have you eaten dinner here; if no, why? Location: menu choices; quality of food; service: etc."

The second project consisted of :

- Visiting with the owners of two other ethnic restaurants in the same section of the city to discuss with them if they had low rates of dinner customers and why. Or if not, what had they done to attract customers.

Mike said that he would be quite interested in doing both of these activities. He had a copying machine so that he could make up some cards without much cost. He said that he enjoyed design work and felt that he could make an attractive and yet information eliciting card. He had already been thinking about getting better acquainted with one of the other café owners. He had eaten there himself

and had met the owner but had not discussed customer advertising with the couple who owned the café.

Mike and I exchange reactions on how our counselling conversation has gone. Mike is proud of his maps. He asks to come back next week and says that he can have at least one of his projects done by next Friday, God willing. I ask him why he adds "God willing" as he has many times in our conversation. He explains that it is a Muslim saying and tells me the Arabic words for the saying. He says that we should always be prepared for the intervention of things which we did not expect or cannot control. Also that we should try to lead a good life that would be approved by Allah. We laugh together, for it seems that we are both aware of the indeterminacy and contingency of everyday life from our own cultural experience. We agree to meet and go upstairs. At the door, Mike expresses his gratitude for a chance to talk this "problem" over. We shake hands and he leaves.

Reflection on Episode 7

SocioDynamic counselling is rooted in on-going daily life experience and social life. Using observation, language, memory, and imagination, the counsellor and client co-construct an interaction process (relationship) which they then use to investigate the life world of the client. Once a life-world understanding is achieved—and this is always only partial—the ground is established for co-constructing projects. A project is an activity or set of activities by means of which the client moves forward in his or her life-world toward a preferred future.

The three principal tasks of the counsellor are:

1. construct (negotiate) a cooperative alliance with the client—this alliance should be fashioned out of the language and cultural knowledge of each. It should function as an direct window to the client's on-going streams of experience in social life,

2. co-investigate the client's life world—with a goal of achieving an understanding of the client's relationship to the "problem" he or she is experiencing. Remember: The problem is the problem. The client is not the problem. What the counsellor is interested in investigating in cooperation with the client is "What is the problem?"; "How is the client relating to the ' problem'; and "how can the client gain a new or better relationship to the problem." This may mean eliminating it, reducing its influence, or accepting it as 'part of life', or using the problem as an opening to new possibilities for better paths in life.

3. Constructing and carrying out personally meaningful projects are the means by which the client "changes things".

My view of everyday living is that it is an on-going conversation. Civilization is a conversation. Cultures are conversations. Society is a conversation. Families are conversations. Relationships are conversations. Counselling is a conversation. Within the conversation which we call social life, the self is a collection of biographical stories all of which are inter-connected and each of which has a voice.

For example, I grew up on a farm. While I am no longer a farmer, I still carry the voice of a farmer within my system of biographical stories. This voice is in memory and is usually far from my immedi-

ate consciousness. However, it is easy for me to speak from the position of 'farmer'. Similarly, I have many other voices : father, lover, writer, gardener, researcher, citizen, spiritualbeing, body, etc.

Counselling is an occasion for giving voice to some biography—it may be the story of being unemployed, or sick, or stressed, or lovesick, or marginalization, etc. It is very important to see that what one voices is strongly influenced by one's social location in daily life—especially in terms of perceived power relations in the immediate social situation.

Counsellors often say to me, "what do I do to get my clients to talk"? My general answer is: "If they seem reluctant to talk, negotiate a different and more relevant relationship/conversation with your clients." Perceptions of threat, trust, unequal power, uncertainty, fear will keep any person's lips sealed. Another way of viewing this is that the problem is not so much that "Counselling doesn't seem to work with this person" as it is "You have not been able to initiate a culturally sensible conversation with the other." Remember that each person is a human inhabiting a life-space which is only open for entry by another at certain moments, under certain conditions, for certain reasons, for certain activities, and for certain durations. Each of these is negotiable.

Some frequently asked questions [FAQs] about New Look counselling

FAQ # 1 Is this a philosophical approach? Answer: Yes, in the sense that people make and are guided by moral choices. Also counsellors have a moral imperative to help others—not only because others face problems which are beyond their ability to understand and solve, but even more fundamentally, because others are co-human beings with counsellors.

FAQ # 2 Do you have a clear definition of counselling? Answer: Counselling is a general method of life-planning and cultural path construction.

FAQ # 3 What about tests? Answer: If you want to know something about a person, ask them. People give personal accounts. They are accountable through their own voiced accounts (stories). Testing—which produces test scores, profiles, results, and test interpretations lead to the creation of a "file-self" and away from the life-and-blood individual. Institutions like tests because they fit in with a factory way of thinking. There are unambiguous, quantifiable, objective, and can be used to make technical decisions. Psychologists and counsellors like tests because they have been trained to like them. Testing is a multi-million dollar industry and is more of a political, dominator issue than anything else.

If and when tests and their results are used in counselling, from a New Look point of view the following criteria should be applied:

1. Are the test results functioning to empower clients? If test results are used in a way that give institutions or clinicians to make technical decisions about an individual—and which override other considerations such as the individuals perspectives, cultural knowledge, and personal accounts, then the test use is certainly suspect. An even worse outcome of using tests is "label-

ling".

2. Are test results kept in balance with cultural knowledge and common sense judgments?

3. Are test results used to pose questions or provide conclusions? If the latter, their use is quite suspect.

If a test is used as a communication device and it is used to open up new topics for discussion in counselling, then it may be of value. Tests used for classification purposes are mostly benefiting the institution and not the individual. Using test scores as a basis for decisions about individuals removes the burden of making a moral decision and of course many institutional members would like to be freed from moral decision-making.

It is argued that testing is efficient, economical, and objective. It certainly is these things but this argument has severe limitations. Shooting someone on the spot rather than seeing that they have a fair trial is efficient, economical and objective (and also arrogant and authoritarian); however, we can find many good reasons for not doing so. As a cultural ceremony, testing is a type of trial and verdict without fair hearing.

FAQ # 4. Can you prove that Constructivist counselling is superior to other kinds of counselling?
Answer: No. From my point of view there is little to be gained from comparing different forms of counselling. What can be shown is that SocioDynamic counselling is close to the way people live their lives; it is rooted in cultural hypotheses rather than scientific hypotheses; it is inspirational for both counsellors and clients; and it is a distinctly human practice, utilizing language, meaning, activity, and social participation.

FAQ # 5. If a problem such as feelings of inadequacy is not in the person, where is it? Answer: Most human problems lie in what Martin Buber called the "in-between", the realm of the intersubjective. An individual does not simply "feel inadequate". The person always feels inadequate in relation to someone(s), something, or in relation to his or her own internal "other voices" (selves). Even physical conditions, which are physically located in the body, emanate from body-other, or body-system relationships. At the very outset, no human being would exist were it not for the relationship (?)of his parents. Babies deprived of human contact (as well as monkeys) cannot survive lack of interhuman (or monkey) contact. Those who do survive are severely damaged. Finally, just as a judge requires a criminal, remember that counselling as a human practice requires both counsellor and client. The very existence of the practice is rooted in relationship. One of the needed improvements in counselling is to shift the problematizing focus from "within the person" to "the space between people." Remember: the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem.

FAQ # 6 "If I perceive human life as dialectical, and relational and counselling as a social practice, won't this lead to a loss of self for both me and my client?" Answer: It is in no way necessary to give up one's interiority, agency, or sense of authorship by shifting one's focus to relationality and intersubjectivity. We are simultaneously "self" and "in-relation".

Placing influence, struggle, and meaning in a social or relational context actually can produce a

greater sense of agency in performance and in the tasks of witnessing/observing and interpreting. Finding out that personal and social realities are negotiated and co-constructed is inspirational, hope-producing, and encouraging. It also introduces into counselling further types of meaning—relational / social [between people], transcendental[beyond ego-self, including spiritual meaning], creative [new and original meaning], ecological [between self and all aspects of environment and social life—that is, meaning flowing through 'the web of life'] —in addition to personal meaning.

Final comments

At the heart of constructivist/SocioDynamic counselling is the sense that life is made up as you go along, and that there are many path-potentials in culture which one may make as one walks a preferred path. Social life is a dialectic of uncertainty and tradition. Traditions are becoming more and more shadow like. Under the impact of de-traditionalization, postmodernism, and the microelectronic revolution, the need increases for agents to take more responsibility in creating the project called "self" and to recognize simultaneously the relational nature of social life. SocioDynamic counselling is a reformulated helping practice which is useful for individuals who are navigating perplexing social life in the context of contemporary societal and technological transformations.

CHAPTER 10
GROUP COUNSELLING: A CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUP COUNSELLING ACTIVITY FOR IDENTIFYING PERSONAL STRENGTHS

This chapter is designed to assist counsellors in conducting counselling groups in a constructivist mode, especially groups for youth and young adults who are in a career decision-making process.

In preparing this chapter I am especially indebted to Haldane (1988)1 and Forster (1989) [2] and their discussion of the **Dependable Strengths Articulation Process.** We do not necessarily share the same theoretical framework, nonetheless there is much in their ideas which I find compatible with my own conception of group counselling.

"By your acts, you create yourself."

I have had years of experience working with groups in various settings: mental health, rehabilitation, student groups, family counselling, and special topic groups such as loss and grieving, addictions, and more. Over the years my own ideas about how groups should be conducted have changes radically. For the most part, I now believe that group counselling should provide participants with two things: 1) activities which can build a stronger sense of self and affirm a constructive identity, and 2) democratic discussion which supports planning, deciding and making ethical or moral decisions in regard to daily life issues. I now have a very conservative view toward groups which purport to put participants through behaviour change procedures, or which encourage interactive confrontation and painful inter-group feedback, or which are organized around utopian, romantic notions of unlimited growth and personal development. Instead, I take to heart Sartre's maxim: "By your acts, you create yourself." I believe that the greatest value of group counselling lies in its use as an opportunity for participation in meaningful activities which in one way or another add to one's sense of resiliency, strength, and ability to participate better in social life. I also believe that group discussions which are

democratic and along the lines of genuine dialogue can be very valuable in clarifying, organizing and trying-out moral and value perspectives.

Assumptions underlying constructivist group work

Negative qualities can be abandoned, and empowering qualities can be acquired though learning and participation in social life activities.

Contemporary society is complex and in flux. Living successfully is not simply a matter of learning "the rules" of social life. It is also necessary to recognize and respect a wide range of differences. Contemporary life is increasingly diverse and people lead many different life styles and exhibit cultural differences. A counselling group is an environment which respects difference

Just as society is composed of multiple realities, individuals develop multiple selves. Self-identity is constructed out of relationships and personal experience. Who a person perceives him- or her self to be (qualities of self of which the individual is aware) is a direct function of the contexts the person is living in—family, friends, gang, employee group, religious group, school associates, ethnic group, etc. A self is not a thing. The word "self" refers to a subjective "sense of self" which can be recognized by the qualities which a person uses to describe him or her self.

The constructivist counselling group provides opportunities for the individual to construct and validate his or her self-identity. Individuals with positive self-identities are more likely to find a valued and successful place in society than those whose identities are characterized by negative qualities, or by lack of personal meaning. It certainly is more desirable to build and manifest an active, self-empowering self than a negative or disempowered sense of self.

Most of the qualities which we accumulate through living and which we use to describe our sense of self are acquired though interaction with others—in other words through our relationships with others. This is why constructivists tend to place considerable emphasis on the **social** aspects of personality and self and not so much emphasis on individualism. Social life, webs of significance, community memberships, networks, relationships, patterns of influence are important concepts to constructivist counsellors and underlie group counselling activities.

Individuals who have accumulated a large number of negative qualities (as they describe themselves) will have a sense of inadequacy, despondency, or powerlessness. Fortunately, negative qualities can be abandoned, and empowering qualities can be acquired though learning and participation in social life activities. It is to try to achieve this latter goal that constructivist groups are formed and structured.

General guidelines for conducting constructivist groups

Constructivist groups are organized for the purposes of providing participants a supportive and reliable environment for constructing and reconstructing their identities and increasing the ability of participants to participate constructively in social life activities such as finding and keeping a job, evaluating self, relating to others, envisioning desirable futures, etc.

While every group has dynamics which are unique, and the purposes of a particular counselling group may not be the same as other groups, and while no two participants are exactly alike in terms of experience, expectations and modes of behaviour, nonetheless certain "rules" can be recommended for the conduct of constructivist-oriented counselling groups. These rules apply to both counsellor and participants. However, it is the responsibility of the counsellor to articulate and re-iterate the rules as seems necessary.

Working rules:

- Protect and respect listening
- Do not interfere with a participant when he or she is speaking. Each participant will have a turn and time to speak.
- Make sure that participants and counsellor are known to each other by the name the individual wishes to be called
- Use language which is suitable to the context and which is familiar to the participants—be careful not to "professionalize" the vocabulary.
- In the case of behaviour which is harmful or clearly intrusive use a three step intervention strategy:

  Step one: remind of the need to show respect and to stop harmful behaviour. If this is not effective,

  Step two: ask the participant to take time out and collect his or her thoughts/behaviours. If this is not effective or if the participant repeatedly violates the group process or is harmful to others, and will not re-orient his or her behaviour, banish the participant from the group.

  Make sure that meeting times, place, length, and eligibility to participate are clearly announced.

  As a leader, the counsellor should take a friendly, matter-of-fact stance and use humour and respect as tools for providing a successful counselling ambience in the group. The group process should be guided democratically, but the counsellor/leader has primary responsibility for protecting the emotional safety of participants, providing a working structure, and modelling good communication skills and a stance of involvement and respect.

Words are tools for getting things done. Choose tools which
will enable us to build a resilient and healthy identity.

Use a vocabulary of proficiency

Today we are besieged—in the media, in the worlds of mental health and therapy, in education and family life—with images of pathology and signs of self-deficiency. A recent article in a widely read magazine points out that the institution of psychiatry has now concocted a pathological name for every possible human behaviour. In other words we live in a time where one can "go wrong" and need to be cured in every aspect of life.

From a constructivist point of view, it is much more healthy and empowering to use a vocabulary of proficiency, rather than a vocabulary of deficit and pathology when doing counselling. Since the self is "constructed", then we can use language which is empowering in the construction process. The focus of the group activity is on potential and learning new ways rather than on the past and on what is wrong in the individual's life. This is not to be taken as a Pollyanna-ish attitude or a denial of difficulty and painful experience. Constructivist thinking does not use rose-coloured glasses, nor is it assumed that everything is "fine" and "positive".

From a constructivist point of view, words are tools for getting things done. If we wish to build an empowered sense of self and a self-identity capable of sustaining oneself in the face of a world which is often dis-empowering and hurtful, then we would do well to choose tools which will enable us to build a resilient and healthy identity. The tools which the constructivist uses are language tools— words, images, expressive activities (such as mapping, drawing, gesturing). The recommended vocabulary is one of potential and empowerment.

Group activity for identifying meaningful experiences and personal strengths

In groups which are oriented to vocational guidance, participants often talk about life and career goals, how to look for work, how they should present themselves in job interviews, and their preparation and skills (and lack of skills) needed for employment.

One constructivist group activity which helps participants to define and uncover taken-for-granted abilities and meaningful life experiences is the **Personal Strengths Identification Activity (PSIA)** which is structured and implemented as follows.

Purposes The purposes of the Personal Strengths Identification Activity (PSIA) are: 1) to promote the sharing of "good experiences", and 2) to help participants to identify personal assets. Participants are engaged in articulating the proficient aspects of their social identity through the interactions in PSIA. The activity can also model the interpersonal communication skills of listening, articulation of meaningful experience, and respect for the experiences of others.

Practical learning focus Participants get practice in telling personal "stories", listening to the stories of others, and practice in using supportive interaction to gain knowledge and to help others

learn. PSIA promotes reflexivity—participants are encouraged to reflect on, and consider the value of good experiences which they have had in their life.

The PSIA is structured learning and has three steps:

The counsellor orients participants to PSIA

Modelling an example of PSIA

Guiding members of the group through the PSIA

Step 1: Counsellor orients participants to PSIA

What is a good experience or personal strength or asset to one person may have no meaning to another.

Some individuals have no difficulty at all in expressing good experiences from their lives. Others find it nearly impossible to do. It is the counsellor's responsibility to give examples, respect the readiness of individuals to share their experiences, and provide clear instructions.

Orientation statement. The wording of an orientation will depend upon the counsellor's preference and experience and on the composition of the group members. The counsellor should always speak to the participants in a level of vocabulary which seems familiar to them. The orientation statement should be something like:

I am going to introduce you to the Personal Strengths Identification Activity. We will be spending 2-3 hours, so we do not have to rush. [The amount of time needed and available will of course vary from time to time and setting to setting]. *We are doing this activity to provide each of you with an opportunity to find and clarify personal abilities which you may not have thought of before, or recently. Most people find this activity enjoyable, beneficial and helpful in thinking about the future. I am going to define two things for our use in this activity:*

Personal strength. A personal strength is a skill, talent, piece of knowledge, value, attitude or personal quality which you have developed sometime in your life—from childhood to the present—and when used consciously can help you do certain tasks well.

Good experience. A "good experience" can be defined as a time in your life when you:
- Did something well—it may have been small (helping a child across a busy street) or large (organizing a conference)
- You enjoyed it
- You felt proud of it

As group leader, you can anticipate that some discussion will be needed to clarify what a personal

strength and a good experience are. I often put up some examples on a flip chart and am always prepared to give personal examples. It is very important to keep the examples clear and small. Don't overwhelm participants with a major life experience. Also you need to promote respect for individual differences. What is a good experience or personal strength or asset to one person may have no meaning to another.

Step 2: The counsellor models a PSIA

Recruit a volunteer from the group to help you demonstrate how to conduct a Personal Strengths Identification Activity. Sometimes I ask a person ahead of time if they are willing to help me if I know that they can express themselves easily in public.

Arrange the group seating in a U shape and put two chairs at the open end of the U for you and your volunteer to sit. Place a flip chart close at hand.

Give the following instructions to the rest of the participants. *As you listen to the story which X is going to tell, make some notes in your notebook on what you hear. Especially make notes about what X must have known how to do, or what qualities X must have had in order to have the experience. Listen for the positive skills and talents which X has that enabled him/her to have that experience. You will have to listen carefully, for X will probably not mention the skills... you have to infer (guess at) them from what you hear.*

When you have given the rest of the group their instructions, and answered questions which they may have, turn your intention to your volunteer (X). Explain to X what you want her to do, that is, recall a time in her life when she did something well and which she felt proud about. Again, stress that it need not be an earthshaking experience. Just one where she can recall the details and remembers it as important and personally rewarding.

You can say that this will take about 10-25 minutes and it is very helpful for the recollection to be full of details. Who, where, when, what happened. Ask X to begin by saying something like: I'd like to hear you tell a story about a time in your life which you would call a "good experience". It can be any time, from your early childhood up to the present. I will ask you some questions as we go along.

Depending upon the experience of the volunteer in telling her stories to others, and depending upon the experience she chooses to tell about, you may have to do quite a lot of prompting or may need to say very little. Some questions to have in mind are (which you may or may not need to ask):

- Can you remember how you felt at the time?
- Who else was involved besides yourself?
  - What seemed important about this experience to you?
  - How did you manage to.....?
  - Is there anything about that experience which you think helped you later on in life?

As the conversation (quasi-interview) goes along, use good listening skills, extend a supportive, empathic stance toward X. Remember that what is a meaningful experience to one person may be

strange, or without meaning to another. Your role is to show respect for X's experience no matter what you may think about it as it might apply to you. Express appreciation to X when she has finished her story. Ask her to share any feelings, reactions, thoughts she had as she told the story, if she wishes to do so.

When the story is finished, ask the other participants to look at the notes they have made, remember what they heard from X, and brainstorm the skills, values, attitudes, talents, knowledge which they think X must have had in order to have the good experience she has related. Write these briefly on the flipchart or chalkboard. If the same strength or asset is mentioned more than once, put a check mark beside it each time it is mentioned.

When the participants and you have built up a list of the storytellers personal strengths, ask her to describe how she feels seeing and hearing these positive qualities about herself. I usually as each participant to give the storyteller the list of qualities which they have observed and written down on the piece of paper. This is usually a very empowering experience for the storyteller.

As counsellor you must be prepared for the fact that the groups will
probably not move in the same speed.

Step 3: Deciding which of two paths to take

At this point, you, as counsellor, will have to make a decision about which of two ways you should proceed with this group learning activity. If you think that the group of participants have a sufficient level of confidence and have the basic communication skills to operate without your face-to-face guidance, then divide the group into smaller groups of 4 persons each. I usually work with groups with at least 8 participants (ideal) but not more than 16. If the group is divided into smaller groups, then give the smaller groups the following instructions:

In your small group, decide who will tell a story, who will facilitate the storytelling, and who will be listener-observers-recorders. You are to then go through the same activity which you have seen X and myself do. First, one of you is volunteer to tell a good experience story, another is to help the story teller, and the other two are to make notes on the qualities which you guess that X must have in order to have the experience which she relates.

Take about 10 minutes for the storytelling, and another 10 minutes for describing the qualities of the experience which you have been told about. Be specific, clear, respectful and don't forget to listen carefully.

After you have used about 20-25 minutes, take a brief break and then change roles and do another PSIA. Keep going in this fashion until each member of your group has told a good experience story and heard what personal strengths the others heard in the story.

As counsellor you must be prepared for the fact that the groups will probably not move in the same speed. You may also have to help if a group seems to be unable to do the activity. You should trouble-shoot, but not take over unless absolutely necessary.

If you decide that the group does not have the necessary confidence and skill to proceed in smaller groups without your constant orientation, then stay in the large group and continue the process taking additional volunteers. This will take quite a lot longer. In general, I have found that the smaller grouping works out satisfactorily. I only remain in the large group format if I am feel quite certain that the communication resources of the group are indeed very limited.

Regardless of the path you choose to take, when the process is finished, bring the large group together and ask some "debriefing" questions such as:

- What was it like, for you as storyteller, to tell your story?
- What was it like to hear what others had to say about your personal strengths and your story?
- Do you find it easier to identify your own strengths, or the strengths of others?
- What about this activity do you think is useful to you in your future?
- How did you find your role of observer-recorder? Of facilitator of the storyteller?
- What is the most important thing you will take with you from this activity?

The most central ingredient in good group leading is respect.

Final thoughts. I and my associates have carried out this group counselling activity with many different types of people: immigrants, at-risk youth, unemployed, single parents, typical clients, mental health patients, counsellors-in-training, First Nations groups, secondary school students in guidance classes, institutional employees engaged in a worker re-integration project, and others. It seems suitable for youth and adults, and for all educational levels.

The most critical factor in the success of this activity is the confidence and skill of the counsellor. It is very important to go through the process yourself as a participant before attempting to apply it in your own counselling practice. Key ingredients for success are:

- Familiarity with the personal Strengths Identification Activity
- Respect for difference
- Willingness to take the time needed to carry out the activity
- Commitment to the goal of building a sense of "proficient" self
- Adequate communication and interpersonal skills as a counsellor
- Ability to provide a safe, supportive and carefully structured group environment
- Appreciation of reflective conversations

There are many activities which can be carried out in a group counselling session. The example which I have presented in this chapter is designed to show, in general, what some of the guidelines are for conducting groups from a constructivist perspective. In preparing for a constructivist group counselling process, questions to ask oneself are:
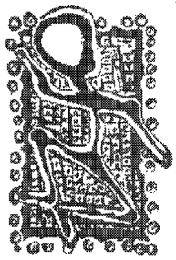
- Am I familiar and confident about the activity which will be the focus of group participation? Have I personally experienced it?
- Is the group oriented to democratic and dialogical communication?
- As group leader, am I prepared to enhance the personal meaning of the group activity and the experience of the group participants by making sure that what is done and discussed in the group is directly related to aspects of the group participants daily lives about which they feel concern and desire to do something about?
- Do I feel confident about protecting listening and supporting dialogue?
- Am I committed to providing (as best I can) activities and experiences which are meant to be self-strengthening and resiliency-building? Am I ready to be patient and provide clear and repeated examples and instructions on how to engage in the learning activity? Conversely, am I ready to leave learners on their own enough so that they can gain a sense of empowerment in the doing of the activity?
- Am I able and ready to contact the group participants at the point of their own readiness for participation and learning? Or do I feel compelled to charge ahead, no matter what?
- If there is a lot of information and data coming into the group, have I prepared learning activities which are meaningful and which help the participants convert information into personal knowledge and know-how? Am I willing to turn the faucet of information off as needed or do I subscribe to the inundation theory of learning?
- Am I prepared to provide the time for reflection and pondering for the slower members of the group? Or do I feel compelled to "cover the ground" and get every goal met, no matter what? As a group leader, do you plan to act as a "seed-planter" or a "slave-driver"?

It takes time to learn how to be a constructivist group leader. It takes time to find a balance between leading and joining, between listening and speaking. The most central ingredient in good group leading is respect: that is, demonstrating unwavering respect for others, respect for democratic process and dialogue, and respect for your own self as one who is trying to assist others to build better lives.

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REFLECTIONS...

Chapter 11
CONSTRUCTIVIST SUPERVISION:
A SOCIODYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE
by Sandra Hamilton and Mary Louise Reilly in association with Vance Peavy

Our epistemic standpoint is that we are responsible, as thinking, observing

selves, for articulating a sense of our own visions and this sense should

not be dictated by external, preset prescriptions about what that vision

should be.

Introduction

We (Mary Louise, Sandra, and Vance) have co-authored this paper from the standpoint perspectives of two practicing counsellor/therapists and a clinical supervisor engaged in the process of supervision. The SocioDynamic supervisory process in which we are engaged, and about which we are writing, is generally constructivist. The SocioDynamic perspective is a "spanning" perspective and bridges several theoretical frameworks: constructivism, social constructionist, narrativity, and symbolic interactionism.

We assume, as does Guidano (1991, p. 103) that self observation is the essential method which constructivist-oriented therapists can use for both assessment and intervention in counselling and therapy. A further, and fundamental assumption which we make, is that self-observation and critical reflection are important features of our version of constructivist supervision. Our version of constructivist supervision is termed "SocioDynamic". This is the name given to a new form of counselling which emphasizes the social and the evolving nature of human experience: hence socio-dynamic.

We have several purposes in mind as we prepare this chapter. One purpose is to provide a conceptual scaffold which frames our constructivist supervision activities, experience and process. A second purpose is to give voice to (narrate) our respective interpretations of supervision as we each have experienced it. Narrative presentation is congruent with both the purpose and nature of our activities

within the supervision process. Each of us has come to feel responsible for our individual work in making the supervisory experience one which is both self-validating and more transparent and open to public view. Our style of writing is intended to convey that we are joint producers of supervision and of this article. Thus we often write in the first person, since what we write is grounded in our experience as individuals.

We believe that research studies are constructed and that it is essential that the researcher(s) acknowledge their formative role(s) in the construction of both the research process and the interpreted results. Our epistemic standpoint is that we are responsible, as thinking, observing selves, for articulating a sense of our own visions and this sense should not be dictated by external, preset prescriptions about what that vision should be.

We are not trying to insure that our visions are faithfully interlaced with what is currently prevailing in the "market" of mainstream research on supervision. Nor do we believe that we should be constrained on how it should be communicated i.e., according to conventional social science writing protocol. We are driven by the Bakhtian (1981) impulse to speak and write from the inside out, grounding our attempts to understand others in our own self-understanding and in the reciprocal modifications that take place in dialogical discourse as it unfolds within the process of supervision.

In Bakhtin's (1981) view, authoritative discourse (the voice of the expert supervisor) is based on the assumption that utterances and their normative meaning are fixed, not modifiable as they come into contact with new voices. "The authoritative voice demands that we make it our own: it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally". Authoritative discourse fits in nicely with the information process model of communication construed as a "transmission" process. Authoritative texts (voices) are those of the father, teacher, priest, adult, commander, and, we would add, the supervisor in most conventional supervisory situations.

In contrast, we are experimenting with making supervisory discourse "open" and to make it possible for discourse (both spoken and written) to reveal *ever new ways to mean* as evolving and new contexts dialogize it. According to Bakhtin (1981), voices always exist in social milieu; hence are "intramental" and constitutive of meaning. The question is "how?" Any utterance is always partially or mostly socially mediated. In contrast to authoritative discourse, "the internally persuasive word is half-ours, and half-someone else's"; from this perspective, voices allow interanimation. Dialogic speech is creative and productive. It consists "precisely in the fact that such a word (dialogical) awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain an isolated and static condition" (pp. 345-346).

We wish to present a model of what it means to be in supervision in a way which maintains a respect for the experiencing, articulating, intermental self being made visible through interanimation (discourse occurring within the supervisory context). We are also interested in exhibiting the view that whatever it is that we call reality, it is essential to see that we have had a hand in creating it. The central challenge for each of us, as writer-researchers, lies in paying the closest possible attention to what each of us chooses to do when we articulate and exhibit our experience (Krieger, 1991) under the premise of dialogicality.

This means that portions of the text in this article are standpoint perspectives (Smith, 1989) from which each of us as authorial participants in the intermental constructivist supervisory process create and exhibit our interpretations from our standpoints as intermental selves in the supervisory process. We adopt a standpoint epistemology for three reasons. First, we belief that the world of human experience (in this case, experience of supervision and counselling/therapy) must be studied and understood from the viewpoint of the historically and culturally situated individual. Second, we believe that therapists/counsellors, as well as supervisors and supervisees must learn to work outwards from their own biographies to the worlds of experience that surrounds them. Third, we believe that we must struggle to produce voices and texts which speak clearly and powerfully about these surrounding worlds of experience. We must not only develop our own reflexivity, we must learn how to help others (clients, for example) to achieve greater reflexivity together with dialogicality— for it is reflexivity and dialogicality which is the ground for construction of meaning, self and relationships. We believe that dialogical communication within the supervisory discourse is productive and creative. It is the process which provides <u>new ways to mean</u> and allows for an understanding of relation to evolve which is lucid, richer in detail and more transparent.

Other portions of this paper are constituted of formalized statements about the constructivist supervisory process and our experience of it, including our interactions with each other.

The original purpose of the supervision was to build therapeutic competence and develop eligibility for certification as registered counselling psychologists. As supervision progressed the supervisees perceived themselves to be in a very different process of supervision than either had experienced previously. After about four months of bi-weekly 2-hour supervision sessions, we decided to write this article together, thus making a public record of the standpoints from which we each interpreted our individual experiences of constructivist-oriented supervision as well as how we were influenced by each other in our supervisory discourse. We realize that there are many versions of constructivist supervision and we can only vouch for the meaning and value of our own version.

Constructivist supervision—general considerations

Supervision is usually defined as a reciprocal process between two or more individuals with the purpose of developing the supervisee's professional ability to provide competent services to clients. There is general agreement in the professions of clinical and counselling psychology that supervision is an extremely important activity in the professional development of therapists. Generally speaking, there are two trends in supervision—modernist and constructivist or postmodernist versions. (Neufeldt, 1997).

Modernist models of supervision

The dominant model of supervision is a modernist, practitioner-as-scientist orientation in which the supervisor transmits exact, expert knowledge to the supervisee in "authoritative" voice (Lambert & Arnold, 1988). This method of supervision often uses manualization (Beutler, Machado, & Neufeldt, 1994) and attempts to link supervision directly to large, empirical research projects (Ivey, 1971; Henry, Strupp, Butler, Schact, and Binder, 1993). The modernist approach attempts to utilize precise, scientifically established standards of practice along with criteria for evaluating when specified knowledge and skill goals have been met by supervisees.

Increasingly, there are dissident voices which question the dominator position of modernist psychological theorizing in relation to counselling/therapy and supervision (Dineen, 1996; Karasu, 1996; Parker, et al., 1995). More fundamentally, the dominant psychology base which serves as a conceptual foundation for modernist models of psychotherapy and supervision is eroding (Fancher, 1995); Fox & Prilleltensky (1997). Further, it appears that practitioners do not utilize "scientific" information to inform their practice. Instead they rely on what they learn from other therapists, from clients, and from their own clinical experience (Beutler, Williams, Wakefield, & Entwistle, 1995).

We question how a standardized, top-down discourse of supervision can produce the clinical flexibility and intercultural sensitivity required of postmodern counsellors and psychotherapists who practice in contexts of cultural diversity. This is an especially relevant question to raise when the supervision and education of many therapists remains rooted in a male-dominator, middle-class, ethnocentric, "scientized" pedagogy.

In modernist supervision the supervisor maintains dominator status. Using the mode of "authoritative voice" supervisors conduct supervision in a top-down fashion, maintaining an expert position in the supervisory discourse (Holloway, Freund, Nelson, Gardner & Walker, 1989).

Emerging models of postmodern supervision

Before proceeding on to our own accounts of what supervision is like to each of us, we wish to acknowledge some of the work already done on approaches to postmodern—specifically, constructivist, supervision. Stoltenberg and Delworth (1989) have pointed out that in the 1980s cross-theoretical, developmental models of supervision came into use, some of which incorporated constructivist concepts. These approaches departed from the "one-true-method" ideology of modernist models in that they rejected the assumption that one supervision strategy was applicable to all trainees. Some supervisory training approaches began to focus on the concept of 'parallel process' in the supervision, introduced in an early study by Ekstein and Wallerstein (1972). 'Parallel process' is an attempt to attend to both the personal process of the counsellor/therapist and the interactive process of therapy. This line of thinking was examined in depth by Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) in a 6-year qualitative study of counsellors and therapists—especially the role of "continuous reflection" by therapists in

their own professional evolution. The authors of this study concluded that supervisees should be directed toward reflection on their new and individual reactions to clients and that this self-observation is more valuable than the use of supervisor expertise to interpret therapist-client interactions.

In the later versions of Interpersonal Process Recall, Kagan (1980,1983) began to stress the collaborative nature of supervision in which interactants were identified as the best authority on their own dynamics and clinical experience. Schon (1983,1987) describes the enactment of the therapy session within the supervisory meeting with therapist and supervisor re-construct the dynamics of the therapy session by recognizing and interpreting their own reactions.

Recently, Holloway (1995) has advocated a systems approach which incorporates constructivist features such as uniqueness in the trainee-supervisory relationship and influence of context. However, she remains squarely in the modernist tradition in her claim that the supervisor should remain in firm control of the supervisory relationship and function as a translator of theory and research for trainees.

Constructivist supervision

The growing dissatisfaction with microanalytic behavioural methods of supervision is spurring interest in constructivist perspectives in supervision in which the "constructivist paradigm" with features such as voice, narrative, and social construction are important. One example of a constructivist version of supervision is Susan Neufeldt's (1997) proposal of a constructivist approach to supervision organized around four principles: influence of context, co-construction, reflexivity, and the use of "clinical wisdom". Use of in-session reflections, constructions, and reciprocal dialogue is favoured over the use of idealized standards of practice to monitor supervisee performance. Using these four guiding principles, the supervisor responds to each supervisee and each counselling scenario in a unique, artful manner (Holloway, 1992) Dialogue and learning from the unexpected is stressed (Neufeldt, 1997).

Supervision as a professional activity remains subject to development and improvement—no one supervisory approach is demonstrably superior to others. We regard supervisory dialogue as the principal vehicle for constructing clinical wisdom. As a guide for our supervisory dialogues we developed the following table of supervisory maxims—given in no order of preference.

Table of Constructivist Supervisory Maxims

1 Images of clinical wisdom[1] are constructed through both interactional and internal dialogues—conversations in which "respect", witnessing", and "self-accountability" are crucial metaphors

2 The self is an evolving polyphonic, socially constructed project

3 Fruitful therapy and supervision rests on self observation (witnessing) as the principal method for mediating experience.

4 Clinical wisdom is constituted and articulated through mapping and non-judgmental dialogue around mapping experience

5 Supervision is a co-constructed interactional achievement

6 Clinical wisdom originates both intramentally and intermentally.

7 Empathy in supervision is dialectical—a negotiated achievement of both mutual understanding and the articulation of difference

8 Supervision is a process for learning, inventing and refining fruitful ways of interacting with clients in creative and co-constructive ways

9 Clinical wisdom evolves through self-observation, imaginary forays into the 'possible', and remembered interactional experiences

10 Words, images, symbols, myths, stories are tools for negotiating personal and social realities i.e., self and social life

Standpoints on constructivist supervision: Voicing reflections on lived experience

Vance's standpoint as a constructivist supervisor

I come to supervision with an intention to work from my own biography

which means that I try to keep my reflexivity open as I work outwards into

the layers of interpretations which I develop as I interact with supervisees

in their quest for clinical wisdom.

I have a long biography as a participant in supervision. I was supervised as a counselling psychologist in 1962-65. In the ensuing years—1967-1995, I have supervised several hundred counsellors, counselling and clinical psychology interns and practicum students in a variety of settings including University counselling centres, community clinics, schools, and Departments of psychiatry. My ideas about supervision have developed and changed considerably over this 35-year period.

My memories of my own experience as a practicum student, a psychological intern, and as a beginning supervisor include such questionable activities as having to virtually memorize the early version of the DM-IV, discussing at length the diagnostic significance of the MMPI and various other measures such as the WAIS and the 16-PF Inventory. My own principal supervisor during my internship was a dedicated professional-as-scientist advocate. Our supervisory discussions were filled with endless framing of hypotheses about client behaviour, formulating diagnostic classifications, and matching interventions to diagnoses. There were eight doctoral interns in my group and we often talked (gossiped) about our humourless, research-obsessed supervisor who considered himself a leading-

edge behaviourist. He was also engrossed in physiological aspects of human functioning. He frequently reminded us that we were very fortunate to be in an APA-approved program of study and this would provide us with the highest of status in the profession of counselling and clinical psychology. On occasion, our supervisor even wore a white coat in the clinic where part of our internship transpired.

Two incidents stand out for me. One was a case presentation which I made to the intern group. I used an existential-aesthetic perspective and described the counselling process as a craft where the purpose was to achieve some sort of aesthetic equilibrium in the client's life. I described the counselling process as a metaphorical process which was more artistic than scientific. Although I was the intellectual leader of the doctoral group, I was severely criticized in the practicum seminar by my supervisor and received a barely passing grade of B for my full internship since I was a menace (his word) to the professionalism of the other practicum students and probably a danger to the science of psychology.

The other incident arose from my performing diagnostic assessments in a mental health clinic which was attached to a psychiatric hospital. The standard intake procedure was to perform an intake interview, administer the MMPI and usually an intelligence test. Then I would prepare a psychological-diagnostic assessment report for one of the resident psychiatrists. Occasionally I would have a brief consultation with the psychiatrist concerning the "patient", but this was rather rare. I would never see a patient after the diagnostic interview and assessment sessions. After a few months of these somewhat boring psychological assessment activities which I was performing, I realised that the three psychiatrists for whom I did assessments had their favourite diagnoses. No matter what my report indicated, it would almost always get re-interpreted to be more in line with the diagnostic preferences of the psychiatrist. One preferred some variety of schizophrenia, a second liked the diagnostic category of inadequate personality, and the third tended toward a preference for organic syndromes. In discussing my observations with my fellow interns—actually a humorous subject for us—I remember remarking that soon I would not have to see patients at all. I could just write a report that more-or-less fit the diagnostic preferences of the particular clinician and then I would not have to endure the lengthy diagnostic sessions at all.

Upon reflection, I now realize I was being strongly socialized into a mode of doing counselling and therapy which depended very much on a conception of the self as a psychometric phenomenon. Further, I was being indoctrinated into a belief in the quasi-medical perspective that a sound diagnosis must be linked to an efficacious treatment, and the unquestioned importance of formulating testable hypotheses in all aspects of clinical and counselling practice. I was being systematically taught to use a vocabulary of deficiency, and being impressed with the need to elevate myself to expert status with reference to clients. I was constantly rewarded for adopting an image as "behavioural scientist", and reprimanded for any "humanistic" ideas or behaviours which I showed and which seemed to deviate from the goal of becoming a scientist-practitioner.

Even when I was pulled up short by a client entrusted to my care by the remark: "Doc, you sure talk

funny", I did not realize how far my training was taking me from the cultural-linguistic sensibilities of people in their everyday social life.

The "civilizing" into professional status which I experienced would influence me to continue to do counselling and therapy and to supervise others in the practitioner-as-scientist mode for several decades before I realized that "there is something wrong with this picture!". It took me another ten years to revise my perspective on counselling/therapy and on supervision and to evolve a generally constructivist mode of supervising.

I see it as my job to assist supervisees to shift from theoretical explanations of their experience with clients to self-observation (witnessing) their own thought processes,—that is to observing their own processes of emotional, cognitive, embodied experiencing of self and other in therapeutic interactions.

Now I come to supervision with an intention to work from my own biography which means that I try to keep my reflexivity open as I work outwards into the layers of interpretations which I develop as I interact with supervisees in their quest for clinical wisdom. I certainly have had a long history of working as a psychologist, counsellor and educator. Yet, I believe that it is fundamentally important for me to remain willing to be taught by the other how she lives her life, how she does her counselling/therapy, and how she constructs problematics relative to that doing.

I assume that others (both supervisees and clients) are resident experts on their own lives. A supervisee may be struggling in her attempts to articulate the meaning and experience of her therapeutic experience—and that is where I come in. I have had a lot of life experience articulating and describing human experience. I see it as my job to assist supervisees to shift from theoretical explanations of their experience with clients to self-observation (witnessing) their own thought processes,—that is to observing their own processes of emotional, cognitive, embodied experiencing of self and other in therapeutic interactions. First, the supervisee must be encouraged and shown how to become more self-aware (reflexive). Then, the supervisee must be provided a safe opportunity to articulate her expanding sense of how she interprets her worlds, both inner and outer, and how these interpretations interweave with those of others to produce horizons of common understanding or points of difference. Most of the time the supervisory discourse should remain rooted in the descriptions which the supervisee articulates of how she is experiencing her own sense of self and her interactions and interpretations[2] of clients and their problems.

Clinical wisdom

I am now going to turn to just one aspect of the complex process which we call "supervision". This is the aspect which we refer to as *clinical wisdom.*

My own life experience has brought me to a point where I assume that certain problems which are encountered in daily living can be "solved" in some sense, while others are simply not solvable but must be lived-through. This living-through can be a valuable source of strength later on in one's life (or it can be a burden which forever after is seen as a matter to suffer about). To make distinctions between the solvable and the unsolvable engages one not just in a meta-cognitive process, but in "epistemic cognition". Epistemic cognition is a term referring to the fact that any instance of knowing implicates my theory of knowledge and calls into question how certain I can be about what I know and an examination of the assumptions and criteria which I hold about knowing.

My own early education in counselling and therapy socialized me into the view that all things are knowable through direct observation with a high degree of probability—in other words, I was taught basic "if X, then Y" thinking strategies and taught that these strategies were to be used in doing therapy. This cognitive strategy reduces therapeutic uncertainties to the status of "puzzles" and the concomitant assumptions that puzzles have correct solutions and the task of the therapist is to apply the correct procedure to find the right solution. This is the modernist, rationalized basis for supervision In supervision the novice is guided by a person (the supervisor) who either knows the right solution or at least knows how to correctly define the problem and determine the best solution to be applied to the therapy puzzle.

I now assume that clinical knowing (indeed, all human knowing) is characterized by uncertainty. Any specific "problems" which a person experiences in daily living or more narrowly, which is discussed in the process of therapy, is best understood as "limited exceptions" to the universe of typical problems which individuals encounter in the practice of daily life. Decision-making about these life problems is not reducible to a mechanical process or an algorithm which can produce a solution. .

My current belief is that supervision is a learning process in which reflective judgments are fostered which help the learners to deal with conditions (in therapy, but also in life more generally) of uncertainty and flux. Reflective judgment must take into account two kinds of knowing—intellectual, abstract knowing and organismic, or embodied, knowing. These two forms of cognition—broadly mental and emotional, are to be brought out (articulated, exhibited, voiced) into a dialectical, dialogical association in supervisory discourse. One of these forms of knowing provides logical cohesion and stability, the other provides an experiential richness and fluidity. When these two modes of knowing *(logos* and *mythos)* are brought into an integrated flow of inquiry and understanding in the context of therapeutic issues and problems, the result can produce what I call "good clinical judgment". Under these conditions we can speak of wisdom and the wise person.

As I am strongly interested in assisting supervisees to deepen their own capacity for reflexivity and for self-witnessing, I use learning strategies such as "life-space mapping", "dialogical, negotiatory conversation", and "mindfulness" which I believe will move us toward these goals. In the following

section I will describe life-space mapping—a procedure which enables an individual to articulate his or her life activities, relationships, past, present and future existential modes, in a coherent, public, exhibit. It has considerable power to delineate and coordinate life activities, demonstrate patterns of influence, and concretize understanding.

Life space mapping is an activity which enables the individual not only to show what is going on, but to <u>construct</u> the meaning of what is going on.

Life space mapping: A core supervision activity

Mapping is just as important to human life as spoken language, music, art and mathematics. It is a way of working from the inside-out and a way of both finding and creating a place for ourselves in the framework of a particular context. All children have a tendency to draw maps and to create doodles. For children, making maps is a way of interweaving emotional feeling and external forays in the world. I think of mapping as a fundamental human activity. Finding one's way in the world consists of looking at something new, remembering what has past, and using this combined knowledge, beginning to find paths into the future. A life space map is our attempt to locate ourselves in the fluxing and often uncertain world in which we are existing.

Every person is potentially <u>homo cartigraphicus</u> and we should understand the cartographic experience to be rooted in visual, kinesthetic, emotional, cognitive, experience, and memory as well.

In making a map we make important distinctions—not only in reference to our inner world of ideas, values, and remembered experiences, but simultaneously distinctions about the web of life to which we are attached by our activities. Each map we make is probably wrong is some details, but the <u>making</u> of it helps to go further into the territory of our life. It is essential to realize that making a map is not simply "representing" reality (it is that), but more importantly it is creating reality. Maps represent, but they also are constitutive of personal and social realities.

Mapping should be approached metaphorically for it is a certain way of telling stories. I understand that every person is potentially <u>homo cartigraphicus</u> and we should understand the cartographic experience to be rooted in visual, kinesthetic, emotional, cognitive, experience, and memory as well. In British schools the skill of graphicacy is often added to the skills of numeracy and literacy. By

"graphicacy" is meant the communication of relationships that cannot be successfully communicated by words or mathematical notation.

Just about anything can be mapped if you conceive of maps broadly—maps, diagrams, doodles, mandalas, mobiles, drawings, weavings, sand-drawings, collages, cartoons, ironic or satirical maps, poetic images, or even the placing of familiar and/or unfamiliar objects in meaningful relation to one another and to ourselves on a table or wall or in the garden. Within the counselling and supervision context, we usually resort to making life space maps with reference to a relationship, a therapy strategy, a "problem" or reflections on counselling process.

Of course there are endless possibilities for mapping, but some frequent topics for mapping are:

Where I am in this specific therapeutic situation, and where I want to go

How I got to this point with this client

My sense of place in the profession of counselling

What is my picture of the situation which I and my client are in

Mapping what is important to my self-as-therapist

If I had a magic wand, this is what I would bring about in my counselling with client X

Who are the important people in the situation we are looking at, and why

My efforts to help X build an escape route, or a new future—what are our plans and projects, and what do we need to consider

Humans never travel in life, never follow cultural pathways without a map. "We all travel with many maps, neatly folded and tucked away in the glove compartment of our memory". Maps are a way of "discoursing" about the world. A map links the various parts of our remembered selves and experiences to each other; and links us as a single individual to the web of others, conditions, and objects surrounding us. Making a map is not primarily a method of describing the facts of our social location and surrounding world. It consists more in finding the threads connecting us to that world. Making maps changes the way we think about the world and ourselves in that world. In the context of supervision, mapping changes the way we do therapy.

Mary Lou's standpoint as a supervisee in constructivist supervision

My experience of the supervision sessions is that I am participating in an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust and intellectual stimulation. The nonjudgmental attitude of the supervisor allows me to explore areas of my work in which I might be confused or in need of guidance.

For the past ten years I have taught counselling courses at the University of Victoria, and performed group and individual psychotherapy in a psychology practice. I sought constructivist supervision from Dr. Vance Peavy because I had read his books, heard him lecture and knew of his commitment to constructivist thinking.

I have found Vance's emphasis on a collaboration and self-observation be stimulating and respectful of my experience and ideas. The supervision sessions with Vance and Sandra have been a rich confirmatory learning experience for me, one which I will describe below.
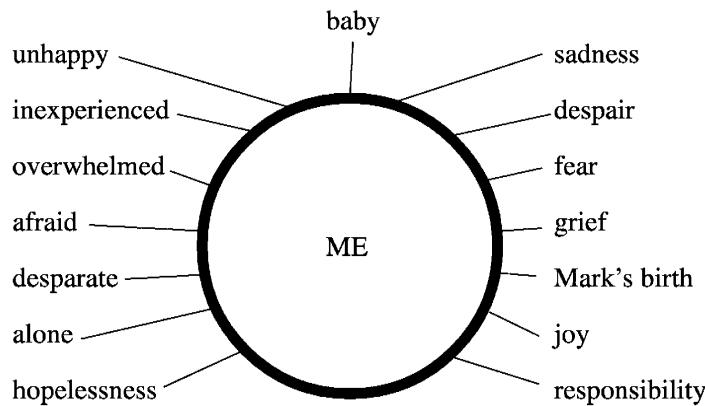
The supervision session is an opportunity to examine client cases and our reactions to the process of therapy from three perspectives: my own, the other supervisee, and the supervisor. The supervisor asks us for our cognitive appraisal and emotional responses to the case presented. He may ask: "What assumptions are you making?" Another question is: "What do you observe in yourself?" It is as if the questions are signposts directing my journey into new terrain: the phenomenology of the relationship to my therapeutic self, to my client. The interplay of three perspectives stimulates my creativity, conceptual and emotional understanding, and self-observational skills (reflexivity).

Prior to each supervision session, I spend time examining one or two cases in my practice—cases that are causing me concern, such as a patient who is suicidal or in distress. Mapping gives me greater insight and objectivity with regard to these cases, and myself, and allows me to decide what direction I want the collaboration conversation in the supervisory session to take. I use the constructivist tool of mapping to clarify and organize my thoughts on each case in order to present and discuss it in a succinct and highlighted manner during supervision.

As I present my interpretations of the therapy process, and my own experience of that myself and that process, I usually ask: "What questions are you aware of as you listen to me describing my experience in this therapy process?"

My experience of the supervision sessions is that I am participating in an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust and intellectual stimulation. The nonjudgmental attitude of the supervisor allows me to explore areas of my work in which I might be confused or in need of guidance. When I first entered supervision with Vance and Sandra I was feeling confused in my therapeutic practice. I felt overwhelmed with sadness and questioned my ability—especially in regard to a specific client.. This client was a married woman, aged thirty, whom I had counselled through the pregnancy and birth of her first child. When the baby was a few weeks old my client discovered that her son was both blind and deaf. Her despair touched me in such a way that I experienced myself as being very sad and as losing my objectivity with the client.

In our supervisory session Vance suggested that I make a life space map of my emotional response to the therapy process and especially to my feelings toward this baby. The result is diagrammed on page 167.

baby

unhappy   sadness

inexperienced   despair

overwhelmed   fear

afraid   grief

ME

desparate   Mark's birth

alone   joy

hopelessness   responsibility

As I mapped out the components of my response to the baby, I realized that each of the emotions I recorded on the map was related to my experience of the birth of my own son, Mark, 26 years ago.

My present feelings, were in fact, my own unresolved fears and sadness about giving birth in a foreign city while in an unhappy marriage twenty-six years ago. As I discussed my map in the supervisory session I began to understand, for the first time, that I felt unresolved grief about my own experience and these feelings had been triggered by the discussion which I had with my client about her baby and the baby's disabilities.

As this insight flooded over me, I felt amazed and still somewhat confused about my experience with the client. Vance suggested that, in order to deal with this unresolved grief, I write a letter in my journal to my then husband describing the fear I had experienced as a young, inexperienced and lonely mother. Of course this "letter" was really an opportunity for me to bring forth my memories and to state them in a "seeable" way. It was not intended as a letter to be sent to my former husband, but as a letter to myself. It was an act of inner dialogue—a discussion with two of my many selves.

Through this letter writing activity, I was able to gain a new understanding from the mapping and from my memories. I was engaged in self-observation in ways which I had never encountered before. I was in the process of turning a "messy" self-text into a coherent and clarified text. I was also untangling my own painful memories from the account which my client was giving me about her own experience with a new baby who was blind. (Incidentally, one of the amazing things about this self-clarifying process was my realization that my client was, in fact, coping with her mothering situation quite well—I was the one who was experiencing pain and sadness.)

At the next supervision, I presented my map to Sandra and Vance. We examined the map in detail and discussed our reactions to it. Sandra stated that she wished she had been a friend of mine at that critical time in my life. Her statement had a tremendous impact on me. My deep thought was that if I had known a friend like her in the past, I would not have been traumatized—or at least the sharing of my experience with someone like her would have allowed me to work my way through my own feelings.

Later in the week I rewrote in my journal that painful chapter in my life, placing Sandra as a friend and neighbor in that past context. In doing this re-authoring, I experienced a shift in my body: I felt my neck and stomach muscles relaxing. The sadness I had been feeling was lifting. It was as if through the self-observation process of mapping, letter writing and dialogue in the supervisory sessions I had moved from despair to acceptance. I experienced these activities and discussion as confirming to me as a therapist generally, and specifically with the particular client in question. To conclude, the dialogue amongst the three of us helps me gain—or regain- my confidence as a therapist. As we review specific therapeutic cases/processes, we also discuss different theoretical approaches to specific client concerns and we shared possible therapy procedures. Procedures are proposed and examined— but not imposed by our supervisor. We also discuss the philosophical foundations of therapy, and how our ideologies and assumptions influence what we do in therapy and how we interpret our experience in therapy,

Most of all, we return again and again to the activity of witnessing ourselves, examining our own assumptions, and trying to discern the mutual influences between ourselves, and between each of our selves and clients whose stories we hear. For me, constructivist supervision is a personally meaningful process, one in which I can engage more fully and more openly than any supervision which I have had before. Our time together is a reciprocally respectful time. I have the feeling that I am re-authoring who I am as a therapist and how I relate to clients.

Sandra's standpoint as a supervisee in constructivist supervision

Our supervisor enables an interactive process where both through
dialogue and dialectical discourse Mary Lou and I are inspired to
question ourselves, each other, and Vance and to entertain 'both/and'
approaches to client work rather than 'either/or', dichotomous
approaches.

In British Columbia, supervision of clinical experience is a requirement of becoming a registered counselling psychologist. So I contacted a supervisor whom I had heard about and who was known as a constructivist. As I began this process of clinical supervision, I assumed that the supervisor-supervisee relationship and transfer of knowledge and expertise would be unidirectional - from supervisor to supervisee. However, my experience has been very different from my expectations. Being mentored by a constructivist supervisor—at least in my experience—is a process of professional and personal evolution and empowerment.

This process was made more complex and rich because I shared it with a colleague, Mary Lou. Our supervisor enables an interactive process where both through dialogue and dialectical discourse Mary Lou and I are inspired to question ourselves, each other, and Vance and to entertain 'both/and' approaches to client work rather than 'either/or', dichotomous approaches. We are encouraged to reflect upon and explore our values and assumptions about the role of counselling and counsellor in the therapy process. We were also encouraged to explore multiple meanings of the concerns which those we are working with present to us.

An emphasis new to me and different from other supervisory experiences which I have had in my earlier master's degree work is that we are learning how to <u>contextualize</u> the experiences and problems which our clients present to us. I now know how to situate the client within the social-ecological and cultural dimensions of their lives. Through supervision, I have become more comfortable in helping clients to tolerate and to explore multiple meanings of highly-charged situations in order to determine their preferred directions and identities.

To individualize our learning process according to our professional needs and current practice, Mary Lou and I select issues from our counselling practices to discuss in our small group. Being able to influence the content of the mentoring sessions reinforced my sense of responsibility for, and instrumentality in, my ongoing professional and clinical development and education.

Personal learning projects which Vance and I have negotiated for myself— such as writing about my experiences with clients, reading constructivist literature, self-reflection and observation experiments, and mapping my own life-space has enabled me to become an active participant in developing and utilizing my own constructivist resources. These projects enabled me to step outside of my own psyche, find a stable and objective footing, and then turn my gaze inward to gain clarification of tacit meanings derived from my actual on-going life experience.

I have also gained increased confidence in using such projects to spark clients forward into movement and evolution, gradually reorienting their perspectives, and engaging them and myself in joint action to construct solutions to their problems.

I will now explain how I use life-space mapping. I have chosen to present my thoughts about life-space mapping for several reasons. First, although I have been in psychological training for over five years and although I have completed a Ph.D. in counselling psychology, I had never heard of life-space mapping until I began constructivist supervision. Although I was a bit skeptical at first, I have found it to be one of the most important therapy and learning activities of my entire education as a counsellor and therapist. It has had enormous value for me as an evolving professional, and now, in my work with clients. I now have a rich appreciation for what my supervisor calls "making the self visible".

Examples of how I used life-space mapping to understand how my life processes influence my perspectives on clients' problems and the counselling process follows:

Example 1: (not illustrated)
I was counselling two women experiencing symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and/or guilt related to recent role changes and conflict in their relationships with their young adult children who were
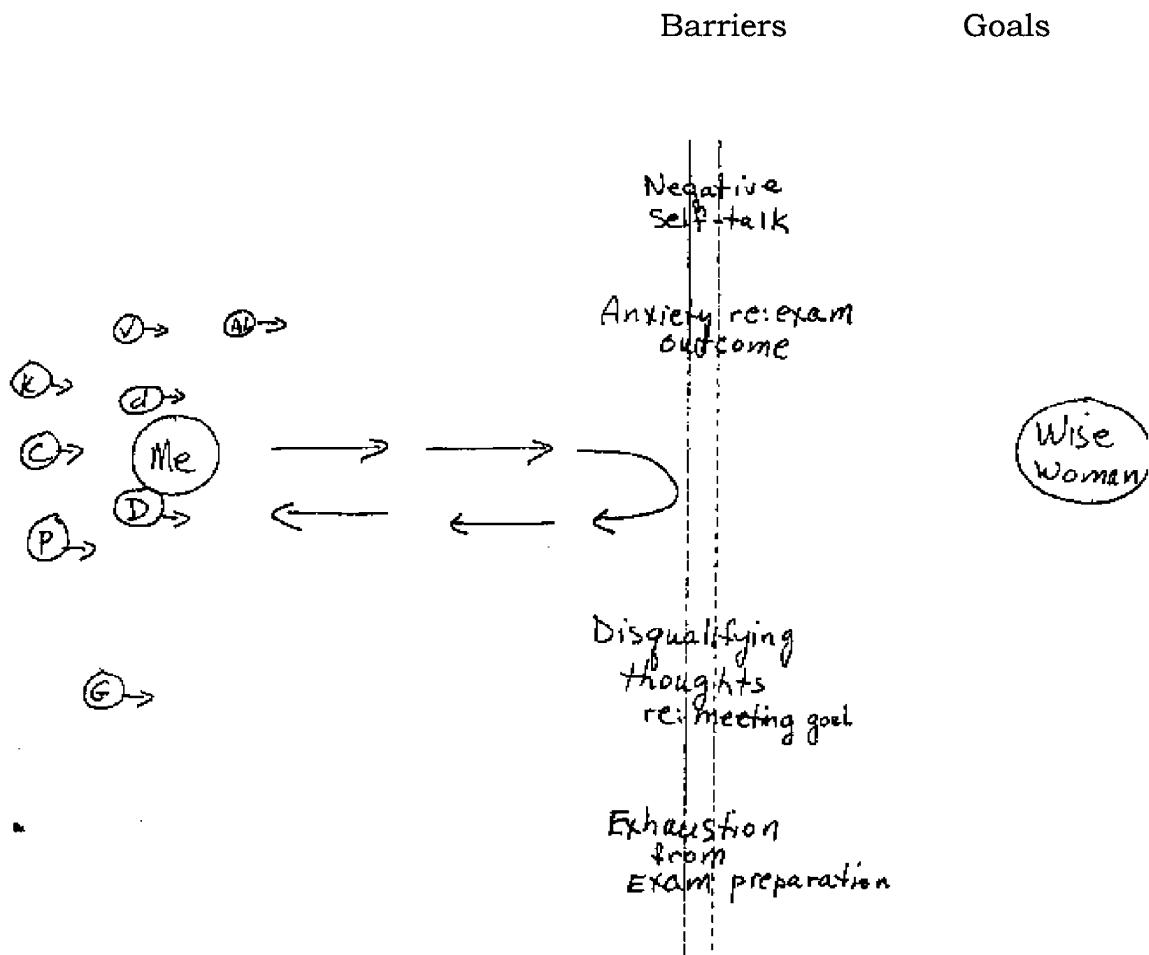
leaving home. As this was an emotionally laden issue in my life as well, I could more clearly see the mothers' perspectives and much less clearly envision the daughters' perspectives. Through group discussion and mapping my life-space as a mother in relation to my daughter and other influences on our changing relationship, I began to understand the complexity of this change from other perspectives. I could then entertain a 'both/and' approach which allowed for the possibility of a mother-older child relationship of both connection and autonomy rather than my earlier perspective of letting-go of the old relationship as a loss.

Example 2: (illustrated)
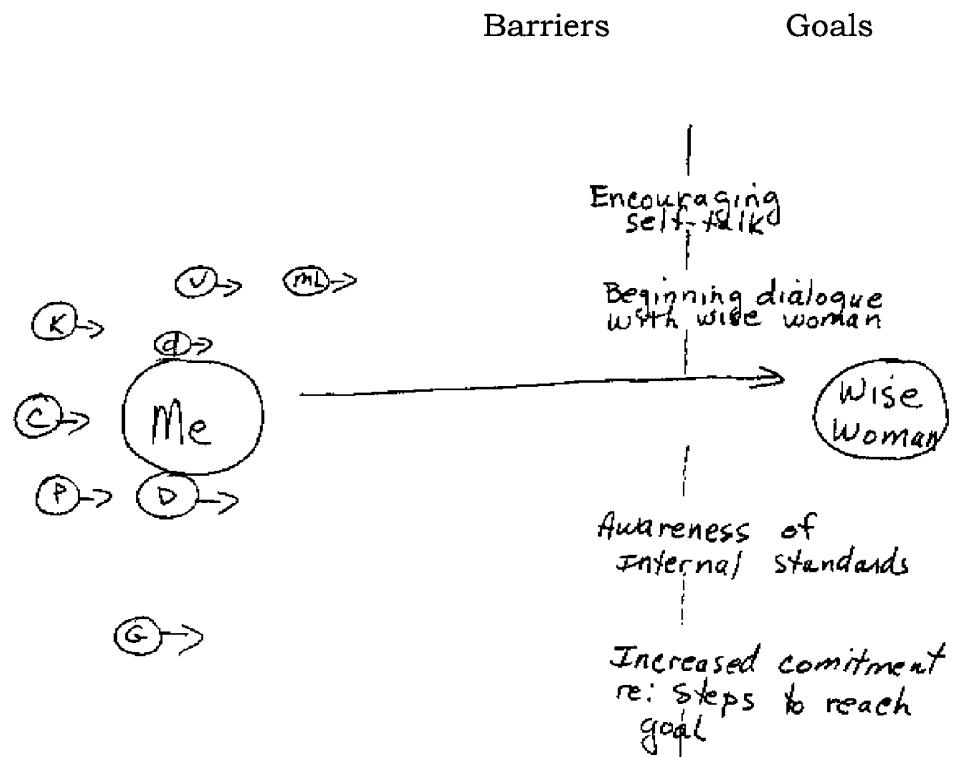
The experience of writing my licensing examinations was like moving into another reality, the reality of experts and external standards for competence. Following the examination, I experienced cognitive and affective perturbations about "not knowing the right way" and "what if I make a mistake" and "not meeting the external standard." Two maps follow: Map 1 was done shortly after writing the examination. Map Two was done two months after the examination.

Map 1 illustrates my preferred future, to be a competent therapist which I envision as "the wise woman." The small circles indicate the important people in my life and the arrows show their support for me toward this future. The diagonal line represents the barriers to my fulfilment of this future. I did this map with Vance's guidance at a point in time when I felt overwhelmed and daunted. The map helped me to visualize my goals, supports, the barriers, and ways I might overcome the barriers (indicated in the box in the bottom, left corner).

MAP I

Barriers   Goals

Negative
Self-talk

Anxiety re: exam
outcome

Me

Wise
Woman

Disqualifying
thoughts
re: meeting goal

Exhaustion
from
Exam preparation

Steps to reframe barriers:
. explore meanings and options in mentoring group & in writing
. address self-defeating self-talk
. map meaning and detail of "wise woman"

Map 2 illustrates the "reframe" and means I utilized to overcome (or pass through) the barrier and proceed to my preferred self and way of being a counsellor. It represents the retrieval or reauthoring of my own internal standards.

MAP 2

Barriers   Goals

Encouraging
self-talk

Beginning dialogue
with wise woman

Wise
Woman

Awareness of
Internal standards

Increased comitment
re: steps to reach
goal

Participating in constructivist supervision has been—and continues to be—very valuable in my development as a counselling psychologist. Vance's way of listening to me has been one of the most important ways in which he has contributed to my development in the supervision process. He listens in a way that makes me feel that whatever I am expressing is true and valuable. However, he does not just reflect. Instead he often asks questions—based on what I have said—that bring out my own assumptions, and those aspects of my expressed experience which I have taken-for-granted and which I only dimly hint at.

The remarkable thing about his questions is that they never imply some theory or hypothesis which he is suggesting to me. Instead they seem to be "fitting" keys to unlock further meanings which are already in me, but which I have either ignored, suppressed, or which have been on the edge of my awareness. I experience these questions as clear, specific, and somehow penetrating while not being imposing. I would not call them Socratic questions, since he does not seem to ask questions for which he already has a preformed answer. I have also noticed that he never forces his questions, but seems to sense my readiness for the question. Also he has an ability to immediately drop the question if it does not seem to be fitting with my experience.

Being listened to in a deep and hearkening way, and receiving his questions which seem to rise from my own unstated knowing rather from his pre-conceptions, thus opening possibilities in my own cognitive and emotional knowing rather than imposing his expertness— has given me confidence to use more questions with my own clients—especially those questions which seem to get at assumptions. Vance's listening and fertile questioning allowed me to set my anxiety aside, particularly at the beginning, so I could talk about difficult issues and aspects of my therapeutic activities where I was not sure of what to do next. As I felt my experiences and dilemmas recognized, respected and validated, I came more to trust my own knowing and intuition. It seems strange that my supervisor often said that I must teach him about what was going on in myself and my therapy. This very act of his—a kind of not-knowing—was instrumental in my learning to join my own clients in a more cooperative way and let them teach me about their lives.

Consequently, I have gained greater clarity of my identity and competence as a counsellor which in turn enables me to remain centred, present, and an ally with clients as they work to construct improved lives.

These group meetings with Vance and Mary Lou became my ideological home. In addition to the valuable means and methods I have learned through this process, the experience itself has enabled me to develop a way of thinking and way of being as a counselling psychologist which embodies the constructivist assumptions of self-observation, critical reflection, and multiple realities. As there are multiple ways of viewing, processing and therefore responding, a sense of freedom, opportunity and choice are open to both me and my clients. And finally, Vance's modelling of, and invitation to me, to counsel creatively and reflectively, all the while developing unique approaches with each client, inspires excitement and challenge for my future self and therapy work. It has kindled a strong Bergsonian image in me of people as *homo faber*—an image that I am now working to organize my therapist-asself and my counselling around.

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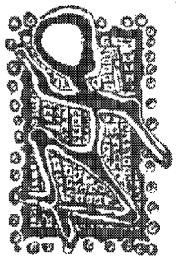
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[1] We use the term <u>clinical wisdom</u> in preference to more commonly used designations such as competency and skill. We wish to emphasize that supervision must attend not only to therapeutic "skills" but also judiciousness, ability to discern inner qualities and nuances of relationship. We also believe that all human beings exist in a "moral space" so that supervision must be significantly concerned with what is "good" in life, with ethical choices, and with "care" which means to become involved in the existential dimensions of the other's existence. "Wisdom" infers the intelligent, judicious, and creative application of the most valuable "cultural sensibility, nuance and judgement" which one has learned in life. We believe that it is clinical wisdom which can, and should be articulated in the supervisory process.

[2] My use of the term "intepretation" does not infer interpreting utterances according to some abstract theory of functioning or behaviour. It does refer to the cultural sensibility of the person—what is being interpreted is <u>how she is experiencing her own meaning</u> and the meaning of her intermental connections and articulations with others, especially clients.

REFLECTIONS...

CHAPTER 12
ON THE WAY TO BECOMING
A CONSTRUCTIVIST COUNSELLOR—OR ,
"GETTING READY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY"

All across the intellectual landscape the forces of objectivism are yielding

to the entreaties of constructivist thought.   ~G. Howard~

In this next-to-final chapter, I will discuss some of the issues which confront all conscientious counsellors, and I will try to indicate what a constructivist frame for understanding these issues is. Of course, I do not claim that all constructivists take the same view that I do.

Constructivist counselling
as a liberating and innovative framework

From my point of view, as I have come to understand more and better just what is entailed in thinking and counselling as a constructivist, my actual counselling experience has been liberatory and at the same time has led to my achieving a deepened sense of responsibility to—and respect for—the other, myself and our counselling relationship.

To enter hand-in-hand as a partner, so-to-speak, into a problem-solving conversation with another rather than as an expert who is supposed to "solve" the other's problem, is an enormous relief from an impossible burden.

I do not say this naively. I accept that the constructivist counsellor is an expert on the processes of communication and use of language which both counsellor and client will use as tools for working; and I accept that the client is the expert on his or her life—although not necessarily able or willing to articulate the essence of life experience without the counsellor's assistance. Both contribute to the counselling process and thus work from the perspective that they are together as co-workers in the

conversation and the problem-solving relationship. From the constructivist perspective, counselling is not a relationship of domination where one person is an expert and the other is a dummy, but a participatory relationship in which each has a special expertise to contribute on behalf of attempting to achieve a common goal. This is an enormously liberating insight.

The counsellor needs to address the client's readiness, and act both as a model of cooperation and even tutor the client in communication skills needed for dialogue, cooperation, and self-expression.

A further liberation occurs from the act of accepting that a partnership or "alliance" allows both the counsellor and the client to more freely exercise their intelligence and their creativity. In any relationship where one person assumes a status of superiority over another, the result is that the talents of both are diminished. A slave-master relationship is inherently curtailing. The master must use a good deal of energy to maintain the status and image of one-who-is-superior; the slave accepts a submissive or dominated status which is always limiting and constrained. Neither is free to innovate and freely exchange.

From a constructivist perspective the counselling relationship should be democratic (free give and take of information and ideas) and innovative (many times the solution to an individual's problem or concern will be invented rather than applied from an already pre-existing set of solutions or techniques).

The preceding remarks should not be taken as a suggestion to lessen the counsellor's responsibility to be skilful, mindful, wise and informed. Further, as any experienced counsellor can attest to, many clients do not enter into a counselling relationship able to work as a partner or ally. They may have other expectations, lack communications skill, or for a variety of reasons, not be prepared to act cooperatively. In other words, the client may not initially be <u>ready</u> to work hand-in-hand. In this event, the counsellor needs to address the client's readiness, and act both as a model of cooperation and even tutor the client in communication skills needed for dialogue, cooperation, and self-expression. Above all, the constructivist counsellor maintains an attitude of respect for the other, for her own person, and for the relationship which the two are constructing.

Assessment and the place of tests in constructivist counselling

In general, constructivist counselling makes much less use of testing than some other counselling approaches. There are a variety of reasons for this. Tests require an assumption of universality—a "good" test is one that claims to measure a given trait or characteristic across a whole population of people. This is not a tenable assumption for constructivists.

1. Testing tends to lead to labelling, or the placing of individuals into categories or pigeon-holes.
2. Tests have very little value in the prediction of individual actions.
3. Tests tend to re-enforce cultural stereotyping.
4. The most frequent use of tests is in classifying, administering, or processing individuals—these are not counselling functions.
5. Test results often reinforce black and white thinking in both clients and counsellors. Test results can be construed as a kind of easy solution for complex decisions—adopting a test result is "easier", "faster "and "cheaper" than the hard work of critical thinking and examination of life experience.
6. Generally, testing has contributed to the fallacy of the "IQ" and to the view that traits are measureable and that the results of measurement are capable of useful interpretation regardless of context. The creation of so-called "culture-fair" tests have come about as a recognition that personality and self characteristics do vary as a result of cultural membership.

Constructivists vary in their advocacy for and against the use of tests. Neimeyer[1] provides a discussion of the various ways in which tests and other formal assessment tools can be used by constructivist counsellors. My own position is that, most of the time, assessment can be done better by interview methods than by testing. This position is based on several assumptions:

1. Because each human being lives in a life-space that is to some extent unique, no test of general characteristics is going to produce a picture of the individual which is free from distortion.
2. If you want to know something about a person, ask[2]. This is not to say what you hear is always true, free from deceit or unbiased. It is to say that most of the time, the individual is the best authority on his or her own life and this life is best revealed as a life story.
3. There are various activities which the counsellor can engage in during the counselling session which have an assessment function:

* designing a map of the person's life-space,
* using a life-line to identify critical events and experiences in a person's life,
* use meaning-creating questions to develop the meaning of life experiences,
* capture a story or script from a person and together with the storyteller, explicate the meaning of the story through the use of dialogue and meaning-creating questions,
* have clients use journalising and other writing and autobiographical methods,
* assist clients to assemble resumes or portfolios which convey the skills, experiences and achievements which they have accumulated in life.

Constructivist counsellors seldom employ the concept of diagnosis. Instead, it is more often the case that the communication of the interview is seen as a constructive activity which is planful and clarifying.

The very meaning of "assessment" is to analyze critically, the nature, value, and merit of something. In constructivist counselling, the term assessment is directed toward the client's life experience and this is best done through dialogue. Following Epting[3], I have developed a set of eight clusters of questions which help to guide the counsellor in assessing the client's experience, concern, and preferred counselling plan:

1. What is the focus of the client's concern?
2. What are the clients assumptions, beliefs and feelings about her concern? Is there anything in the client's past life experience which she can use to help with this concern?
3. What is your appraisal of the client's story? The client's basic stance?
4. What are important contextual factors? Who else is involved? Where and when is this concern appearing? Does the concern implicate gender, race, ethnicity, social class, stigma, or difficult relationship to other people? Is this an empowerment-disempowerment issue? Does the client lack information or ability?
5. Does the client have a preferred goal? What routes are open to her to move in the direction of her preferred future?
6. Do the counsellor and client have a plan or activity which both agree will probably be in the client's best interest and that the client can implement(and will implement)?
7. What is the next step? For the client? For the counsellor?
8. Are counsellor and client in agreement that what each is contributing to the counselling process is improving the client's chances of success in resolving the concern?

Using terms such as planning and clarification instead of diagnosis or even assessment reduces unfortunate tendencies on the part of some counsellors to classify clients into pigeonholes such as "unmotivated", "lazy", "irresponsible", "neurotic", "challenged", or "co-dependent". Such labels tend to stigmatise and disempower people and stress deficits rather than assets. Reification and labelling also hide the actual experiences and meanings which constitute the real self and real activities in life. To recap, the aim of assessment (planning) in constructivist counselling is to open up avenues of movement, promote empowerment, support transitions, and assist the client to gain eligibility for more participation in social life.

What about the place of data and information in constructivist counselling?

Not infrequently, counsellors are inclined to over-emphasize the importance of information in the counselling process. They are fixated on getting the "facts" of their client on the one hand, and on transmitting data and information to their clients on the other hand. Certainly it is important and necessary to have accurate and relevant information at hand in making decisions and planning. However, either interrogating clients in order to get an objective, factual view of their situation, or saturating them with information during the interview are both mistakes and are meeting counsellor needs more than client needs.

Information is only valuable for the client when she is able to integrate it into her thinking and make use of it as meaningful knowledge. Flooding clients with information can be quite disempowering. I have developed guidelines for the counsellor to use when providing information for client use:

1. Does the client seem "ready" to receive this particular parcel of data or information?

2. Is the information relevant to the concern of the client—from the client's point of view?

3. Is the client able, and given an opportunity, to discuss how she plans to use this information in meeting her need?

4. Is the counsellor providing information which might better be gathered by the client—in other words, is providing this information having an empowering or disempowering influence on the client?

Both information gathering and information dispensing are often meeting the needs of the counsellor (counsellors often assume and have learned that this is what a good counsellor does) more than meeting the needs of the client. From a constructivist perspective, accurate and relevant information is very important. However, it should not over-ride the criteria of client readiness, personal meaningfulness, client empowerment, and conversion of the information or data into client knowledge which the client understands how to use in the context of solving her problem.

Responsibility for the counsellor implies that she work in a committed way to try to achieve what is in the best interests of the client.

Culture-centred counselling

In recent years it has become necessary to pay more attention in counselling to the role which cultural membership has in the counselling process. In many parts of the world there has been a flow of people across national boundaries either as immigrants or as refugees. The resulting cultural mixing and diversity has brought new obligations to the profession of counselling.

It has become fashionable for texts on counselling to include sections on "multi-cultural" counselling, or "cross-cultural" counselling. At this point in the profession of counselling there is not a great deal of agreement about how to think and practice counselling in contexts of cultural diversity. However, there are certain insights which can assist the counsellor in making sense when counselling with clients who have grown up in a culture different from the counsellor's own. I will briefly describe several of these insights:

1. All counselling occurs in a cultural context.

When counsellor and client come from different cultures, we can speak of bi-cultural counselling. The "subjective" cultures of both come into play. These appear as unquestioned and seemingly self-evident assumptions and conclusions that are rarely stated and even more seldom questioned. They can account for marked mis-understandings and break-down in interpersonal communication. For example, a Caucasian English-speaker typically speaks rapidly, asks many questions, and is more-or-less self-assertive. On the other hand an individual whose culture or origin is aboriginal (First Nations) will also speak English but does so much slower, with long silences and asks fewer questions. These

differences can lead to serious mis-understandings. The Caucasian may view the aboriginal as resistant, slow-minded, and uncommunicative while the aboriginal views the Caucasian as pushy, intrusive, and domineering. Both speakers interpret silence very differently. The aboriginal sees silence as necessary for "thinking things over and formulating a thorough and careful reply," while the Caucasian interprets silence as a sign of indifference, resistance or mental slowness. Such conflicting communication patterns can lead to mutual distrust, frustration, and withdrawal from communication.

2. All forms of counselling and effective counselling in all cultural contexts require the presence of a trustworthy relationship, an essential ingredient of which is empathy.

It is difficult for a counsellor who is insensitive or unaware of the client's subjective culture to have empathy with the client. It is perhaps more accurate to say that a counsellor working with culturally diverse clients should have cultural empathy. At a minimum this means having knowledge of the clients basic assumptions about such cultural items as manner of dress, food, ceremonies and rituals, family and gender customs, and work habits.

3. Another issue in bi-cultural counselling is that of ethics.

At one extreme is what can be called ethical relativism which is characterised by tolerance and broad-mindedness. At the other extreme is ethical absolutism which implies a rigid and unyielding stance with regard to values and moral judgements. Either of these stances can spell conflict in bi-cultural communication when the counsellor or client adhere strongly to a particular ethical stance which may make sense in one culture but which contradicts basic values or assumptions in the other's culture.

A good ethical stance for the constructivist counsellor to take is a kind of middle-ground between relativism and absolutism. This stance is the "ethic of authenticity, responsibility, and care." A stance of authenticity means that the counsellor takes care not to manipulate, pretend, or in any way deceive the client. Authenticity requires that the counsellor value honesty and sincerity, even though this may mean dealing with painful experiences. It also means that words and actions should be congruent—the counsellor does not promise anything which she cannot deliver on.

On the level of the individual, the constructivist counsellor attempts to display and promote critical thinking, reflexivity, and self-knowledge as one of the best ways to implement an ethic of authenticity, responsibility and care.

Responsibility implies that the counsellor work in a committed way to try to achieve what is in the best interests of the client. It also means adhering to the principle that, through thick and thin, it is almost always best for individuals (both counsellors and clients) to take responsibility for their own actions and accept the full consequences of their actions. Personal choice and responsibility are pre-

ferred over blaming or accusing others for one's own actions, indifference, passivity, neglect, denial, and feigned ignorance.

Care is a deeply rooted belief that one is part of humanity, that each of us is, to some extent, our brother's and sister's keeper, and that the alleviation of the suffering of one human being is a act of good for all of humanity. Care is a relational and contextual principle and must be adjusted to each situation because of unique factors. Care tells us that it is not acceptable to display indifference nor is it acceptable to turn away from others who are suffering or are being subjected to cruelty. How we respond with care will vary from one situation to another. What care tells us that we must not do is to ignore or pretend that suffering and pain are not real—that nothing can be done anyway. Further, that it is not acceptable to avoid involvement with those less fortunate than ourselves by claiming that they "deserve" to suffer or endure cruel or unusual hardship.

An ethic of authenticity, responsibility and care is congruent with the constructivist perspective of multiple realities. While there are multiple realities (counsellor and client may come from very different cultural frames of reference), within any given perspective, there are certain values, practices and actions which are preferred over others.

From a constructivist perspective, preferred values and actions are the result of human negotiation, not dictates of some extra-human authority, and long-standing principles, norms, and laws always remain candidates for possible re-negotiation. On the level of the individual, the constructivist counsellor attempts to display and promote critical thinking, reflexivity, and self-knowledge as one of the best ways to implement an ethic of authenticity, responsibility and care.

4. One of the most influential considerations in bi-cultural counselling is the dimension of individualism vs. collectivism.

Often the counsellor comes from a culture which stresses the virtue of individualism while the client comes from a culture in which the collective, family, or relationality is favoured over individualism. One of the cultural groups with which I have had the most contact are aboriginal groups in Canada and the United States. In many native groups, the family, clan and community have great value and often override the concerns of the individual. Most counsellors who have worked with migrants and refugees are aware that although it may be the individual who is seen in counselling, it is the family of the individual that collectively makes many important decisions.

Not very much research has been done to identify counselling principles and methods which are especially suited for bi-cultural counselling[4]. Most of what we know, or think we know, comes from first-hand experience in bi-cultural counselling. Drawing mainly on the conceptual work of Hofstede[5] I will present a table of cultural dimensions in counselling.

Hofstede proposes four bi-polar dimensions which come into play in varying degrees in bi-cultural counselling. The first dimension is that of individualism versus collectivism. Most European and Caucasian North-American cultures stress individualism while non-western and most indigenous cultures are organized more around the concepts of the collective—family, community, clan.

The second dimension is especially manifest in the type of counselling relationships which are used. When power is unequally distributed to the counsellor, the counsellor's expertise, credentials

and elevated status are prominently displayed. When power is more equally distributed between counsellor and client, the counselling relationship tends toward informality and cooperation.

The third dimension, high versus low uncertainty avoidance is often manifest in the degree to which the counselling process is either technical-bureaucratic (high uncertainty avoidance) versus experiential and informal (low uncertainty avoidance).

Finally, the gender factor enters into counselling in at least two important ways. First is the preference by members of certain cultural groups to have gender similarity between counsellor and client. The second way that gender enters into counselling is in reference to the fact that males have, until recently, dominated the theory-building of counselling, the training of counsellors, and in many places, the practice of counselling. One of the most significant complaints of the advocates of feminist counselling is that for years counselling and therapy has been under the domination of males and that female experience has been trivialized or ignored. In the last several decades, however, there has been a "feminization" of counselling and therapy—at least insofar as counselling practice is concerned and women have entered into leadership roles in the profession of counselling.

Table: Cultural dimensions in counselling

Individualism	*Collectivism*
Self, insight, self understanding	Relationship, group, network
Alienation, guilt, loneliness	Shame, relationship failure
Counsellor as strong figure	Counsellor as nurturing
Development of individuality	Social integration
Individual choice, responsibility	Acceptance of social controls
Individual integrity, conflict, resolution	Harmonious relations, balance

Counsellor Power	*Client Power*
Directive counselling, cog-beh. coun.	Person-centred, constructivist
Counsellor as expert	Counsellor as ally
Counsellor as change agent	Counsellor as catalyst
Conformity, social effectiveness	Self-discovery, potentiation
Differentiation of counsellor/client roles	Counsellor/client role overlap & de-differentiation
Professional credentials emphasised	Self-help, support groups, networks, emphasis on counsellor/client cooperation

High Uncertainty Avoidance	Low Uncertainty Avoidance
Genetic, biological explanations	Social, psychological explanations
Behaviour change techniques	Emphasis on meaning, experience
Medical affiliation	Multidisciplinary orientation
"Scientific" status claimed	"Best guess", bricolage status
Tight regulation of counselling practice	Counselling practice loosely regulated
Masculinity	Feminity
Pro-organisation stance	Pro-person stance
Legalistic, presses for conformity	Creative, empathic, expressive
Feeling avoidance	Feeling acceptance
Individualistic	Relational, holistic
Enabling, action oriented	Caring, nurturant
Rationalistic	Intuitive

The four dimensions and various factors displayed in the preceding table may be familiar from your own experience. It is not that the factors are good or bad in themselves. However, if they come into play in cultural settings where they are in contradiction to basic cultural assumptions and values, the result is conflict and mis-communication between counsellor and client. If they are similar to, and resonant with the counsellor's and clients respective cultural assumptions, the counselling process should be fruitful and characterised by empathy, understanding and problem resolution.

I have tried to show in this book how constructivist counselling is a form of counselling which is well-suited to the demands of uncertain times and how it can serve and inspire new generations of counsellors.

As I have pointed out in earlier portions of this book, we are now living in a time of very high uncertainty and we need forms of counselling which acknowledge rather than avoid the uncertain conditions of social life and help people navigate in seas of cultural uncertainty. My conjecture is that in times of high uncertainty we need counselling which is characterised by low uncertainty avoidance. We must learn to face and deal with high uncertainty, not avoid it. Over time we may find that we are able to construct selves and relations which can be healthy in the midst of uncertainty and we will come to prize living in cultural contexts with low-uncertainty-avoidance patterns. Within such a culture, a range of helping approaches would be acceptable and the principle of multiple realities would

be widely upheld. Cultural diversity would provide richness and challenge rather than conflict and frustration.

Forms of counselling which stress such components as: life-experience, caring, novelty and innovation, philosophical and spiritual views, self and relational construction would be celebrated and available to all members of the culture who wished to increase their eligibility for more rewarding participation in social life. I have tried to show in this book how constructivist counselling is a form of counselling which is well-suited to the demands of uncertain times and how it can serve and inspire new generations of counsellors. It provides hope and support to individuals in their struggles to form better lives, and it releases creativity and intelligence for both counsellor and client to use as tools in the struggle.

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CHAPTER 13
WHEN STRANGERS MEET:
MAJORITY CULTURE COUNSELLORS
AND MINORITY CULTURE CLIENTS[1]

There seems little doubt that counsellors are - or should be - key figures in the process which enables refugees and immigrants to learn how to navigate in the host culture.

Introduction

In this chapter I have two goals. First, I will identify and discuss a number of issues which arise when members of different cultures relate to each other via the,~ counselling process. Then I will offer some observations on the education and practice of counsellors who are, or will be, counselling with people who are from cultures different from their own.

It is probably unnecessary to say that counsellors all over the world now meet more and more clients who are culturally different from themselves due to immigration, opening of the borders of countries, and the incidence of refugees fleeing intolerable life conditions. These human movements and re-settlements have serious implications for guidance workers, counsellors, educators, health, social assistance, and policing authorities. In some instances the local labour market and entire communities may feel the effects of these increases in population from other cultures. There seems little doubt that counsellors are - or should be - key figures in the process which enables refugees and immigrants to learn how to navigate in the host culture.

On the wrong track

In North America the term "cross-cultural counselling" has been used to refer to counselling with members of minority cultures. The two basic assumptions underlying this type of counselling are that 1) the counsellor and client are culturally different and 2) standard counselling techniques should be adapted to culturally different clients. The term "multi-cultural counselling" has been used more-or-less interchangeably with the term "cross-cultural counselling." Although a large literature has built-up on the topic of multi-cultural counselling, there is scant reason to believe that either the quality or quantity of counselling for minority clients has improved as a result of the attention which is being given to "multi-cultural counselling" (Des, 1997).

Mainstream counsellors may have attitudes, expectations, values, and counselling techniques which not only don't support the counselling process, but actually interfere with it.

There are numerous reasons why multi-cultural counselling has promised more than it has delivered. One reason is that much of the emphasis in multi-cultural counselling has been on 1) adapting general counselling techniques to the minority counselling context. This practice assumes that a range of generic skills can be developed and used across differing minority groups, and 2) focusing the training of counsellors on individual interviewing skills. The concept of generic skills and exclusive focus on individual interviewing are not the most important considerations in counselling with minority group members.

In order to create better counselling for minority group members it is essential to shift the focus of counselling and counsellor training. First, it is necessary to shift attention from exclusively individual counselling to the social and political contexts in which counselling takes place. Second, it is equally necessary to include certain cultural features of minority cultures into the counselling process. Every culture has developed some method or methods for dealing with human misery (Kleinman, 1988), and these "culturally-sensible" methods are often quite different from those advocated by Western, individualistic psychology and counselling professionals. Further, the characteristics of clients vary considerably in different minority populations, as do culture-specific methods of dealing with problems (Triandis, 1985). Main-stream counselling approaches tend to mirror the beliefs, values and expectations of white, middle-class, privileged majority-culture members. Counselling theories and practices are products of majority-culture academics and do not seem to work very well with minority culture members (Wohl, 1989).

Further, minority culture members are often faced with racism, discrimination, and oppression which most counselling academics have never had to face, and which are usually not dealt with as important topics in counsellor education programs. Such topics, if addressed at all, are usually examined on a purely intellectual level and leave out the socio-political context entirely. For example a

recent book by Ridley (1995) on overcoming unintentional racism in counselling has virtually no reference to culture, except for individualistic concepts such as cultural transference, empathy, and goal setting.

Current attempts by counsellor education programs to implement multicultural studies in their offerings leave much to be desired. In a 1987 study in the United States, Pontoretto and Casas (1987) used a peer nomination technique to identify 35 institutions across the country with noteworthy multicultural components in their counsellor education programs. 20 experts were used and barely more than half (18) received only one nomination as a program meeting the criterion: "this program has multicultural strengths relative to the traditional counsellor training program". Some of the experts refused to name any program as meeting the criterion.

It should be held firmly in mind that the problem of inadequate counselling services for minority group members has two sides: minority culture members do have customs, beliefs, world views and values which differ from those of mainstream counsellors. The other side is that mainstream counsellors may also have attitudes, expectations, values, and counselling techniques which not only don't support the counselling process but actually interfere with it.

The majority of counsellors seem to work best with clients who are culturally similar to themselves, and who are youthful, attractive, verbal, intelligent, and successful (the so-called YAVIS syndrome) and do not do so well with clients who are homely, old, unsuccessful, nonverbal, or culturally different (the HOUND syndrome; Krumboltz, Becker-Haven, & Burnett, 1979).

The problem is bigger than counselling

In the latest issue of the American Psychologist, Christine Hall (1997) has written a very interesting position paper entitled, "Cultural Malpractice: The Growing Obsolescence of Psychology." Based on the changing demographics of the Unites States (by 2050 it is predicted that at least 50% of the US population will be people of colour), Blacks, Asians, Native Americans, Hispanics and others will draw even with the white population in numbers if not in other ways. Hall argues that substantive changes will have to be made in psychological theory, research, training and practice, or it will become increasingly irrelevant to larger and larger numbers of people. Guthrie's 1976 classic book, Even the Rat Was White recounts decades of mistreatment of minorities in the United States by white, middle-class, academic psychologists through exclusion of minority members and by incorrect attributions and generalisations.

In the United States, the National Institute of Health has issued a memorandum that it is unethical for research scientists who are inadequately knowledgeable about minority culture members to do research on them. It seems to me that this same opinion should prevail with counsellors and therapists also. The counsellor who has little or no knowledge of the subjective culture of clients is almost certain to make wrong assumptions, subscribe to stereotypes, and act like a "cultural dope". Is this not unethical practice?

Minority culture members tend to utilise counselling services less than majority culture members

and also tend to terminate counselling more quickly (Sue & Sue, 1990). In a study which I and my associates (Peavy, 1994) carried out in British Columbia on First Nations clients and counselling services in schools and community counselling services, the utilisation of school counselling services by Native youth was less than 25 % compared with the participation rate of white students, and in some schools was virtually zero. The highest participation rates were in those few schools with counsellors of Native ancestry on staff. Generally, minority clients under-utilise counselling services because: 1) they do not trust majority culture counsellors, they feel that the counsellors are not sensitive to the issues which they confront in their lives, the counsellors do not act sensibly toward them, and the counselling services do not meet their needs. Middle class, white counsellors frequently have had very little actual life contact with minorities, and have not had much culturally relevant training in their preparation as counsellors or therapists.

Due to their lack of relevant cultural experience and knowledge, majority culture counsellors make many false assumptions and have inaccurate perceptions of minority clients. Asian clients often somaticize stress and are viewed as delusional when in fact they are simply stressed. Hispanic clients may be viewed as passive or resistant when in fact they are simply deferent to authority. Native clients may be viewed as evasive, resistant or retarded for not speaking when in fact they are offended and put-off by counsellor questions and rapidity of speaking. Arabic culture clients come from a culture with strongly delineated gender roles. If an Arabic culture woman is referred to a male counsellor, this may cause her great distress due to the conflict in cultural protocol.

With reference to clinical training, Hall recommends that all practitioner programs should work for the goal of "cultural competency". In her view, culturally competent practitioners must understand the impact on individuals of ten cultural dimensions:

- Cultural membership, including foods, customs, ceremonies, and spirituality (or religious beliefs).
- Family structure, including gender roles
- Language of origin and literacy in majority culture language
- Identity processes, including personal variations
- Medical, personal helping and healing proclivities
- Testing and assessment procedures and tools
- Oppression and political issues
- Stigma of status and social location
- Socio-economic differences within groups
- Majority culture-minority culture relations

Hall contends that North American psychology is at a critical juncture in its life cycle. It must develop a (culturally) diversified psychology with respect to research, training and practice, or it will recede into obsolescence for larger and larger numbers of people. To the extent that counselling is regarded as largely an applied psychology, I suggest that it is in the same boat as psychology in general in the sense that it needs revising to meet the needs of cultural diversity.

Revising counselling and counsellor education
to gain more cultural sensibility

*It is quite likely that you will discern each client has definite cultural
characteristics which are not evident in the others and that in each
instance you are in a bi-cultural interaction with its own distinctive
dynamics and cultural knowledge requirements.*

In the rest of this paper I will present a number of suggestions for making counselling and counsellor
education more relevant in the context of cultural diversity. By way of caution, I doubt if there is any
universal solution or strategy to follow. Just what constitutes "helpfulness" is differently constructed
in differing cultural contexts. The very nature of cultural diversity varies from region to region in the
world and of-course within any cultural group or sub-group, there are endless important individual
differences. My own professional and minority cultural-contact experience has been greatest with
North American aboriginal people. I have also had quite a lot of contact with Hispanics (mainly Mexi-
can and Chilean), and Asian (mainly Chinese and Japanese). My observations are no doubt influenced
by these contacts.

One of the first things that Canadian psychologists and non-native counsellors find out when coun-
selling with Natives is that there is no such thing as a "generic Indian. The MicMac people are quite
different from the Cree, sub-groups within the Cree differ from one another, Crees differ from the
Haida, and the Haida are quite different from the Northern Tauchone and so on. Even though in other
ways they are similar- all have extended families, all have an intricate set of spiritual beliefs, and all
are respectful of elders.

I live in Canada which is essentially a country inhabited by ab(original) people for many thousands
of years and then colonised by immigrants over the past four centuries. Canada continues to admit a
fairly large flow of refugees and immigrants today, especially from Asia. In downtown Vancouver
many stores display advertisements in English, Chinese and Japanese. Along English Bay sea walk,
one hears a great diversity of languages being spoken by evening strollers - French, German, Russian,
Hungarian, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Hindi, Spanish, Italian as well as English, of course. In
some schools the percentage of children coming from homes in which English is not the family lan-
guage is now exceeding 80 %. In addition there remain remote aboriginal communities in which many
adults do not read or write English and who still speak their own ancestral languages.

I believe that it is essential to recognise the many differences that distinguish one cultural group
from another - so different are many cultural groups that I believe that it is misleading to use the term
"multicultural" in the context of counselling since it carries the connotation that there are generic skills

which, once learned, will enable one to counsel members of various cultures - a kind of universal solution to cultural diversity.

If you are an advocate of generic multicultural counselling skills as adequate to make you an effective counsellor with clients from a diversity of cultures, then you should try the following experiment. Even though each of three clients speaks your own language sufficiently to establish conversation with you, try being a counsellor in turn to 1): a client who is a Russian immigrant farmer; 2) an Iraqui woman who is a refugee from the marshes of southern Iraq; and 3) an Inuit from the far north of Canada. It is quite likely that you will discern that each client has definite cultural characteristics which are not evident in the others and that in each instance you are in a bi-cultural interaction with its own distinctive dynamics and cultural knowledge requirements. It will take more than generic skills to render you competent in all three cases.

In the following paragraphs I will make suggestions which I believe are helpful in thinking about counselling with clients whose cultural background and origin is different from your own. What constitutes cultural competency and how is it acquired? I draw rather heavily upon my own research and practical experience in counselling with and for Native people, since that is what I know most about. I do not claim that everything I advocate will hold true for all cultural members everywhere. I mean the suggestions to be an attempt to place us on a better track than we have been on up to now in our attempts to deliver culturally sensible counselling to members of minority cultures or sub-cultures. By "minority members" I refer first of all to refugees and immigrants who are from cultures different from the majority host culture; I also refer to aboriginal people such as First Nations in Canada, Sami in Finland, and Maori in New Zealand who are neither immigrants or refugees but are marginalized sub cultures and who were "here first". In large part they became marginalized under the oppressive influences of colonisation and reduced to sub-culture status. I also include other "minorities" such as gay and lesbian, lower-class members, people of colour, and the more-or-less chronically unemployed. These latter groups are, in many senses, part of the majority culture, yet they are often stigmatised, marginalized, oppressed, and constitute out-groups who are deprived of full participation in the social life of majority culture.

The following theses and brief arguments constitute a platform for revising our counselling concepts, practices, and training with reference to counselling services for minority (or sub-culture) members in cultures of diversity.

Thesis I

A competent counselling interaction between a majority culture member
and a minority culture member is best described as bi-cultural.

The term "bi-cultural" indicates an ability to navigate in two cultures, characteristically one's own primary culture and then a second, often, though not necessarily, a sub-culture or minority culture.

Many First Nations individuals are bicultural. They maintain a native identity, including a world-view, spirituality, and body of traditional knowledge (ceremonies, food, dress, and tribe or clan protocol) which may or may not include traditional language facility. At the same time they have learned how to survive in main-stream culture. They have learned the ways of the middle-class culture members and have acquired an education and the ability to work in middle-class society if they choose to do so.

It is much rarer to find a main-stream culture member who is bi-cultural - that is, who is "at home" in First Nations cultural life. In our research into counselling services for First Nations youth and young adults, one of the questions we sought answers to was: "Is your preference that a counsellor be of First Nations ancestry?" While more than fifty per cent responded with an unqualified "yes", there were a good many others who indicated that they did not seek out a counsellor because he or she was native. Rather they sought a counsellor according to how the counsellor presented him or her self. What was desired were counsellors: "Who know us and our families, who are familiar with native culture, who are known in our community through their attendance at long-house meetings, ceremonies, funerals, feasts, and sports." "It is not so much that the counsellor must be of the same band or clan that we are, it is that the counsellor should have first-hand knowledge of our culture and community life and should have a friendly and respectful attitude toward us and our culture."

There are endless mediating factors which influence the bi-cultural counselling situation. With regard to Native clients it makes a real difference whether not the individual is rural or urban; traditional, bi-cultural, transitional or acculturated; residential school generation or later; matriarchal or patriarchal; residing on-reserve or off-reserve; clan-affiliated or not. Similarly, it makes a real difference if a non-native counsellor is familiar with native culture merely through reading or has had direct living contact with native people and culture; and whether or not the counsellor understands rural life and has or has not been the object of racial discriminatlon, etc.

In our research we found that many counsellors working in schools with First Nations students in attendance and located near Native communities had never attended a long house meeting, and had never attended a native funeral or other ceremony, except perhaps as tourists had watched dances or drumming events. The family structures are very different for many non-native counsellors and native people. For example, a majority of non-native counsellors live in a nuclear family arrangement where relatives are often far away and only loosely bound into a family structure. On the other hand it is not uncommon for a native individual to refer to an extended family with over a hundred members - sometimes several hundred members. The first native student I supervised in graduate study invited me to her brother's house for a family get-together following her examination for a master's degree. There were 68 adults and a large number of children at the home meeting - all family members except for me.

Incidentally, at her oral examination, her five brothers, their wives, a number of her uncles and cousins, and her mother, all attended the examination as a sign of respect for her accomplishment. In my 30 years of supervising graduate students, I have never witnessed that type of family attendance at a master's degree examination of a non-native graduate.

One final observation, instead of the student receiving gifts from the family members, she gave a

gift to each of the 68 adults together with a spoken thanks. This was an act of respect on her part for the support she had received from her extended family during the two years of her studying.

Thesis II

Bi-cultural counselling research, training and practice should be unified;

holism and inclusion should prevail over reductionism and classification

in practice.

One of the most unfortunate consequences of 20th century scientific psychology and its applications has been the development of endless classifications and speciality distinctions. For reasons that completely escape me, research, pedagogy, and clinical/counselling applications are typically treated as distinct categories, thus fracturing psychological thinking into disparate elements. This may satisfy a modern-day Descartes but it definitely does not make cultural sense today to make them exclusive of one another. As Hall (1997: 649) points out, "Most women; people of colour; gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals; and (some) applied psychologists do not separate these issues." Certainly one of the central points of most aboriginal world-views is their perception of the inter-relatedness of all things. In short, I believe that counselling with members of minority cultures should be holistic rather than reductionist and should acknowledge, respect (and often include) elements such as spirituality, symbology, and traditional healing knowledge.

Bi-cultural counselling should also be context-sensitive and include consideration for family structures and influence. In the next thesis I will discuss the requirement that various aspects of the socio-political-economic milieu must be considered for bi-cultural counselling to be useful.

Thesis III

Bi-cultural counselling should be informed by an

emancipatory psychology

Many minority members experience some degree of oppression, discrimination, and marginalization. Indeed, entire minority groups can be the object of oppression in some societies and at particular historical stages. Conventional psychologies driven by cognitivism, behaviourism, and psycho-analysis leave much to be desired as psychological models for practitioners who work with minority clients.

Most notably, they are implicitly based on middle class values and urge compliance with majority culture social norms (rancher, 1995). While humanistic psychology and counselling approaches associated with it are not so inclined toward compliance to standards of behaviour as other psychologies, it suffers from a different type of limitation. That is, humanistic psychology verges on Utopian fantasising in urging people to "become whatever they want to become". There is seldom sufficient attention to the constraints and barriers which are constructed by majority culture sources of power to inhibit the forward movement of marginalized and oppressed people (Peavy, 1996).

Further cognitive-behavioural, psychoanalytic and humanistic theories all claim to base their clinical practice on scientific hypotheses and scientific evidence. This claim is not at all well supported, according to Masson (1989) and Fancher (1995) and has contributed to the split between research and service in psychology. Helping services such as counselling and therapy are more truthfully described as guided by cultural hypotheses rather than scientific hypotheses. Counselling is dependent upon cultural knowledge and is a practice based on "best guess" rather than scientific principles. Further, both psychoanalytic and cognitive-behavioural advocates try to ally themselves with the medical model, including diagnostics and cures which leads in a majority culture direction of gaining power. However this inclination toward the conventional medical model simply increases the gap between counsellor and many minority culture clients many of whom have their own cultural reasons for being suspicious of medical service and in other cases are denied access to medical service.

Why an emancipatory psychology? First of all, an emancipatory psychology can be construed as a prerequisite for the good life and the good society (Macedo, 1994). Second, an emancipatory psychology aims to remove oppression, deprivation, exploitation and exclusion. It tries to reduce or "eliminate psychological, social and political barriers to the basic democratic values such as self-determination, caring, compassion and distributive justice~ (Prilleltensky, 1996: 308). Oppression and marginalization occur because dominant groups exercise power to gain their own interests at the expense of others who have less power.

Conventional psychologies which have their sources in middle and upper class thought and values and which are often allied with powerful forces (for example, medicine, funding sources) in society tend to ignore or even perpetuate oppressive practices. Psychology with an emancipatory theme can be used to reverse this tendency (Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1994; 1966). Good lives and good societies are constructed from multiple values and ideals such as justice, authenticity, and diversity. Such ideals depend upon people's ability to exercise choice and to have a legitimized voice in society. Choice and voice are constrained or eliminated under conditions of oppression.

There are multiple versions of the good life and the good society. People strive for good lives and societies which best suit their culture and context. Regardless of the particular version of the good life and the good society, which individuals and collectives strive for, conditions of emancipation are required for fulfilment of the "good". A "good" society provides the social, political, and economic structures to support the advancement of good lives; it provides the psychological, moral and material conditions which enable individuals to pursue their dreams, to have hope for a good life, and through effort and democratic action to achieve personal fulfilment.

Prilleltensky (1996) outlines five ways in which psychological practitioners tend to explicitly or implicitly obstruct emancipatory goals which clients may have:

- Dealing with the consequences of oppression and ignoring the causes,
- Framing oppression in individualistic terms and ignoring the social dimension,
- Working with communities in ameliorative rather than transformative ways,
- Demonstrating a gap between knowledge of oppression and willingness to struggle against it,
- Lack of ability to deal with the oppressive actions of clients, and
- Clients may experience oppression in one sphere of life - for example, work - and yet act very oppressively toward their own family members.

Perhaps conventional psychological practitioners can be said to pay too much attention to the good life - especially individual self-interests and not enough attention to the good society, social responsibility and social structure. As Saul (1995) puts it: (Canadian culture, and more broadly, North American culture), "leads to a worship of self-interest and a denial of the public good" (p. 187).

Thesis IV

A constructivist framework for

culture-centred counselling holds promise

I base this thesis on several premises. First, the constructivist world view is especially synchronous with the world views of many (perhaps not all) nonEuropean culture groups, especially aboriginal. Second, constructivist thinking is not based on a particular Euro-North American personality theory as are nearly all psychotherapy and counselling approaches.

I will identify a number of constructivist concepts which illustrate the potential contribution of constructivist concepts to forms of helping:

- Constructivist-framed helping is "located" in the realm of language; helping is a form of discourse, inevitably located in a particular culture and made sensible through language use.
- Constructivist-framed helping is based on "multiple realities"; it depends more on cultural claims than on scientific claims.
- Constructivist-framed helping is sensitive to myth, symbol, and metaphor.
- Constructivist-framed helping is transparent to spirituality since it assumes multiple realities.
- Constructivist-framed helping rests on assumptions of participation, cooperation between helper and helpee, and common ground.
- Constructivist-framed helping receives contributions from various sources and resists domination by any single theory or source.
- Constructivist-framed helping relies upon invention and a "bricolage" approach to helping which

is rooted in cultural knowledge and does not advocate a "bag of Majority Culture tricks" for use in helping minority clients.

- Constructivist-framed helping is emancipatory and does not re-inforce subtle submission to majority culture codes. It practices a "what are the advantages and the disadvantages" method of discussion, not a behavioural norm method.

I will conclude this discussion on the mesh between constructivist thinking and working with minority clients with a two quotations from aboriginal sources. The first is from a study (1996) by Rosie McLeod Shannon (Cree) and Fritzi Crowfoot Woods (Carrier) in which they form fifteen contemporary models of counselling in order to determine the relevance of each for counselling with aboriginals. In most models they found bits and pieces that seemed relevant to aboriginal ways of doing and thinking but many were mostly irrelevant. About constructivist counselling they had the following to say:

First Nations philosophy and constructivist [counselling] seem to be one and the same for both believe in valuing the relationship and showing respect for the individual. Both see the individual as the expert of his life and that he/she will ultimately decide what to do and when. Along the journey of life we make meaning of things that are significant to us. Constructivists emphasise novelty. First Nations people believe that people can acquire new gifts, but they must struggle to do so. Some of the most important resonances between Native world views and constructivist thinking are:

- Respect for the individual, uniqueness, power, cultural differences, spirituality and health.
- Self-knowledge and humanness of the counsellor
- The individual is the primary decision-maker and the actiontaker.
- Stress on social responsibility.
- Takes context into account and tries to understand each individual in terms of their locale and cultural territory.
- Develop personal meanings through participatory relationships.
- Emphasises understanding the other's point of view - patience for understanding.
- Individuals feel cared for and emotionally safe
- Encourages the responsible expression of emotions, does not pry.
- Self protection is normal resistance is not a favoured concept.

The second quotation is from Rupert Ross (1997). He discusses the Family Group Conference as it is used in New Zealand and is drawn from Maori culture. The purpose of the Family Group Conference is bringing family and community members can be joined together to "design" a sentence for lawbreakers which fits the crime, the community and which does not emphasise punishment or retaliation but which allows for the lawbreaker to develop better and more culturally acceptable ways of acting. However, beneath this surface attempt to deal with individuals in culturally congruent ways, there lie deeper intents: to help people see others as complex, many-sided, and "whole" creatures, not just labels [offenders, victims); another is to give offenders a graphic demonstration of the degree to which their actions touch others, both positively and negatively, and that nothing they do is without consequence to others, convincing [all parties involved] they have the wisdom to design changes in

their relationships with each other that will help everyone move towards a better life. Counsellors help parties achieve their own consensus, thus allowing for an improvement in their relations to each other. The purpose is healing professionals are not supposed to control or direct [the process] (Pp. 20-21).

These observations by Aboriginal counsellor/healers and by a jurist who has worked for decades with Native people in their efforts to effect a criminal justice procedure which fits with Aboriginal world views indicates the linkages between minority aboriginal peoples and constructivist thinking. And, as I stated earlier in this paper, constructivism's attention to multiple realities, diversity, novelty, differentness, context and cultural knowledge, together with the deep sense of respect for individual, relationship and community which it conveys make it a desirable framework for bi-cultural counselling and working with minority members and families more generally (Peavy, 1997).

Recommendations for the training of counsellors who counsel with minority group members

Based on the forgoing discussion in this paper, I will offer a short set of recommendations regarding preparation of counsellors to work with minority clients:

- Cultural knowledge about the clients being served is more important than skills pulled from regular counsellor preparation.
- Counsellors should become acquainted in the minority community should consider doing house calls.
- Many models of counselling detract from bicultural counselling rather than supporting it.
- When counselling with minority clients, relationships, communication, and context take on considerable meaning.
- Individualistic psychology is often a poor basis to work from when counselling with minority group members.
- Psychological approaches should be emancipatory participatory, and relational.
- It is a good idea to train minority counsellors who are bicultural to counsel with members of their own minority group.
- It is very important to conceive counselling as a cultural practice, using cultural knowledge and insights, and remove it from domination by "scientific" psychology. Counselling is more an art of a "best guess" rather than being a scientifically grounded profession. This becomes painfully obvious when working with members of cultures other than your own.

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CHAPTER 14
COUNSELLING FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE

I am holding a talking stick. I have been talking about the Indian

Residential School in Shubenacadie for many years, and I still don't

understand why the hurt and shame of seeing and hearing the cries of

abused Mi'kmaw children... does not go away or heal.

~Isabelle Knockwood~

[attended the Indian Residential School from 1938-1947;

in 1992 Isabelle graduated from St. Mary's University in Halifax]

We are crying for a vision that all living things can share. ~Kate Wolf~

Personal notes

I was born and raised in the high mountains of Colorado and the wind-swept plains and deserts of Utah and Wyoming. I was part of a family which had intermarried with Indians. My own blood has no native lineage. Perhaps I am "brown" instead of "white" since I have Portuguese ancestry and I grew up as that "dirty little Portuguese kid". My family were subsistence ranchers who raised cattle and had a herd of sheep.

Most of the people I grew up around were not educated beyond primary school, some had not gone to school at all. They were either "poor white folk" or Indians. My white blood uncle married a woman of the Cherokee nation. She became my "aunt" in both the usual and the Native sense. I visited her four years ago. She was in her late eighties, could not walk or care for herself. She still had those wonderful Eagle-Woman eyes. She took my hand in hers, looked at me with teared eyes and said, "you are the only son I ever had". Her own children had all been girls.

I had another relative who was of Native ancestry. Uncle John, who became the key male figure in my life from my age of 10 until he died when I was 18. Uncle John's mother was Ute and his father Cheyenne. He could not write English nor could he drive a car. He was tall and graceful. He seldom spoke—around Whites he almost never spoke. He and I became companieros. We spent hundreds, probably thousands, of hours riding our horses together. We looked after cattle and sheep, tended fences, trained horses, and just rode for the pleasure of it. Uncle John was beautiful to watch on a horse. I never saw him off-balance. His tall Texas-style hat perched gracefully upon his head even as his horse jumped or ran full speed. Other members of Uncle John's family had fallen prey to alcohol and were what I heard referred to as "gutter-Indians". John himself never drank to my knowledge and lived a quiet life in an old house trailer with his wife who was a practical nurse and White. I ate many meals at their table and on occasion slept overnight on a cot beside their trailer. Many times after feeding cattle in raging blizzard winds and snow, I would come to their trailer to warm and dry out before their warm fire. We would eat home-made mince meat pie prepared from venison (or buck-skin as we called it) and I would sometimes read items from the paper to Uncle John. More often we just sat in silent appreciation of good food and the pleasure of being warm and protected from the bitter cold.

In my view of things, "Uncle" John and "Aunt" Evelyn are spirits close at hand as I live my life.

Much of my world-view came into being as a consequence of my time with Uncle John. I developed patience, a sense of the inter-relatedness of all things, the sacredness of life, the value of spirituality, respect for people, animals, and the earth and its life, the wrongness of cruelty, I came to understand the deep value of silence and how much of talk is hardly more than prattling and self-pluming noise. I learned to listen and see with considerable concentration. And I learned a great deal about the animals of the forests and streams. Uncle John taught me to run a trapline since the only way I could have any money of my own was by selling muskrat and mink hides.

The amazing thing about Uncle John as a teacher was that he almost never said anything. I learned mainly by observing him. Occasionally he would gesture to me, especially if there was something which I should see. Most of the time when I spoke, he would just look at me, and occasionally he made a soft grunting sound. He was the man I loved and when he died I felt as if my father (whom I had hardly known) had died. Most of the White adults in my life were racially and culturally prejudiced—and ignorant. If there was a favourite White saying about Indians in my growing up years, it was that "The only good Indian is a dead Indian."

The fact that in the midst of such intolerable prejudice and bias, Uncle John could maintain his dignity and poise left an indelible impression on me. I left that world when I was about 20, and began a long journey through education and on into professional, academic life. Yet today, half a century later, Uncle John's silent teachings rest solidly within my soul. Uncle John opened my young eyes to the way of the modern day warrior.

Now I am nearing 70 years of age and I am attempting to bring about a better quality of human services, including counselling, into several First Nations communities. In my view of things, "Uncle" John and "Aunt" Evelyn are spirits close at hand as I live my life.

Note on terminology

In this chapter I use the terms "First Nations", and "Native" interchangeably. I occasionally use the term "Aboriginal" and the term "Indian"—also interchangeably with "First Nations" and "Native". I am not unaware of the subtle differences in meaning which these terms carry for different readers. The term "First Nations" is currently preferred and is the most "politically correct" term to use. And, it should not escape notice that First Nations people were the **first** inhabitants of lands from which they were subsequently forcibly removed by colonializing powers and governments. I grew up using the term "Native" and "Indian" to refer to my friends and some of my family members without pejorative or discriminatory meanings so it seems very familiar and natural to me to use these terms also. The last Royal Commission used the term "Aboriginal", so the terminological complexities go on and on.

What I attempt to do in this chapter

Writing about counselling and healing practices which will benefit First Nations people is a daunting task, especially for one who is not of First Nations ancestry. In my opinion, a chapter on First Nations counselling such as one might find in a standard counselling textbook is not appropriate. Nor is it adequate to speak of the need for "multi-cultural" counselling skills. What I try to do in this chapter is sow some seeds of cultural understanding and sow other seeds about how majority culture ideas about counselling and traditional knowledge about healing and spirituality might co-exist and form a symbiotic and synergistic pattern of benefits for First Nations people. I see the matter as a one of bi-cultural discourse.

My study and life experience have taught me that generally the best helping arrangement occurs through the interactions of individuals who come from the same culture. Therefore, the best condition is when a Native person helps another Native person. However, until sufficient numbers of Native people have acquired the traditional and modern counselling knowledge to place them in a position of modern day Native healer/helpers, then we have to do the best we can in educating non-Native individuals how to be helpful with Native people (and of course do everything we can to bring more Native people into positions as competent helpers).

One of the great differences between Native and non-Native helping is that Native helping is interwoven with spirituality. Most non-Native counsellors know very little or nothing about Native spirituality. Many will even believe—because they have been educated to believe—that Native spirituality is either pathological or illusionary. In other words they are dismissive of spirituality.

My own opinion is that spirituality has an important place in the lives of most people, and especially of most Native people. It is synonymous with healing. Healing and helping go hand in hand—anyone who has a position as helper, counsellor or human service worker with First Nations people should be both respectful and knowledgeable about the spiritual practices and beliefs of the First Nations people being served. This issue is made much more complex by the fact that several generations of First Nations people have been forcibly stripped of their culture's knowledge of spirituality through actions of the Government of Canada and various church groups. Today, in the same community there will be Native people who are profoundly spiritual, others who are trying to recover or discover their own spirituality and yet others who reject Native spirituality.

Some would argue that non-Natives cannot or should not have anything to do with Native traditional knowledge and spirituality. I do not agree with this position. My own views are in line with those of Frank Fools Crow, Oglala holyman and ceremonial chief of the Teton Oglala Sioux, who said, "These ceremonies [referring to the pipe and sweat lodge] do not belong to Indians alone. They can be done by all who have the right attitude... and who are honest and sincere abut their beliefs in Wakan Tanka (Great Spirit) and follow the rules." In a similar vein, Ed McGaa Eagle Man, Oglala Sioux lawyer, writer, and spiritual teacher has written, "I believe, like Fools Crow, Eagle Feather, Sun Bear, Midnight Song, Rolling Thunder, and a host of other traditional peoples, that it is time that spirituality is shared."[1]

I am not implying that counselling for First Nations people is identical with Native spirituality. I am saying that Native spirituality is an essential component of counselling for and with First Nations people. Whether you are of Native ancestry or of non-Native ancestry, if you wish to counsel Native people it is imperative that you: 1) respect Native spirituality; 2) learn about Native spirituality; and 3) give spirituality an accepted place in your world-view and counselling practice. If, for whatever reasons you cannot do this, then it is my opinion that you should seriously question whether or not you can sincerely present yourself as a competent helper to First Nations people.

Aboriginal culture and counselling

The following paragraphs are taken almost word for word from my submission to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People which I made in Vancouver in June, 1993.

Boldt points out that the real test of any culture lies in its efficacy as a **design for living and surviving.**[2] Unfortunately, but undeniably, the Canadian governments of the past attempted to impose on Aboriginal peoples a design for living which has devastated aboriginal culture and thus has created a continuing cultural crisis for aboriginals. This crisis has extended over the past century and continues today. This strategy of cultural annihilation has contained three main forces: 1) forced cultural assimilation; 2) loss of traditional means of subsistence; and 3) social, political, and economic isolation from mainstream society external to reserves. Over the decades, what were previously strong, intact cultural

identities rooted in traditional practices, world-views, and cultural self-sufficiency have been directly prohibited, devalued, attacked and a "culture of dependency" has been the result.

Aboriginal cultural identities which nonetheless link with the wider

*mainstream society; and, at the same time nurture **qualitative features of***

***Native life** in ways which invoke hope, spiritual sustenance, healing,*

family life, and pride.

Another way of saying this is that under the relentless influence of forced assimilation, economic dependence, isolation, and denial of the right to language and spiritual practices, Aboriginal cultures have undergone a process of **deculturation.** Evidence of cultural degeneration is found in such indicators as unemployment, alcoholism, sexual abuse, child abuse, family violence, suicide, vandalism, theft, and health problems associated with imposed and unhealthy diets—all of which are epidemic in many Aboriginal communities. It is of paramount importance that: **none of these indicators of cultural and identity degeneration characterized pre-colonized Aboriginal cultures.**

If we consider the indicators listed above to be cultural "diseases" much as are smallpox, syphilis, and tuberculosis, then we can claim that the non-Aboriginal cultures (which have long been characterized by these indicators) passed-on, and in some cases, imposed, these degenerative factors upon Aboriginal cultures and peoples.

With the degeneration of Aboriginal cultures, failure of those cultures to function as the primary means of maintaining social order has occurred. The Canadian criminal justice system has been called upon to maintain order as the traditional cultural influences have lessened. One result of this condition where the justice system of one culture is imposed upon the members of other cultures is that members of Aboriginal communities have been exposed and vulnerable to cultural bias, racism, discrimination and cultural "blindness and denial" of the criminal justice system and the ineptness of that system to function in an Aboriginal context. That is why Aboriginal leaders and community spokespeople are now advocating for changes to the criminal justice system, including a separate Aboriginal justice system. It is also why, in part, that 1 in 4 males in Canadian prisons is Aboriginal—a figure greatly disproportionate to the ratio of Aboriginals to non-Aboriginals in the general population.

First Nations people are now embarked upon the task of **cultural revitalisation** in efforts to once again make Aboriginal cultures designs for healthy living in modern contexts. Options to this course of revitalization are indeed bleak: 1) give up and assimilate; 2) cling to ever-more isolated reserve life with only remnants of traditional culture; and 3) continue to accept a culture of dependence (which most First Nations people strongly reject).

Historically, Aboriginal cultures did not lack a capacity for change and adaptation. Their very survival required change from time to time. However the norm for adaptation and change became

paralyzed under forced assimilation, enforced isolation and denial of language and traditional practices.

However, some present-day Aboriginal groups are meeting with success in adapting traditions and behaviour patterns for living beyond the worlds of their reserves. I had direct experience working with and on the Warm Springs Reserve in Oregon as the Warm Springs people were moving toward control of their own education, economy, and justice system. Their goal is to maintain cultural identity and traditional practices and at the same time function in relation to mainstream American economy and political systems.

Jules Henry[3] has pointed out that all cultures which provide effective designs for living and surviving have "cultural maximizers". The two main functions of a cultural maximizer are: 1) to maintain and develop cultural organization, i.e., protect the integrity of cultural institutions, practices, knowledge; and 2) to contribute certain qualitative features which ensure the continuance of cultural life and the identities which that life makes possible. Today there is a great tension between those Aboriginal leaders who can perform the function of maximizing Aboriginal culture and the powerful economic and political non-Native personages, institutions and policies which make up majority Canadian culture.

There is a real danger that too many talented and able Aboriginal individuals will leave their people" by finding personal solutions and niches within the majority culture. Or, conversely, that the First Nations' talented and educated will form an "elite" which does not maintain adequate contact with their constituents scattered across Canada on reserves and in the large cities.

The task of the Aboriginal cultural maximizer is difficult and two-fold. The maximizer must lead the larger Aboriginal population on the road away from cultures of dependence toward revitalized Aboriginal cultural identities which nonetheless link with the wider mainstream society; and, at the same time nurture **qualitative features of Native life** in ways which invoke hope, spiritual sustenance, healing, family life, and pride in Aboriginal ancestry and identity.

So we must ask: How can traditional beliefs, customs and practices be transformed into contemporary ethics, norms, and customs which help Aboriginal people survive in modern contexts? How can the extended family be rebuilt? How can spiritual practices become vital and relevant? How can ceremonies which unite and vitalize be supported and promoted? It seems both unrealistic and unlikely that traditional principles and practices can only be expressed as ancient and unchanging rituals and traditions belonging to a beautiful and nostalgic past. How can the door the future be opened without denying or back-turning upon the past?

There are various faulty assumptions which are carried forward when
mainstream counselling ideas and practices are grafted wholesale onto
Native clients and situations.

For both Natives continuing to reside on reserves and in remote communities as well as the increasing numbers of urban-dwelling Natives, the means must be found or developed for the continuation of cultural identification for those who want it, and means must be found for providing spiritual nourishment which "makes sense" against the backdrop of modern urban life, to those who want it.

I believe that, in addition to Aboriginal leaders, Elders, and spiritual healers, another type of cultural maximizer can be found in the form of the **counsellor** or **counsellor/healer.** The counselling process is **both a healing process and a process of identity and talent development.** Through relevant education, training and experience, counsellors for First Nations people can play a vital role on three levels: 1) the individual; 2) the family; and 3) the community in forming linkages between Aboriginal cultural identity and aspects of mainstream life. Linkages such as education and work skill development, health resources, life-style development, and higher education—all of which are part of surviving are sorely needed.

The First Nations counsellor can also play a critical role in nurturing the qualitative features of Native life by contributing to, and mentoring others in customs, spirituality, foods, ceremonies, sports and so on.

Ideally, both from a Native perspective, and from a professional counselling perspective, the counsellor of First Nations clients would be a person of First Nations ancestry. However, in many instances, that is not likely to be the case for a host of reasons—at least in the near future. It is also clear from some research and from practical experience that it is not sensible to impose majority culture models and methods of counselling directly on to Aboriginal lifestyles and Aboriginal cultural members.

There are various faulty assumptions which are carried forward when mainstream counselling ideas and practices are grafted wholesale onto Native clients and situations. Some of these mistaken assumptions are:

Misconception of what is normal

What is considered "normal" varies according to cultural context. Standards of normalcy which are rooted in middle class white society are often inadequate references for what is normal or not in Aboriginal contexts. Beliefs about spirits is an excellent case in point.

Excessive emphasis on individualism

In North American majority culture, considerable emphasis is put upon individualistic psychology and the value of the individual is often championed over the welfare of society. Such goals as self-determination, self-fulfilment, autonomy, and rugged individualism can be in direct contradiction to cultural values and identity which priority is given to family, community, and nature. More of a balance between the individual and the social is required. Also, Native conceptualizations about the self tend more to holism than do North American ideas of the self which are often fragmentary.

Fragmentation

Mainstream counsellors and other helping professionals such as psychologists and social workers often undergo training in which they are expected to examine knowledge of humans by studying separate disciplines such as psychology, sociology, education, and other studies and do not develop a holistic view of human life. They learn to interpret behaviour from narrowly defined perspectives of discrete disciplines and are prevented from arriving at an integrated, holistic perspective.

Most of all, they are seldom exposed to any kind of information about spiritual belief systems; even worse, they may be taught that such belief systems are either "primitive", "pathological" or not relevant to a professional, scientific perspective. Finally, they are often taught testing and psychometric procedures which are very destructive when applied to Native people. As I heard one prominent Native spokesman say at a conference on educational assessment: "What we want is not so-called culture-fair or culture-free tests. We want you to stop testing us."

Neglect of client's support system

In majority culture counselling great emphasis is placed on the reduction of dependence and the promotion of independence. One of the major problems faced by many Aboriginal clients, especially in contexts like attendance at non-reserve schools, or migration to city living, is social and cultural isolation. Building and maintaining culturally relevant support-systems and networks is much more important to many Native clients than gaining individual autonomy.

Neglect of history and the primacy of healing

Many First Nations people have experienced years of racism, abuse, discrimination, poverty, and exploitation. Personal and cultural history is much more important in the counselling of First Nations clients than it is with most non-First Nations clients. There is a great deal of pain, shame, anger, and hostility experienced by many Native people stemming from the treatment they have received by both majority culture members and their own dysfunctional family members who have earlier suffered the abuse and semi-torture experiences doled out by some residential-school employees and officials.

Many of the contacts which Native youth and children have had with the criminal justice system, school system, and social services have also engendered humiliation, distrust, and feelings of inferiority, shame, and pain. For many (not all) First Nations people the healing of old pain and hurts must be very much a part of the counselling process, no matter what the other objectives of the counselling may be (for example, career choice, educational planning, life-planning, employment, life-skills, etc.). No mainstream method of counselling addresses either healing or spirituality, so it is necessary to construct culturally sensible counselling for First Nations people and not rely on "off-the-shelf" varieties of mainstream counselling. There are, however, other aspects of mainstream counselling which do make sense in Native contexts.

The time is now

In 1972 the National Indian Brotherhood presented Jean Chretien, then Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, with the landmark policy paper: *Indian Control of Indian Education.* While most of the paper dealt with educational issues, the paper also addressed counselling for Native children and youth. The document contained the following recommendations regarding counselling:

- There is an urgent need for more Indian counsellors to work both on and off reserves;
- The training of non-Indian counsellors who work with Indian children is of grave concern to Native parents.
- It is generally agreed that present counselling services are not only effective [especially for students living away from home], but often are a contributing factor to the failure of Native children and youth in school.
- More para-professional Indian counsellor-aides are urgently needed. Such positions should serve as a training ground for professional advancements.
- The training of non-Indian counsellors who serve Native children should include courses and experiences in Indian history and culture.

The 1988 Report of the Royal Commission on Education recommended that each and every school where First Nations children are in attendance should have **guidance and counselling services which ensure that Native students are prepared for the challenge of living and working upon leaving school.**

I, as a counselling Elder, am fully supportive of non-First Nations

individuals who are learning to be counsellors with Native people so long

as they have a lasting and strong commitment to learn Native cultural

knowledge, world-views, and cultural aspirations, and are willing

to participate in Native community life.

In 1992-93, I and my research team[4] studied the quality of services available for First Nations children and youth in British Columbia and the Yukon. We found that the counselling services for Native youth are somewhat better now than in earlier years—as is the case with counselling in schools and communities generally, but that there remain many glaring inadequacies. The lack of Native-culture oriented counselling is still dramatically apparent. In schools there is great variation. In a few schools the counselling for First Nations students was surprisingly relevant and well delivered. In other schools it was non-existent. In a few schools there was a clear stigma attached to the counselling offered by the school—from the Native students' perspective. While forward strides have been made in the education of First Nations teachers, virtually no progress has been made in educating First Nations counsellors. The most noteworthy feature of Native counsellors in the schools is their almost

total absence. To date no Canadian University has offered counsellor education programs designed specifically for First Nations participants.

Among other things we asked First Nations youth what they liked in their counsellors. A few of the comments are:

What you look for in a counsellor is a best friend, someone like you, someone who has had rocky times, and knows what to say and what to do. Someone who is quiet-will keep it to themselves whether you cry on their shoulder or yell and scream at them.

My counsellor doesn't pretend like she knows what has happened to me—she doesn't act like she had that experience too. She pays attention all the time. She knew the right thing to say. I guess she turned into a friend.

If I was going to talk to anyone I'd talk to him (a Native counsellor in the school). Being a good friend, friendliness, someone you can look at and talk to- that's what's important to me. I'd talk to him abut my family life, things I've done, things I'd like to do. I'm open to him and he's open to me.

When counsellors are really understanding and accepting, anything is possible. Good ones are not pushy and don't ask a lot of questions. They know when to talk and when not too. My counsellor is a real friend—I guess you'd say he's a role model. I see him at the Long House—that makes me feel great—I always go over and talk to him and his family. Sometimes I play with his kids. We eat together.

He can tell if something is wrong. He doesn't have to ask a lot of questions. He will stop you in the hall. He cares and will go out of his way to check out if you are okay. We can hang out around his office.

Sadly, comments like the above were rather few and far between. However, they do give a flavour to what Native students would like to have from their counsellors.

On the issue about whether or not an ideal counsellor is Native, First Nations informants in our study had three main opinions:

1. Other things being equal, yes, it is good to be able to talk with someone who knows your own background and culture;

2. We don't go to a First Nations counsellor because he is Native. We go to him because of how he presents himself.

3. What is important to me is that the counsellor know something about my culture

or about any different culture, for that matter. If they are not Native, then they must

be willing to go out of their way to find out about my culture. They must understand

that we do come from a different culture and that's important to us. The counsellor in

our school is not a Native, but he is okay. He often plays sports with us and I some-

times meet him at the Long House and I've seen him around the Band Office. He

knows who my family is. I've no problem with him. He is fair about racial things.

My own position as a counselling Elder is that I am fully supportive of First Nations individuals who are learning to be counsellor/healers and I am fully supportive of non-First Nations individuals who are learning to be counsellors with Native people so long as they have a lasting and strong commitment to learn Native cultural knowledge, world-views, and cultural aspirations and are willing to participate in Native community life (for example sports, feasts, ceremonies, funerals) in a culturally sensible way.

Practical guidelines in First Nations counselling

Creating a culturally relevant counselling approach for First Nations people is just beginning. So what I will do in the rest of this paper is to present a number of concepts and practice guidelines for counselling with Native people. The material in the following pages is the result of joint efforts between Fritzi Crowfoot Woods [Carrier], Rosie McLeod-Shannon [Cree] and myself.

Bi-cultural counselling

If you are a Native person with a Native cultural identity and you face a non-Native in conversation, you are in a bi-cultural situation. If you are a non-Native facing a Native in conversation, you are in a bi-cultural situation. It is our belief that the term "bi-cultural" most accurately describes a counselling situation when Native faces non-Native. While it is currently the fashion in mainstream counselling texts to speak of multi-cultural counselling, or cross-cultural counselling, we prefer the term bi-cultural as best fitting and naming our own counselling experiences. This implies that the counsellor of Native ancestry must learn how to navigate mainstream culture—at least to a degree; and the counsellor of non-Native ancestry must learn—again to a degree—how to get around sensibly in Native cultural life.

Eight bi-cultural counselling principles

1. Personal principle: Friendliness and openness

It is important to offer friendliness to First Nations clients and their families. Show a personal and interested attitude, rather than an "official" or "expert" attitude. This will help build trust in your relationships and in the counselling process.

2. Cultural context principle: Knowledge of First Nations background

It is wise to know the specific history and cultural protocol of the First Nations group(s) with whom you are working. No two Native groups are alike. They are similar in some respects: extended families, respect for elders, community closeness, sharing. They differ in other respects: languages, regions of origin, ceremonies, dances, and cultural organization. Appreciation and knowledge of cultural diversity is essential. There is no generic Indian!!!

3. Holistic Principle

An important way in which nearly all Native people are alike is in their holistic approach to life. When counselling with First Nations people, the counsellor must be prepared for them to talk about whatever they wish and not rush to impose a focus or agenda. They will come to the real issue in time. The relationship is first, the problem comes second. In general, the thought processes which First Nations people exhibit are intuitive, holistic, pattern-seeking, and non-linear rather than linear and reductionistic.

4. Extended family principle

Counsellors should be aware that First Nations individuals come from extended families. This may have important implications and strong impact on the counselling process. With some First Nations individuals, family life takes precedence over virtually everything else.

5. Encouragement principle

When working with First Nations clients, especially children and youth, it is important to extend encouragement, support, and praise when it is appropriate and you are sincere. In school, Native students often hear what they cannot do, or what they are doing wrong, so it is important to help them understand that they do have strengths, they are respected and valued persons, and that they can do well, and are doing well. Often, what they are able to do in the classroom may not seem to the unknowing teacher to be very praiseworthy. But in the light of what they have to cope with in the full scope of their lives, often their school accomplishments—even getting to school—is amazing and courageous.

6. Availability principle

When working as a counsellor in a school or other agency serving Native people, it is important to

have an open-door, drop-in policy as much as possible. An appointment schedule will often prohibit Native youth from seeking counsellors' time.

7. Principle of mutual respect

If you wish to gain the respect of others, then you must extend respect to them. Mutual respect and cooperation is very important in working with Native clients and in solving problems. Generally speaking, respect is a much more pervasive value in Native cultures than non-Native.

8. Humour principle

In First Nations cultures, humour is a healing tool and a way of building relationships and gaining respect. Humour is often insightful and may point out patterns and relationships which you would never think of otherwise. A counsellor should have a respectful sense of humour and be attuned to both the what and the how of "Indian humour" which is subtle, often oblique and may require an ability to laugh at oneself.

The effective counsellor for First Nations clients

What is important is that everyone be on a capacity-building program,
whether slow or fast.

As part of the research project which we carried out, we developed a profile of the counsellor who is effective with First Nations clients. This is an idealized profile, but it gives some guidance to the direction counsellors should try to move in their own development and practice.

Counsellors who are effective with First Nations clients:

- Recognise and respect Native diversity—and know that the "generic Indian does not exist;
- Are **bi-cultural** and are either of First Nations ancestry, or have a deep knowledge of First Nations culture and world views;
- Present themselves in an informal, friendly, interested, respectful, and trustworthy way.
- Are accessible—tend to use a "drop-in" and "hanging-out together" approach and use a "quick-response" approach rather than appointments;
- Build and maintain a network of contacts (parents, band officials, Elders, Native role models, other helpers) in the Native community and are known to participate in community affairs such as sports, ceremonies, Long House meetings;
- Use an intuitive, "heart-felt" style of counselling which is holistic, quiet, humorous, respectful of cultural protocol and appreciative of spirituality; and
- Have developed a capacity to respond to a wide range of needs: educational and career planning, in-school adjustment, learning about and coping with majority culture demands and practices, life-

style and cultural identity issues, loss and grieving, violence, aftermath of sexual abuse, transitions, cross-band rivalries, suicide, consequences of poverty, interactions with the criminal justice system, aftermath of experiences of discrimination and racial conflict and bias, and substance abuse.

This suggests that both Native and non-Native counsellors face a daunting task in reference to their own development and helping capacities. The preceding list should be viewed as a set of professional development goals which may take years or even a life-time to fulfil in any complete sense. What is reasonable is to ask that counsellors, and those who employ counsellors, see to it that helpers move in these directions. What is important is that everyone be on a capacity-building program, whether slow or fast.

Different interpretations of counselling conversation

Another research project which I carried out earlier has to do with the differences in how First Nations clients and non-First Nations counsellors interpret the discourse (conversational) practices of the other when they are in a counselling conversation. The following table shows these differences.

The table highlights some of the possible barriers to communication in counselling situations when there is lack of cultural awareness of communication and thinking differences. Needless to say many counselling conversations go very well and few counselling conversations are likely to have all the implied difficulties indicated in the table.

What the non-Native counsellors think about the Native clients' conversational practices	What the First Nations clients think about the non-First Nations counsellors' conversational practices
In on-going counselling conversations	
They avoid answering my questions	*They ask too many questions*
It's hard to get them to start talking	*They start talking right away & interrupt*
They get off track and want to talk about other things	*They want to talk about what they are what they are interested in, not what I want to talk about*
It's hard to get them to talk about themselves.	*They don't give me a chance to talk*

They are too slow to speak	*They just go on and on*
They are too direct and not explicit	*They are not careful in how they talk*
They just don't make sense	*They just don't make sense*
They won't look at me	*They are pushy*
They expect me to know their relatives	*They never ask about my family*
They play down their own abilities	*They brag*
They avoid planning	*They just want to talk about the future*

Theories of counselling and counselling with First Nations people

Several years ago I asked two First Nations individuals who also had considerable experience in counselling both in Native communities and non-Native schools where Native children and youth were in attendance to read and discuss with each other and with me nine theories of majority culture counselling. I then asked them to indicate particular features of each model of counselling which they judged to be useful in counselling with First Nations clients.[5] Briefly, they came to the following evaluations.

Existential therapy

Existential therapy is based on beliefs and assumptions, some of which are congruent with Native world-views. First Nations world-views hold to a belief in constant change—one season follows another in every person's life. They also believe that everyone must develop their own potential and remain actively engaged in following that goal. For Native people life is a struggle—and this is resonant with existential thinking.

Psychoanalytic theory

First Nations people believe that change occurs in patterns and cycles, and in stages. Failure in a person's life is the inability of the individual to follow the teachings that he has learned in a particular moment in life. For First Nations people, all things are inter-related and it is only possible to understand something if we understand how it is related and connected to everything else. Traditional psychoanalytic theory seems somewhat over-focused on childhood from a First Nations point of view.

Gestalt therapy

The aspects of gestalt therapy which have the most relevance for First Nations counselling are dream-work and role-playing. Dreams have a very prominent place in the lives of some Native people. Role-playing is especially useful in the healing of pain. Gestalt assumption of wholeness is congruent with a Native world view.

The best over-all matches between First Nations world-view and main-stream counselling approaches seem to be constructivist, Adlerian, and Reality Therapy, in that order.

Adlerian therapy

Adlerian theory resonates in various way with First Nations world-views: principles of encouragement, social interest, power of the person to influence and create events, adherence to the values of respect, acceptance and understanding. Both believe in change and struggle. True learning comes about through persistence.

Person-centred counselling

Common values of respect, listening in a non-judgmental manner, acceptance, sincerity. Emphasis on individuality is more than in Native views which value the social life and extended family and relationships with grandparents, uncles and aunts which nurture self-development. Techniques of paraphrasing and stress on emotional feelings in the interview not always appropriate in Native counselling.

Transactional analysis

Some aspects of TA not particularly suited to Native psychology. Getting people to "script free" and the sometimes confrontational nature of TA is not appropriate for many First Nations clients. The fragmenting of the self into different intellectual categories also contradicts the Native penchant for wholeness and connectedness.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy

CBT has useful aspects for First Nations counselling. For example in helping find connections between specific behaviours and environmental reference points. Also in developing a realistic, tolerant philosophy of life. First Nations people tend to believe that it is up to the person to decide to change and then to work to make it happen and this attitude jibes with CBT theory. Drawbacks of cognitive-behavioural approaches for use with Native clients can be excessive reductionism to the detriment of wholeness and connectedness, and-in some forms-confrontation and arguing which is definitely inappropriate with Native clients.

Reality Therapy

There is quite a bit of resonance between reality therapy and native psychology. Both take the view that people are capable of change, should be urged toward self-responsibility. First Nations people, particularly, believe that the only true failure a person faces is inability to be self-determining and in charge of leading his or her own life in a constructive way.

Constructivist therapy

First Nations philosophy and constructivist theory seem to be very close to one and the same thing. Both value cooperative, constructive relationships, value respect and construe the people and the world in relational, connected, holistic patterns. Both see the individual as the 'expert' on his or her life. Along the journey of life, people make meaning of things and experiences.

Constructivists tend to be wary of techniques, and emphasise relationships, cooperation, and mentoring. First Nations people tend to believe that when a person decides to improve his or her life in a certain area, they can be guided by teachers, guides and protectors who will do this through the kind of relationship that they share. A path is always there for those who decide to travel it. Both constructivism and First Nations beliefs hold that much "true learning" comes through struggle and through novelty—that is, challenging and elaborating that which has become familiar.

From a First Nations counselling point of view, it is important it is helpful to be familiar with various mainstream counselling models. There are some aspects of each which might be useful with certain clients. Also it is good to know what not to do. The best over-all matches between First Nations world-view and main-stream counselling approaches seem to be constructivist, Adlerian, and Reality Therapy, in that order.

Aspects in which most non-Native counselling models are inadequate:
1. Spirituality
2. Dream-work
3. Assumption of holism or interconnectedness of all things
4. Assumption of "There is a right time for everything"
5. Assumption of multiple realities and a universe in flux
6. Conditions of pervasive respect and patience.

Principles of a First Nations world-view

Just like other cultural groups in the world, there are variations in the philosophies or world-views between groups, and even within groups so far as Native People are concerned. However, it is possible to identify certain philosophic themes which are more or less consistent throughout Native cultures. I have drawn on the Four Worlds Development Project[6] in constructing a First Nations World-View.

Principles of a First Nations world-view

1. Wholeness (holistic thinking). All things are connected. Everything in the universe is part of a single whole. It is only possible to understand something if we understand how it is connected to everything else.

2. Change. Everything is in a constant state of flux. One season falls upon the other. People, animals, birds, and fishes are born, live and die. All things change. There are two kinds of change: coming together and coming apart. Both kinds of change are necessary and are connected to each other.

3. Change occurs in cycles or patterns. If we cannot see how a particular change is occurring and what it is connected to, it usually means that our standpoint is affecting our perception.

4. The physical world is real. The spiritual world is real. They are two aspects of one reality. There are separate laws which govern each. Breaking of a spiritual principle will affect the physical world and vice-versa. People are both physical and spiritual beings. People are whole. The highest goal is to develop in a balanced and harmonious way—to become a respectful and respected part of the "web of life".

5. People can acquire new gifts, but must struggle to do so. The process of struggling to acquire new personal qualities is called "true learning".

6. A person learns in a whole and balanced way when allowed to. The four dimensions of true learning are: mental, spiritual, emotional and physical.

7. The spiritual dimension of human capacities implies four inter-related capacities:
   a. the capacity to have and respond to dreams, visions, ideals, spiritual teachings, goals, and theories.
   b. the capacity to accept these as a reflection of our unknown or unrealized potentials.
   c. the capacity to express these in speech, art, writing or mathematics.
   d. the capacity to convert this symbolic expression into action directed toward making the possible a reality.

8. People must actively participate in the development of their own potential.

9. It is up to the person to decide on action and on the development of their own potential. A path is always there for those who decide to travel it.

10. Any person who sets out on a journey of capacity building can always find aid. Guides, teachers, and protectors will aid the sincere traveller.

11. The only source of failure is a person's own failure to follow the teachings.

Traditional healing

Spirituality, values and beliefs are all part of the healing process of First Nations people. Many aspects of Native spirituality can only be discussed by the appropriate people who have earned and been granted this gift and knowledge. If you are a counsellor or other helper it is probably best for you to approach the Elders and spiritual leaders in your region. There are varying protocols to follow in approaching spiritual leaders and Elders. You should find out the protocol before trying to establish

contact with spiritual leaders and Elders in your search for information and knowledge which you would like to acquire. Remember that respect is the soil out of which all higher human qualities grow.

Concluding thoughts

In this chapter, I have only presented the barest outline of bi-cultural helping as a way of practicing First Nations counselling. One program of which I have some knowledge and which has provided Native counsellors with "Tribal Mental Health Counselling Skill" is reported in *A Gathering of Storms*[7]. It is a valuable resource for those readers who want to assist a Native community to develop counselling expertise within the community.

There are many more important issues which I could address. However, those will have to wait for a later publication. I will very briefly mention a few matters which I would encourage any counsellor who is counselling with First Nations people to find out more about.

Circle work

Circles are of great significance in First Nations world-views. Black Elk: *"Everything the power of the world does, is done in a circle."* It is good to learn how to do counselling in circles. The circle is a way doing many things: a healing circle, a talking circle, a learning circle, a listening circle, a circle of prayer. A circle is the way of great respect: it ensures that no one is left out, that each who has something to say can do so, that listening is absolutely protected. The circle is an act of democracy and a way of joining the Great Spirit. A stone, feather or sacred object passed from hand to hand in the circle follows the circle that all things live by. In the circle each person belongs and each is needed to complete the circle.

Vision quest

In the olden days, the individual seeking a vision would fast for four days and nights. The vision quest was a journey to seek guidance for themselves as well as their community. It was more than a quest for meaningful dreams and visions. It allowed the individual to reconnect with Mother Earth and her special offerings.

Today the vision quest is usually modified. Fasting, if used at all, may be only for two days. The dream-like states experienced under deep relaxation can be used under the guidance of a facilitator to engage in visualization and guided-fantasy as a method to visualize and recreate situations which can help with dilemmas and goals in life. Dreaming which come with fasting, imaginative visualizations which come with deep relaxation and lucid dreaming are all connected and can be used by experienced guides to help individuals in the search for meaningful life understandings and purposes.

The time of the seventh fire

Today First Nations people in Canada, together with aboriginal people in many parts of the world,

are entering a period of rebirth. The Hopi prophecy tells of the difficult times the First Nations people everywhere have endured for the last seven generations. It also foretells of their eventual liberation from their long, terrible shadow and time of darkness. The people would know that the time of darkness was beginning to end when the eagle landed on the moon. Interestingly, it was in 1969 that Neil Armstrong spoke to the whole world from the surface of the moon, "The eagle has landed."

In recent decades aboriginal people have renewed their struggles to gain more control over their own lives and destinies. Counsellors, though their informed assistance to individuals, can help to turn darkness into light. It is possible to learn the four-fold way of the visionary, educator, healer and warrior. In my childhood I was told of the Cheyenne dog-soldiers. They were individuals of vision and knew how to serve their community. They were supreme warriors and walked the sacred road. In battle a dog-soldier would tie a rope around his waist and peg the other end into the ground. A dog-soldier did not retreat—he would fight until all the enemy were gone or until he himself died. A dog-soldier would say, "Remember the children, remember the grandmothers and the grandfathers, remember those who cannot fight. We do this so that the people might live." Today, of course, the way of the gun, spear and arrow are past. What one can be today is a spiritual warrior and one who persists in the name of the Mother Earth, the people, and the Great Spirit. One can also be an educator, a healer, and a carrier of vision and "Walk in Balance"[8]. At times I have seen these all manifest in the work of the counsellor.

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CHAPTER 15
GITXAN NATURAL HELP

Alfred Brady, in association with Vance Peavy

Caring is a reflex. Someone slips, your hand goes out. A car is in the ditch,

you join others and push... You live, you help. (Ram Dass)

Sitting Bull says, "If a man loses something and goes back to look for it he

will find it". We must return to the old ways to find our lost treasures.

(Jones and Jones, 1995, p. 90)

Preface

I have included this chapter for several reasons. First, it is a good example of how the values of a culture contribute to acts of helping in that culture. Second, it reinforces the contention that counselling should be viewed as a culture-centred practice. Third, it serves as a caution for those who would import majority culture counselling methods unreflectively into First Nations contexts. Fourth, it is the opinion of the researcher, who has had many years of experience and first hand observations of First Nations people in counselling and community life, that constructivist theory and counselling seems to be the best fit between a majority culture helping method and First Nations clients. Fifth, this chapter should be of interest to those counsellors and educators who are interested in the nature of natural "peer" counselling in a First Nations context. Finally, this chapter reports a research study which demonstrated how a non-native researcher and native participants can do research a co-researchers. Co-operatively, they provide interpretive research results which have practical value in describing

natural helping and develop knowledge which is useful for guiding the activities of counsellors and other natural helpers.

Introduction

Helping is not something that has recently evolved just through the works of well known Western helpers such as Freud, Adler and Rogers. Almost every individual in a society is potentially capable of helping another individual in need.

Egan (1990) introduces his book The Skilled Helper with the following statement:

> *Throughout history there has been a deeply embedded conviction that under the proper conditions some people are capable of helping others come to grips with problems in living. Today this conviction is institutionalized in a variety of formal helping professions [such as], counsellors, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and members of the clergy.*

He adds to this other professions such as doctors, dentists, lawyers, teachers, and others of whom *"there is still some expectation that they will help their clients or staff manage a variety of problem situations"*. Finally he adds to the list of helpers *"relatives, friends, acquaintances, [and] strangers..."* Most importantly he points out that *"...only a small fraction of the help provided on any given day comes from helping professionals"* (p.4).

It is that final group of non-professional helpers that this project examines.

I have lived for the past 25 years in the Gitxsan territory. During that time I worked five years as a social worker and eight years as a counsellor working mostly with Gitxsan people. I have witnessed not only a significant need for help expressed by many, but also the existence of many friends and relatives, and even strangers, who are helpers in the community. While a few of these helpers have received some formal Western counselling training, most have not.

The traditional Gitxsan House system (described in the Terms Used in the Report) has been an integral part of that helping system. This is confirmed by Vickers (1993) who relates that *"... the helping professional needs to know there are systems already operating to meet the needs of the people [and that]... Today that traditional structure exists in the Gitxsan territory...."* (p. 16).

The traditional system includes much more than just chiefs and wing chiefs, it also includes all of the social support systems that have evolved over the centuries and are acted upon by all the members of the community.

This research project will be looking at three aspects of natural community helpers: what might the characteristics of natural helpers look like, what processes might they utilize, and how did they come about to be helpers.

Peavy (1997) presents a *"profile of the counsellor who is effective with First Nation clients."* That profile points out that:

Counsellors who are effective with First Nations clients:
- *Recognize and respect Native diversity*
- *Are bilingual and are either... of First Nations ancestry, or have a deep knowledge of First Nations culture and world views*
- *Present themselves in an informal, friendly, interested, respectful, and trustworthy way*
- *Are accessible — tend to use a "drop-in" and "hanging-out together" approach as a "quick response" approach rather that appointments*
- *Build and maintain a network of contacts (parents, band officials, Elders, Native role models, other helpers) in the community and are known to participate in community affairs...*
- *Use an intuitive, "heart-felt" style of counselling which is holistic, quiet, humorous, respectful of cultural protocol and appreciative of spirituality; and*
- *Have developed a capacity to respond to a wide range of needs: educational and career planning, in-school adjustment, learning about and coping with majority culture demands and practices, life-style and cultural identity issues, loss and grieving, violence, aftermath of sexual abuse, transitions, cross-band rivalries, suicide, consequences of poverty, interactions with the criminal justice system, aftermath of experiences of discrimination and racial conflict and bias, and substance abuse* (p. 126).

I suspect that there are natural Gitxsan helpers who model this profile quite closely. In addition to the obvious cultural sensitivity and awareness, I suspect that the characteristics and approaches that are not necessarily culturally specific will also be modelled by the natural Gitxsan helpers.

Peavy (1997) states that the *"best helping arrangement occurs through interactions of individuals who come from that same culture... [especially when they]... have acquired the traditional and modern counselling knowledge to place them in a position of modern day Native healer/helpers..."* (p. 117).

There are no empirical studies that look at natural Gitxsan helpers. In fact there appear to be no empirical studies that look at natural helpers in any First Nations context. And yet it seems most likely that there have been natural helpers in virtually every culture.

Although I concur that a trained counsellor from the same culture may well describe the best counselling arrangement, when Egan's view that professionals only provide a small fraction of daily help is considered, we begin to look at a quality versus quantity comparison. Should more time be put into increasing the quality of professionals or should more time be put into increasing the skills of the non-professional helpers? Perhaps the answer lies in an approach that includes increasing both.

My curiosity was attracted to those natural Gitxsan helpers who appeared not to have any formal Western counselling training. What process did they go through that directed them to become helpers? What is it that they do as helpers and what characteristics do they exhibit?

By empirically studying the natural Gitxsan helpers I hoped to gain insights that could be offered to both professional and non-professional helpers who work with Gitxsan people. I also conjecture that this study offers a perspective useful in other bi-cultural counselling situations.

Research basis for this chapter

The project was conducted in the Hazelton area which is closely
connected with the three northeastern villages of the six villages of the
Gitxsan nation.

Current literature has established models for counselling people of First Nations ancestry and for training counsellors for them. The need for "Natives counselling Natives" (MacNiell, 1994, p. 50) is a primary theme, as is the need "to determine content of culturally appropriate training programs" (Peavy, 1994, p. 109).

One approach to help establish that content is to look at natural helping processes that exist in individual cultures In preparing this chapter I draw my research of the characteristics of four Gitxsan natural helpers, what they do and how they came to be helpers are the topics of this project. The questions which directed my research were:

1. How Gitxsan natural helpers come about to be helpers;
2. What, they do as helpers; and
3. What personal characteristics do they feel are important?

Research questions

A structured interview guide was used to guide the research for this article. It enabled co-researchers to relate their helper experiences in a conversational manner, which allowed for some flexibility in the process. The questions were designed to elicit information in the following three main areas:

1. Information about the co-researchers, for example:
- How much of your life have you lived in a Gitxsan community?
- Have you had any experience or training with Western-style counselling?
2. How they came about to be a helper, for example:
- Could you describe the people and/or experiences that were influential in your becoming a helper and how they influenced you?
3. What do they do as a helper, for example:
- Would you describe what you do when people come to you for help?
- What types of problems do people bring to you to discuss?
- What do you feel are the important characteristics of a helper?

The project was conducted in the Hazelton area which is closely connected with the three north-eastern villages of the six villages of the Gitxsan nation, since all four of the co-researchers were living on reserve. My intent was to discern the traditional Gitxsan influences on natural helpers and I as-

sumed that those on reserve might generally be more closely aligned with traditional Gitxsan influences.

The selection of co-researchers was further limited to those with the following characteristics:

1. that they be bilingual in Gitxsan and English;
2. that they be at least fifty years of age;
3. that they be approachable (as judged by the Gitxsan people who helped establish a short list of potential co-researchers); and
4. that they have little or no Western-style counselling training.

The fact that this project was conducted in a manner that was as respectful of Gitxsan culture as possible, and that through my living and working with Gitxsan people I have come to know that it is considered impolite to interrupt someone, especially an Elder who is talking, it was therefore difficult to extract a deeper understanding through questioning what they had said while they were speaking.

It is also considered inappropriate to question an Elder at all, and I was asking them over twenty questions. This proved to be awkward right from the beginning of the structured interview. I found that often a co-researcher would take what appeared to be a tangential direction when relating a story and I would feel unable to redirect them because of my concern about insulting them. Even if I had apologized at the time there would have been a certain loss of trust in me as a listener. As it turned out, even if at the time they appeared to be going off topic, usually the answers were in some way related to the topic and offered valuable information.

I did not intentionally seek out those known to be medicine men or medicine women or shaman but merely those known as helpers in the community.

There is a definite role for medicine men and medicine women and shaman, but usually there is an extensive and refined training that goes into developing the skills and practices used by them. These people are more commonly seen as healers rather than helpers. There are many sources for information on healers in the Bibliography and Selected References such as the following authors: Halifax; Hammerschlog; Homer; Jilek; Medicine Eagle; Arrien.

My focus was to search out the less formal experiences of the natural Gitxsan helpers, with the hope that it would be possible for more Gitxsan people to develop the skills modelled by those natural helpers.

Terms used in my research

Gitxsan - "The Gitxsan people live primarily in the six villages of Gitanmaax, Glen Vowel, Kispiox, Gitwangak, Gitanyow and Gitsegulka on Gitxsan territory which occupies about 30,000 square kilometres in northwest British Columbia" (Gitxsan Office of Hereditary Chiefs (GOHC). (see map Appendix I)

The total band membership, according to the Gitxsan Government Commission, is 5,719 with 2,677 living on reserve and 3,042 living off reserve. The majority of off reserve Gitxsan would live in

British Columbia with concentrations in the Hazelton area, in towns and cities along Highway 16 from Prince Rupert to Prince George, and in Vancouver and Victoria.

Gitxsan is the most recent spelling used by the Gitxsan people. Previous spellings of Gitksan and Gitxsan are still found in some documents and in the name Gitksan Government Commission.

The following is a description of the Gitxsan traditional system:

> *Western archeological evidence has so far found evidence of more that 10,000 years of occupation by the Gitxsan. The English translation of Gitxsan is "people of the river of the mist". The traditional hereditary system is active in the Gitxsan nation. It is a matrilineal system -and with members of a Wilp, or House, tracing their lineage through their mothers. All Gitxsan belong to a Wilp, -which is the basic unit for social, economic and political purposes. The Wilp is a collection of closely related people. It consists of one to several families and can number from 20 to more that 200 people. Each Wilp has a hereditary chief. A hereditary chief may have several wing chiefs -who perform particular functions for House members, such as, planning and administering forestry work. There are approximately 48 House groups, each with their own territory in the Gitxsan nation. The House groups belong to one of four Gitxsan clans: Lax Gibuu (Wolf), Lax Seel (Frog), Gisgaast (Fireweed) and Lax Skiik (Eagle). The feast hall, called the potlatch by some coastal First Nations, is the forum where business, social and political decisions are legitimized in the traditional system.... Traditional history and laws are passed on orally. Each Wilp has an adaawk, or oral history, which describes important events in the House's existence.* (Gitxsan Office of Hereditary Chiefs)

The chasm that exists between mainstream expectations and the cultural values of Native American Indians can be referred to as cultural discontinuity

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First Nations, Aboriginal, Native and Indian - when these terms are used, they are used interchangeably and with an awareness that there are sensitivities which need to be taken into account.

Natural Helpers - I have used this term to refer to those people in the community with little or no formal Western counselling training, who other community members seek out for help with their personal problems.

Co-researchers - This term refers to the four Gitxsan natural helpers who offered to be interviewed for my project.

Knowledgeable Informant - These are Gitxsan community members who are active in the community, are aware of social activities and have a good deal of knowledge about individuals in the community.

Healers - These are those highly trained people often known as medicine men, medicine women or shaman that have skills at working with traditional medicines/herbs and spiritual ceremonies. They were not specifically sought out in this project.

Thematic Analysis - This refers to the process of reviewing and condensing the data by searching for common themes among the four different interviews.

Data - This refers to the information given by the co-researchers in the interviews.

Random use of pronouns - He and her and the possessive, his and hers will be used randomly both to protect the identity of the co-researchers and to accommodate today's political correctness. It is interesting to note that the Gitxsan language has only generic singular and generic plural pronouns and their corresponding possessives. Occasionally a co-researcher will use an English pronoun with the wrong gender which can be confusing to a non-Gitxsan listener.

Cultural Discontinuity - Garrett and Garrett (1994) explain that

> *many of the problems facing Native American Indians today result from a vast cultural conflict between Native American Indians and mainstream American culture. Many Native American Indians experience conflict when they either try to internalize unfamiliar values of the dominant society or to practice the traditional roles necessary for the preservation of traditional values and practices. The chasm that exists between mainstream expectations and the cultural values of Native American Indians can be referred to as cultural discontinuity* (p. 135).

Brief review of literature

In my review of the literature on natural helpers and First Nations people, I did not find one empirical study. In fact, only three articles in my review even mentioned the term natural helpers.

Bopp and Bopp (1997) merely state that "natural helpers in the community (are) those people to whom others frequently turn for advice and support" (p 44).

Rahim-Jamal (1998) completed "a plan for provision of mental health services to the Gitxsan" (p.

1). Part of that plan described "four to six Mental Health Workers" to be "identified from the natural helpers in each community... " (p. 23). This tends to demonstrate the increased recognition of the importance of natural helpers in the Gitxsan community as a resource.

Polk (1987) describes a program in Alaska with the Yup'ik people that involves "training local village residents as "natural helpers" - local people to whom other villagers go for assistance with their problems" (p. 20). Although the article describes their assigned role in the community, it does not explore what they might have done as untrained natural helpers, which is the focus of my project.

Rutter (1994) examines the ongoing debate on the value of psychotherapy and presents two points. The first is that "no one has made much of an effort to look at therapy delivered by nonprofessionals, despite the fact that it proves just as effective, or more effective than therapy performed by psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and family therapists" (p. 12). Secondly, she states that "On the average, psychotherapy offers more benefits than no therapy - it just may be that much simpler interventions yield similar results" (p. 95).

I hope that my study of natural helpers as nonprofessionals can give direction or insight into some of those simpler interventions.

Since I live among and work with Gitxsan people, I have chosen to attempt to learn the process that natural Gitxsan helpers go through to become helpers, what they do as helpers, and what characteristics of helpers they feel are important. This might give some insight into what can be done to promote the phenomenon of natural helping in the Gitxsan community.

The co-researchers

All four co-researchers are Gitxsan and have Gitxsan names, three of which are names of hereditary chiefs. Two had lived in Gitxsan communities all of their lives, while a third had only been away from the community for a few years while at residential school. The fourth had spent 80% of his life in a Gitxsan community and 20% at other locations in British Columbia including a few years at residential school.

There were two male and two female co-researchers ranging in age from just over fifty years of age to over eighty.

Three of the four had no training in Western-style counselling, while the fourth had *"some workshops around loss and grief and how to handle youth"*. In response to the questions, "Did it change how you helped people? Describe.", the response was *"not really... it kind of gave me a little more insights... (and) more confidence in what I'm doing... (and)... confirms some of the things that I'm doing "*.

"I've got sacred instruments that give me the status of being a helper. The pipe and the sweat lodge are my teachers. The assumption is that I go out to be of service to the people"

Thoughts about being seen as a helper

There were two women and two men as co-researchers. TWO indicated they had been encouraged to do volunteer work from their early years, as teenagers and younger. Their comments were;

"They always look up to me to help"

"I do volunteer work and I've always done that... right from the beginning "

"Now that I am what they consider an Elder, I do a lot of consulting not just with family but with other people too. "

The other two had been helping for about 24 years. Their comments were;

"(it) probably just falls into preparation to be chief"

"I've got sacred instruments that give me the status of being a helper. The pipe and the sweat lodge are my teachers. The assumption is that I go out to be of service to the people"

This is an early indication that there will be a focus on a traditional Gitxsan chief's duties as a helper as well as a focus on the role of a "pipe carrier".

(Granddad said) *"always observe what goes on", "always be there for them", "help as much as you can"*

How they came about to be a helper

The people who were influential in their becoming a helper

It appears that parents and grandparents played a primary role in influencing three of the co-researchers who said:

(Granddad said)   *"always observe what goes on"*

"always be there for them"

"help as much as you can"

"my mother -was my biggest influence... she expected me to do it... I did what she asked me to... people came to her for help"

"my mother taught me everything about sharing and how to behave, and when you become chief, you're there to serve your (extended) family and take care of their interests"

"Father was a hereditary chief and people came to him for a lot of things so I was expected to be the same)"

Other important people were hereditary chiefs who seemed to influence all four of the co-researchers.

"our hereditary chief was one of the biggest influences in my life... (and he) taught me that every thing was sacred... and made me do a lot of thinking... "

Still others who were influential included older councillors, a father-in-law, elected councillors and others as indicated by comments like these:

"all kind of groomed and helped me along to be of assistance, to be of service to the people, community, families..."

"A senior pipe carrier gave me a lot of encouragement and a lot of advice on how to carry,... how to conduct myself and how to conduct ceremonies

"I noticed a lot of general encouragement from the people around"

Teaching by modelling appeared to be evident in all four of their experiences.

"he was always there for us"

"she showed me how to live just by being the nice person she was"

Two of the four indicated that they were actively passing the same message on to their children.

Two of the co-researchers indicated they had been encouraged to help others all of their life. They had seen parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and hereditary chiefs modelling helping. It seemed to be expected of them from an early age and they developed as helpers from childhood.

Another co-researcher described how she started to develop as a helper at about the age of twenty-five when she was chosen to get the name of a hereditary chief. The influence of both parents was important but so was the influence of the hereditary chief who took her out onto the territory and trained her.

Another co-researcher described her helping experience as starting about twenty three years ago in a community service role that evolved into a broad based helper role.

One of the co-researchers described being given a pipe when someone known to him passed away. This began a series of events and experiences that seemed to encourage that person to continue on and develop skills as a pipe carrier.

Experiences that influenced their becoming a helper

Each of the co-researchers recounted an experience that they felt was influential in their becoming a helper.

One talked about a major life decision that was extremely difficult for her to work out on her own when she was a young adult. A close relative let her talk and then the relative talked about the consequences of the decision she had to make for herself.

Another talked about being in elementary school in a group that *"knit and made scarves and sweaters to send to the guys (soldiers overseas) to use in the cold weather"*. That's what really got to her.

A third described the following experience:

> *The biggest... (incident) that influenced my life and helped me think at a very early*
>
> *age... (occurred) when we stopped to fish (on our traditional territory)... and this*
>
> *guy comes over the bank and he chased us away... and got angry and fired some*
>
> *shots... (to scare us). After that... (our chief) talked to us and reminded us that it is*
>
> *important to remember the history of this place... and to act peacefully and (to know*
>
> *the history and the location of the boundaries)... because (we're)... going to have to*
>
> *deal with these guys and it's going to be a long time .. (This) really underlined that I*
>
> *have to be concerned about everything and... seeing how the chief related to the*
>
> *commoner like myself...* made me feel important *(and) that* I had a role to play...
>
> *Eventually, all those experiences will help me shape the rest of my life...*

The fourth co-researcher is a pipe carrier and she described several experiences that influenced her decision to follow the path of the pipe carrier.

> *I went to see a little old man (out of province)... he summoned me to check a pipe...*
>
> *he asked me a number of questions, he says, tell me about your dreams, I told him all*
>
> *the dreams I thought were profound, he said two of your dreams are visionary... he*
>
> *asked me how many times that I just about died and I said three times... he asked me*
>
> *a little bit about my background... what am I doing now so at the time I was (quite*
>
> *actively involved in the community)... he said to me,... you're highly qualified to*

become a pipe carrier... that's why you got the pipe... and it's typical of a lot of helpers to have near death experiences... gone to the edge and come back and it's typical for helpers, pipe carriers to have the same kind of dreams that I have... I see lights... I see faces...

... there are some other ceremonies I have to attend... do fasts, vision quests and things like that...

. I went to Yuwipi ceremonies... sixty of us sat around... and performed the Yuwipi ceremony... at the time I received the blessing and I was asked to light up my pipe and the Yuwipi man told me, he said that I was on the right path...

... all the sweats, sweat lodges and everything... very attractive... conducting the sweat ceremonies... you see lights and you see faces and what (I was told was) that the faces that I see are the old people and the way he interpreted it to me was that the old people are trying to reach you... they're trying to call you... there's work for you,... there's another line of work for you and that kind of shook me up and I got called to a meeting... they asked me, try... to do teachings, to do spirituality, to do ceremonies... just try it... now I'm expected... that I'll be there all the time... (and that is)... right in step with my life...

He talked of three other experiences of a spiritual and supernatural nature that influenced his belief in the value of his continuing on the path of a pipe carrier.

(On another occasion someone close)... got very sick, and as I was (out of town) at the time... I do meditation... and... these lights started appearing to me and this very brilliant bright light appeared in front of me and it took off to (the hospital that the person was in)... right into the hallways, right through the hallways, right into his room... went right into his body and then kind of hovered around... his belly area... and it... came shooting back to me... and you know, when you get hit with something you kind of get... (he demonstrated his head being knocked backward... and that's one of the lights that (senior pipe carrier) explained... explained to me... he said when you make an intense request, the grandfathers show themselves by appearing... they manifest in the light to tell you they hear your prayers and that... they're shaping an answer for you...

... another occasion, (someone close) was very sick... I picked up the pipe... shortly after I got the pipe... and I was sitting there 'cause... no manual comes with the

pipe... I thought... I was helpless 'cause there wasn't anything I could do so I said... I'm going to pick up the pipe (now)... during the pipe ceremony after you do an intensive purification, an intense request, then you do intense listening... during the course of my intense listening, I was instructed to do two what I know now is tobacco ties... I'm going to take it downstairs and put it in the fire and make it as an offering... and I talked with my senior pipe carrier... my advisor and he said, what did you do... this is what I had to do... and he said, do you know about tobacco ties... no I don't know anything about tobacco ties... well those... are tobacco ties... quite common in... Aboriginal spirituality and a way of making offerings and at that time as well you know, I saw the lights as well blue light, pure light while I'm doing my intense listening...

He described another occasion that involved a fox, small lights and voices.

I took that to (my senior pipe carrier)... and the old man... said... those are the grandfathers... showing themselves and they manifest in the form of lights you see them... there's other occasions in the sweat lodge you see lights... you hear things... feel a brushing... Eagle wings brushing... so those are very inspirational... they show themselves, not only in the form of light helpers or helpers that come in the form of lights but they show themselves in the form of animal forms as well .

Each of the four talked about experiences that empowered them, made them feel important and helped show them a direction for their lives. Three of the co-researchers were confronted with experiences that appeared to have strong emotional meaning that made indelible impressions on them. In the case of the pipe carrier, her experiences tended to defy logic and had a strong spiritual message for her. She found the whole experience "very attractive" and felt it was the right path for her. At different points in their lives, all were given opportunities to help other people. They were also able to observe other people they respected, modelling helping behaviour.

What they do as helpers

How they know when a person needs help
The co-researchers offered about six different answers to this question, such as:
1. individuals calling on the phone or approaching in person for themselves;
2. individuals calling on the phone or approaching in person referring someone else for help;
3. the helper observes someone appearing to need help

"I see in her face that she's tense and sort of scared, (so I) go and see her (and) talk to her";

4. the helper hears through the "grapevine"

    "you hear things in a small town";

5. a House meeting is called

    " ... we have what we call a House, ... a Wilp ... it's the extended family and we have a meeting once a month ... if anybody is going through a bad time ... they come to the House meeting and talk about it "

6. the helper is just "drawn to a person" who they feel may need help.

What they do as helpers

There appear to be two basic approaches to helping offered by the four co-researchers. Three of the co-researchers dominantly used a one to one approach that encouraged a dialogue between themselves and the person needing help. The fourth co-researcher, although incorporating a certain amount of dialogue in the approach, focused more on a ceremonial approach that might include *"intense purification, intense requesting and intense listening".*

"teach the wholeness of life ... to be aware of everything... that everyone is important ... there is a role for (everybody) "

The dialogue approach also includes actions and activities in which one or both parties might take part. It also might include a group process.

The ceremonial approach more often includes group participation, as in a *"sweat lodge"* ceremony, but it might also include some of the aspects involved in a dialogue approach.

Both approaches invariably start with listening to the person who appears to need help.

A cousin told one of the co-researchers,

    " remember what your (grandfather) said to you ... don't tell them what they're supposed to do, he said, just listen to them"

Another co-researcher said,

    "sometimes they just need to talk, and I guess I have learned to listen, and they feel comfortable"

Paradoxically there are times when the co-researchers find themselves doing much more that just listening as was indicated by these comments,

"a lot of kids need to get direction from somebody"

"you have to tell them it's not their fault and they have to act (for) their own life"

"I talk to them and I tell them what to do and what not to do"

Many different kinds of suggestions and approaches are offered by the dialogue approach to those needing help depending on their specific needs. The following is a list of suggestions and approaches described by co-researchers:

regarding remembering parents and grandparents guidance

"go back to the time (your) parents are talking about things

"remember what our grandparents always tell us"

regarding looking at the effects of their behaviour

"you should just stay home and be with the kids, maybe they need attention, that's why they're doing (the) things they're doing"

use of self disclosure

"I don't mind talking about the problems that I went through and I've got nothing to lose at the age I'm at now if it can help somebody"

"I understand your situation I was there myself"

use of prayer

"I just pray for them I know prayer answers things"

NOTE: Prayer was a primary tool for the pipe carrier and those she helped.

encouragement

"I just give them encouragement"

learning from leaders

"watch all these leaders and how they do things"

teaching awareness and personal value

"teach the wholeness of life ... to be aware of everything... that everyone is important ... there is a role for (everybody) "

using metaphor

> *... you have a chain of about ten links and you're in the middle, and the first four links got messed up in your background. You have nothing to do with those first four links and it's affected you so you shouldn't be too hard on yourself .*

modelling and credibility

> *"it's very important to have credibility. If I don't live what I say, then people aren't going to take me seriously"*

to help alleviate cultural discontinuity

> *"we try to be mentors and to compensate for what might be lacking out there now because (of) too much TV and stuff like that"*

> *"take the best of my Gitxsan society and the Western society"*

> *"you can combine the two ... you can live in both cultures"*

understanding influences on feelings and behaviour

> *.. one thing that's important for Aboriginal people is to have a clear understanding of the misery that they're in and the source of their misery... that if Aboriginal people understand the source of their misery it's easier ... once they have that insight ... to craft, to chart a journey of healing ... once they understand the source of their anger, their addiction, their violence, their behaviour ... it would be easier ... that misery ... just dominates every family ... every individual ... every First Nation ... so you put it in perspective for them ... you're not the only one ... your dad, your mom, your grandfather, your great-grandfather went through it ... take a look at it (and try to understand the reasons they did what they did) ... did your dad go to residential school ... it starts to unfold and they start seeing .. now I understand why ... I'm drinking lots ...*

> *"open doors to understanding the way things have been throughout our history the many bad effects from residential schools"*

empowering

> *"if you want to talk about it then we'll talk about it"*

making a spiritual connection

> *"have you tried talking to a medicine man"*

helping to let go of the past

> *"I don't think there's too much we can do about yesterday but there's something we can do about tomorrow"*

learning from past mistakes

> *"if people learn that a mistake is not necessarily wrong if you can learn from it ... then there's something good in it"*

accepting responsibility for choices

> *"life is about choices and you can make good choices or bad choices and it affects your life afterwards"*

encouraging action

> *"what we are going to do is to do it, not just put it off"*

In addition to the suggestions and approaches, the co-researchers themselves would take action to assist the person needing help as indicated by the following:

consulting with others

> *"I told her (sister) I said what are we going to do about her?"*

(NOTE: all of the co-researchers had a well established network of both Gitxsan and other culturally sensitive resources in the community)

financial assistance

> *"if I have the financial aid I can provide it ... and they're generous in returning (it) ... much like the banking system ... in our feast house too, there's always a little bit of interest on top"*

House system

> *... we have what we call a House ... Wilp ... it's the extended family ... and we have a meeting once a month just to get together and talk about what we have to do and ... if anybody is going through a bad time they come to the House and they'll come to the meeting and talk about it and as a group we sort of tell him or her what they should do and what they should try ...*

openness to informal "drop-in" visits for help

> *"they come around and visit for a while, we have tea and things like that. They don't come right out and say what they are there for but they sort of talk about it, ... I don't question them or anything"*

> *"if you think things are going out of control then just remember where I live, come and see me"*

> *"Granddad said, always be there for them"*

a supporting role for grieving

> *"just be there ... you don't have to say anything ... and at the feast if you don't have any money, just help out and do what you can"*

a supportive role for someone depressed and needing work

> *"that person might be the one that I would have help me doing my fishing and it gives me a chance in the evening to talk more ... (to show that I) care and recognize their potential"*

The ceremonial approach in usually quite different from the dialogue approach after the initial conversation to establish the person's need. For example;

> *... people approach me asking for advice about their family or kids or health related stuff ... they'd sit and talk and usually it always ends up ... can I have a smudge, or can I have a smoke ... could you do a fanning, a sweat or a pipe ceremony... or they want a brushing ... I usually don't prescribe anything ... they usually request it or they come and say, here's some tobacco or a cigarette ... I know you're going in a sweat this afternoon, could you think about my daughter who's journeying to Kamloops ... could you ask for protection that she have a safe accident-free journey ... or could you think about my family member who is very sick*

The focus of the co-researcher who is a *"junior pipe carrier"* is *"to help them heal ... to help in any way (she) could"*. This was further described when she explained

> *... there's a source of anger ... there's a source of addictive behaviour ... there's a source of that illness ... you've got to try and seek it out somehow... that's what I was taught ... you do what you can -with your bundle, your pipe, your rattles, the drum, the sacred herbs that you use for making smoke, the songs that I have, and the cer-*

emonies that I have, the many ways of praying that you ... making a request ... have

a sense of that... you can do something even if it's ... it's just to comfort them ...

Two of the ceremonies that are performed are a pipe ceremony and a sweat lodge. Some comments about those ceremonies include,

... I do (a) sweat lodge ... very intense purification where the sweat lodge ceremony

and the part that unfolds in the ceremony helps ... there are times when I conduct a

ceremony differently ,for a particular individual or a particular group ... depending

on what they need ... sometimes if we give four rounds at a sweat lodge, I'd spend

more time maybe on the grandmother round for the women or the grandfather round

for the men ... depending ... I always like to spend more time on last round work ...

they do intensive questioning of themselves ... it's just a general sweat ... like an

introduction ... but if it's kind of more intense requiring more helping and more heal-

ing, I conduct the round a little bit different ... depending on a situation, I may sing a

certain song ... there's a number of calling-in songs ... calling in the grandfathers ...

I do one healing song ... there's a sound that I use sometimes when I do a ceremony

that was given to me at a fast ...

... I do pipe ceremonies... something in the tobacco that they offer... I put it in there

and they draw the smoke ... and it will blend with them and they blow the smoke out

and it will blend with all the universe so that when you call the grandfathers in, two

hundred and five grandfathers come ... some of them stay to help ... also in a pipe

ceremony, after you do an intense purification and an intense requesting, then you

do intense listening (for instruction) ...

Sometimes the ceremony is done to give comfort rather that to heal.

... sometimes there isn't anything I can do ... the man's on his deathbed ... there's a

difference between curing and healing ... I can't cure because I'm just a junior pipe

carrier so then I could help prepare the person for birthing into the spirit world...

give them comfort ... and get them ready...

The co-researcher refers several times to calling in the grandfathers for a variety of reasons as indicated in the following,

"during a smudge... I do a little bit of time doing the fanning, doing the calling in, I

say, grandfathers, be merciful on these (people) ... give up some of your special

knowledge, understanding, send help and assistance"

The co-researcher also gets requests for information about dreams,

> *... some people ask me about dreams ... I say, I could give you general information but I've got no training in dream interpretation ... I can kind of tell whether or not it's something really profound ... some of the answers come in the form of dreams ...*

Some limitations of being *"just a junior pipe carrier"* include not being able to *"cure"*, a limited range of ceremonial tools and as stated,

> *"I don't administer any medicine ... because I'm just a junior pipe carrier"*

In conclusion, it seems that both the dialogue approach and the ceremonial approach are helpful in the Gitxsan community. The fact that only one of the four co-researchers was focused on his activity as a pipe carrier may indicate that the ratio of those using a dialogue approach to those using a ceremonial approach dominantly leans toward the dialogue approach. The pipe carrier knows of four other local Gitxsan pipe carriers in the area.

The processes of learning the two approaches are quite different although there appears to be an overlap as all co-researchers were influenced by growing up in the same Gitxsan cultural environment. The specialized training for the pipe carrier comes closer to that of a healer than a helper. Although I was not specifically intending to study healers in this report, it became a reality that perhaps more accurately reflects current helping processes in the Gitxsan community. There are important roles for both the natural helpers who use a dialogue approach and the helper/healers who use the ceremonial approach. Although it seems that spirituality plays a stronger role in the ceremonial approach, spirituality is also a very significant part of the lives of the three co-researchers who use the dialogue approach, and would be incorporated as needed.

Characteristics of a helper

There is a high degree of overlap between the characteristics described by the three co-researchers using the dialogue approach and the co-researcher using the ceremonial approach. The characteristics that appear to be most suited to the ceremonial approach will be noted as such.

Although it is not my intention to prioritize the list of characteristics of helpers suggested by the co-researchers, the first three received the most frequent acknowledgement.

The list of characteristics and some examples of supportive comments are as follows:

availability

> *"be there for them'*

> *"always be there for the people that need help"*

> *"be available when somebody approaches you to do something ,,, you can do something even if it's just to comfort them"*

credibility

"it's very important to have credibility (and) live what I say"

"live according to the values and philosophy of the Gitxsan people are a part of the land"

"abide by our values of trust, honour, sharing, respect, honesty"

"you've got to have a pretty clean life"

humility

"I've tried and can't say (I've) succeeded in some cases"

"be humble"

self-sacrificing but with self-care limits

"respect your limits"

"walk firmly on the earth ...walking firmly means you're on call, but also, it's correct not to pick up your pipe ... whatever reason" (pipe carrier)

"if there is a better person to do my job, then I would gladly get out of the way "

"confidentiality"

"integrity"

"honesty"

"wisdom to be able to help or guide them"

open minded

"assumptions can be wrong"

caring

"you've got to have a deep unconditional love for the people who seek your services"

"be caring of everybody's interests"

self-knowledge

"a helper should know themselves well"

"be at peace with yourself"

"knowing your essence as an Aboriginal person is really important ... everything about you ..."

respect for life (sacredness)

"they have to have a deep understanding of the power relationship between the creations and the Great Spirit, or the Creator... and understand that all life has a spirit ... the animate and the inanimate... life is sacred"

a calling (pipe carrier)

... I think there has to be some form of calling ... I was told not all people are qualified to do this ... there seems to be a trial or you have to suffer... you have to go through some form of suffering ... like coming back from death ... your going to have to have some dreams that indicate that you should be doing this kind of work .

Types of problems people bring to them

The most prevalent problems brought to all four co-researchers are:

depression
suicide
anger / violence
grieving
parenting problems (especially by those having gone to residential school)
loss of culture
drugs and alcohol
problems with the police
cultural advice
needing life direction

Three of the co-researchers indicated the following list of problems that have been presented to them:

victim of violence
victim of sexual abuse
work or school related
money problems
prejudice
relationship/ marital
living in two cultures (cultural discontinuity)
spirituality

Two of the co-researchers worked with these additional problems;

problems with parents

gambling

Only one co-researcher had experienced consulting about;

abortion

While another co-researcher reported helping around;

housing

Many problems involved a combination of issues and topics.

This wide range of problem types indicated that the natural helpers are very versatile.

Age range and sex of those they helped

The female co-researchers indicated they saw mostly women ranging in age from around ten years to fifty or sixty.

The male co-researchers indicated they saw males and females equally ranging in age from as low as five years to sixty or seventy.

What they do for people who don't know what's bothering them

The following comments were offered:

"just let them talk"

"after listening to them you sort of point out what you think is wrong"

"sometimes they're not ready to talk ... there's always another time"... it doesn't make sense to press the issue"

"I just let them talk it out and then just by listening you ... kind of intuitively ... I kind of suggest to them ... and help them crystallize what's bothering them "

Listening with respect and patience and gently suggesting possibilities seem to be common to all of the co-researchers.

What they do for people they are unable to help

The following comments were offered by two co-researchers:

"sometimes I can't get through to some ... (so) I just listen to them"

"there are people you'll never change"

Other comments made were:

"I refer them to programs going on with the Gitxsan nation"

"lots of times ... if I can't help them the only thing I could give them is inspiration and encouragement ... there's lots that they can do themselves "

"if I can't help, you got to go see (another counsellor) or go to (treatment) or maybe talk to you employer or something .. or go to a sweat . "

Role of Gitxsan culture in the helping process

Each of the four co-researchers presented a somewhat different focus on what they felt the role of Gitxsan culture played in the helping process, but all felt it was significant. The following comments represent their thoughts,

... for ?ne it's a big ... big role because ... I disclose who I am as a Gitxsan (person) ... and how it's helped me for my own identity, my own essence ... and how it helped me in my inner journey ... it's just very powerful, know who you are ... be proud of who you are ... don't let anybody push you around ... use your Aboriginal essence ... your Aboriginal pathways ... your Aboriginal teachings ... your traditions for your own healing ... and almost always you know you see their self esteem is going up ... just by hearing it ... it's ... not an arrogant thing ... you know but it's something that's their essence ...

"being a participant is very important ... we have to pull our weight ... the healthy participant in our culture will be a healthy person"

"people sitting down in the feast house, witness, they don't just go there for the good-ies, they are there for the people"

As previously mentioned in "What they do as helpers", the House system plays an integral role in facilitating the helping process for House members. Accepting and embracing being Gitxsan and taking an active part in the House and feast system are important parts of being healthy and supporting the health of the people.

What they do for their own problems

"talk to my friend or sister or eldest daughter"

"go to a counsellor or another chief or somebody who seems together"

"my aunt is dead now but I have her children .. and even though they are younger that me, I can talk to them"

... I usually go to a senior pipe (carrier)... to healers that I know... talk to my family
... I've got some very close friends who watch out for me ... l perform ceremonies not
only for other people but for myself as well ... it benefits me..."

Gitxsan shaman

Although the topics of shaman, medicine men/medicine women and healers were not a part of my
study, one of the co-researchers was practising the skills of a healer and another felt it was an omission
from the topic of natural Gitxsan helpers and offered the following about haldowgets and halaits:

... actually, one of the things that... has been left out ... is the sense of the good
shaman and the bad ... there was good and evil ... the bad were called haldowgets ...
and the good were called halaits ... the halaits were the good guys ... they displayed
their powers in different ways ... my grandfather said that they were groomed and ...
had to live strictly ... and they learned to live a life of humility and ... they weren't
preoccupied with ... earning money to buy a car and stuff like that ... they were
strictly ... one in charge to heal ... and concentrate ... talking to the creator ... and
fasting and cleansing themselves ... and doing rituals and even their helpers ... went
through a similar kind of ... thing for helping the shaman ... to healing and ... if a
person was sitting and helping a shaman and they'd broken every rule in the book,
that would have some effect on what the helper is trying to do ... my grandfather's
father was a shaman ... way back in the 1800s ... my grandfather used to tell me that
he used to be called to (other villages) ... and he said that he'd seen people display
their powers and some people ... looked like these people were like eating dogs and
... that they had incredible powers ... and ... he said his father ... used to bring birch
bark with him ... real dry birch bark and then he would light the fires and the fire
would be getting good and hot and then he would pick up these burning birch bark
and eat them ... that was the way of displaying the powers that were helping him ...
he was showing the people that there was nothing phony about this ... and like any
other person that would try and do this ... if you hadn't been chosen to do it ... then
don't try it ... all these people were chosen ... he says that there was ... other shaman
who displayed their power ... by having people come ... people would just be curious
and he would bring a rope with him and he would have all these strong people ... ask

them to get up and ... then he put the rope in his teeth and ask them to pull him ... to

move him ... but they would have four or five people there tugging but they couldn't

move him ... and that was just his way of showing ... that was the power that he

possessed ... someone else's power ... so it's just a real mystery ... listening to those

kinds of things .. I don't think I could really pin down how they do these things ...

whether it's illusion ... but I think the way that they convinced people ... that they're

not B'S'ing anybody I guess ... is that they were actually able to heal the person ...

that would say the most I guess ... like they're not just putting on a show there ....

In addition to the co-researchers comments, Glavin (1990) states:

the halaits and the haldowgets are organized into two secret societies, each of which
maintain ritual privilege and supernatural powers.

The halaits are healers *and are respected in the community. The haldowgets are*
more inclined to inflict injury, and are feared. Few outsiders, anthropologists or
otherwise, have been able to assemble much information about them. Their identi-
ties are a secret, and nobody likes to talk about them, at least publicly or for the
record, but there's often hushed-voice speculation about who might be a haldowget,
or who saw so-and-so hiding in ditch in his regalia, or who said so-and-so is a
halait" (p. 160)

"Despite their decline, the halaits are still present in Gitxsan society, and they are
active..." (p. 161)

Perhaps someone in the future will take on the challenge of how to promote a resurgence of halaits.

Concluding comments

It was my intent that the findings of this research should be made available to anyone who is in a position to promote greater helping in the Gitxsan nation and more generally, to those who are engaged in bi-cultural counselling.. This would include those in training to become helpers/counsellors as well as those currently helping and counselling Gitxsan people. This would also included educators and community workers.

The following recommendations are based primarily on the findings of my research and derived from the data provided by the four co-researchers.

Recommendations to helpers and those training to be helpers/counsellors
1. Read the section "What they do as helpers" and consider how each I suggestion matches your style and the Gitxsan people with whom / you are working.
2. Read the section "Characteristics of a helper" and do your own personal helping characteristics inventory for a comparison.

Majority culture models of counselling and therapy are, in some respects, inappropriate and can be potentially harmful when used in unmodified forms within First Nations contexts. Perhaps the most applicable approach is constructivist based counselling. This stems from a emphasis on multiple realities, respect, connectedness, and the activity based methods of mapping and personal projects.

Recommendations regarding the ceremonial approach

For those attracted to the ceremonial approach, seek out the pipe carriers in your community. Ask some of the many helpers in the community or at local treatment centres for the names of pipe carriers that you can talk to. Remember the traditional offering of tobacco in exchange for help from a pipe carrier. You may be able to take part in a sweat.

Recommendations for promoting the development of natural helpers in the community
1. Recommendation to Educators:
    For curriculum: teach Gitxsan history, philosophy, values, beliefs, art and language, making use of natural Gitxsan helpers and Elders as much as possible.
    For staff: encourage all staff to model the characteristics and approaches of natural Gitxsan helpers.
    For activities: a)   provide plenty of opportunities for young people to be helpful to others, and let them know their help is appreciated.
                      b)   give some of your recreation a cooperative focus where young people benefit from helping each other.

Recommendations to community workers and planners
1. Establish a holistic wellness centre that would utilize the services of natural Gitxsan helpers as well as professional helpers. The centre could address needs of survivors of trauma, residential school, and addictions as well as treating sexual offenders and family violence.
2. Promote community based workshops making use of natural Gitxsan helpers as co-facilitators. Topics such as parenting and helping could be offered.

3. Provide opportunities for family-based, healthy and fun recreational activities as alternatives to bingo and TV.

Recommendations to natural Gitxsan helpers

1. Keep up the good work.
2. Continue to expand your skills and learn from others, especially those who come to you for help.

My reflections

True to my expectations, the co-researchers modelled almost every aspect of the profile describing counsellors effective with First Nations clients (Peavy, 1997). The only specific omission was that none of the co-researchers mentioned anything about a holistic approach. Had I mentioned it, I expect all would have agreed that it was important.

The most enjoyable aspect of the entire project was meeting with and interviewing the four co-researchers. They all made me feel very comfortable despite the fact that I was asking them over twenty questions and in some cases rewording the same question and asking it again if I felt they had more to offer on that topic.

I had the distinct impression that had I invited the remaining eleven people on my short list of potential researchers to take part, they all would have accepted. I also expect that upon meeting them, I would have experienced some of the same feelings of warmth, sincerity, self-confidence, humility, pride, optimism and concern for others that I felt with the four that I interviewed.

How different they are from many of the people I meet, as a counsellor, who often appear stuck with a negative view of themselves and others. I wonder how their lives might have been different if at an early age they had the good fortune to be taken under the wing of one of the natural Gitxsan helpers.

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APPENDIX
OVERVIEW OF SOCIODYNAMIC COUNSELLING

Sociodynamic counselling: a constructivist form of counselling designed for helping people navigate 21st century social life

SocioDynamic Counselling originated from research done as part of the
Creation and Mobilization of Counselling Resources for Youth (CAMCRY)
project—a National Research and Development Project in Canada from
1988-1992. The term "SocioDynamic Counselling" is a Canadian
Trademark registered to Dr. R. Vance Peavy

WHAT DOES THE TERM "SOCIODYNAMIC" MEAN? "Socio" is derived from the Latin word socialis which means companion, ally, associate. "Socio" marks our primary existence as social or relational beings. The word "dynamic" is derived from the Greek dynamikos which means powerful, in motion, altering, and refers to the aesthetic equilibrium of the parts as a whole which are unstable when separated. Dynamic also implies continuous change, especially cultural change and change in patterns of cultural meaning.

SOCIODYNAMIC COUNSELLING is organized around concepts of wholistic social existence— that is, living as a whole being while simultaneously living in a web of culture-centred relationships. More emphasis is placed on the social than on the psychological. SocioDynamic counselling is based on the assumption that human existence is largely socially constructed. Further, both people and the social contexts in which people are embedded are continuously changing. Social beingness , multiple

realities, transformative meaning, unpredictability and non-linearity are key features of the SocioDynamic perspective.

SOCIODYNAMIC COUNSELLING is situated in the Human Science Paradigm. Thomas Kuhn pointed out that we only perceive what our particular lens or metaphor will let us see. The Human Science Paradigm places very great importance on language, meaning, and activity. Language provides us with the tools for negotiating with each other and with institutions. Individual life, and cultural life is purposeful, and is organized in patterns of meaning—in short, our everyday existence is symbolic , premised on meaning, and carried out through communication and activity. The Human Science Paradigm provides a sharp contrast to the Positivist and Behavioral Paradigms.

SOCIODYNAMIC COUNSELLING is, generally, a constructivist strategy. People are seen to be important contributors to, and builders of, their own lives, relationships and contexts. Three tenets of constructivist thinking are:
- personal and social realities exist in the form of multiple alternatives; they are socially and experientially negotiated; they are "local" and specific; personal and social realities are dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them.
- constructivist epistemology is neither "objective" nor "subjective". Rather it is "participatory". What we come to know in counselling, and in other walks of life, is the result of our interactions with others. Our knowledge is literally the creation of the processes of interaction between ourselves and others.
- each human being perceives the world through a lens or filter of mental constructions. Counselling is a process of assisting individuals to articulate their constructions and to recognize the way in which their construals are either empowering or disempowering in terms of goals which they wish to achieve or the futures which they wish to build. Mental (cognitive and emotional) constructions are elicited and refined hermeneutically—through listening, critical examination, and negotiation.

SOCIAL LIFE AND CULTURES ARE CHANGING, PEOPLE ARE IMMERSED IN UNCERTAIN TRANSFORMATIONS—REVISIONS OF COUNSELLING MUST BE UNDERTAKEN TO MEET THE NEEDS OF CONTEMPORARY CITIZENS. A basic assumption underlying the development of a new form of counselling is: people living in North American, European, and some other regions of the world are immersed in rather unpredictable processes of transformation which produce considerable uncertainty, existential insecurity, and confusion about values and how to live one's life. Change itself is not new—as humans we have always had to cope with change. What is new is the speed of change, the orders of change, and the rapid spread of change to cultures and social groups beyond its origin.

Well into the 20th century, many people still lived in traditional cultures which began to break up in the 18th century but are still dominant in a few cultures. In most Western societies, we now find ourselves at the end of the modern era. It is the modern era in which industrialization, urban living,

belief in progress, and faith in science and technology have been main features. In the modern period, religious faith and participation in extended families and intimate neighbourhoods declined, replaced in part by faith in rationality and switch from moral values to economic values. As the new millennium arrives, many people are in the postmodern stage of social evolution. This is an era of considerable uncertainty. Many feel that the foundations of life have dissolved, and express fear and confusion about futures.

Counselling (all forms of helping/healing/therapy) emerge as part of cultural history. The differences between traditional, modern, and postmodern cultures and modes of existence are considerable. These differences exist in social life, institutional life and in forms of communication. Most importantly all social, economic, and political changes at the societal level have consequences for the individual. Many of these changes are not predictable, avoidable, or even understandable. More and more, what it means to be a self is changing. The self is less and less shaped by tradition, is not assured of progress, and now must be seen as socially constructed.

For the first time in human history, the self is being regarded as a "project" to be built simultaneously by one's own efforts and by participation in interactive, relational webs of significance—friends, co-workers, peers, virtual communities, etc.

Forms of counselling which made sense in the dependable days of modernity and factory life, in times where traditions still guided what was right and desirable to do, are disintegrating. Of course what makes life complex is not just change, but the fact that there is an increasing mix of traditional, modern and postmodern conditions. This complex mix is apparently the result of such phenomena as migration, travel, and the impact of the microelectronic revolution in the forms of computer, TV, and robotics.

As we move into new modes of social life, new dilemmas arise in social life for individuals to resolve. To do this, people often need to learn how to think about their situations in new ways. Many "solutions" must literally be invented. There are few formulas to follow and even fewer precedents to draw on. SocioDynamic Counselling is a social invention designed to provide counsellors with both a contemporary social life perspective and a set of counselling tools for assisting people resolve everyday troubles and uncertainties in these new contexts.

NEW VOCABULARIES FOR COUNSELLING. One way to initiate and advance a new model of counselling, is to both introduce new vocabularies and to use old words in new ways. When we perceive new realities, we must be careful not to hide or obstruct them by placing old names and explanations on them from earlier paradigms. Some of the new ways of thinking about counselling which make up the SocioDynamic perspective and ways articulating these thoughts are:

- More focus on meaning and on the use of language as a set of tools for getting things done
- Use of the terms "act", "action", and "activity"—all of which imply the existence of an "actor" who acts with intention, purpose, and meaning
- Adopting a vocabulary of proficiency (strengths, personal assets, talents, potentialities, abilities) for counselling and avoiding the deficit vocabulary (diagnostic classifications,

deficiencies, incapacity, problems, pathologies) which are the stock-in-trade of conventional, modernist models of counselling and therapy and medicine

A vocabulary of proficiency is based on the assumption that all clients have personal strengths and experiences which they can use to improve the quality of life and reduce or eliminate personal troubles. Working with client strengths has numerous benefits:

1. Respect for clients is reinforced
2. Motivation becomes intrinsic
3. Counselling as a cooperative, democratic process is supported
4. No person is completely without personal resources and all situations contain some opportunity for choice and action
5. Using everyday language to name and develop strengths removes the stigma of illness, failure, blame
6. Proficiency language supports efforts to construct better ways of living
7. Emphasis on personal strengths encourages individuals to draw on past experiences where they were successful and able to cope
8. Strength-oriented discourse fosters hope, provides the experience of supportiveness, and opens windows to the future.
9. Strength-oriented discourse reduces tendencies toward blaming, discrediting, derogation, and discouragement. It also minimizes the image of counsellor as a Mr. Fix-it.
10. Strength-oriented discourse provides both client and counsellor with opportunities and tools for constructing solutions, new pathways in social life, and contributes to the important activities of planning, deciding, and carrying out activity projects.

A new Vocabulary of the "Self" is used in the SocioDynamic perspective. The term "self" is construed metaphorically. In the SocioDynamic perspective a "self" does not exist as a thing. The term self is a metaphorical tool for referring to the existential activities, projects, and experienced meanings of the human being. The use of the term self continues, but care should be taken not to reify what is essentially a metaphor. Old vocabularies of the self defined the self as a somewhat fixed, conditioned entity made up of measurable traits and variables. I call this the "psychometric" self. From a SocioDynamic perspective, characteristics of the self include:

- The self is continuously evolving—it is not fixed
- The self is comprised of "self-organising" configurations of meaning
- The self is socially constructed—conceptually, the self is metaphorical and symbolic. Of course the constructed self "lives" in a physical body which is also self-organizing—but with more help from genetic codes, and neuro-physiological givens.
- The self is built by "storying", i.e., we are narrative selves.

The SocioDynamic focus on self is from the reference points of:
- Voice—being able to speak with authority about life experiences
- Position—location in social life, our status in relation to others, social life and institutions

- Identity—who we articulate ourselves as being: I am this person at this time, in this cultural place
- Activity—we "make" ourselves through our acts and activities; we create meaning through our activities
- Self-as-project—we produce ourselves through planning, deciding and acting
- World-making—symbolically and metaphorically, we make and can voice many personal worlds/ selves—remembered selves, present selves, future (possible) selves.

WHAT ARE SOME KEY FEATURES OF SOCIODYNAMIC COUNSELLING? Cultures everywhere and in all known times have developed ways of helping people in trouble. Helping methods are always embedded in assumptions, values and cultural beliefs. These assumptions are a scaffolding upon which the counselling approach is based. SocioDynamic counselling seeks to ground itself in emerging assumptions about living and social life as it is developing at the beginning of the 21st century. Some features are carried over from modernist thinking; other features are more aligned with the contingent, postmodern conditions (such as unpredictability, virtual realities, global economy and communication, de-traditionalization, robotization of labour, cultural diversity, shrinking of time and space) into which we find ourselves moving .

Selected key features:

1. Recognition that counselling is not a scientifically-driven endeavor, but rather is a culture-centred activity. Counselling is a profession of the "best-guess" and operates from cultural hypotheses and knowledge. SocioDynamic counselling does not rely much upon such tools as objective measurements, tests and value-free observations. Subscription to the formula: "If you want to know something about someone, ask them!" is advocated as the preferred way of gathering data.

2. For the most part, problems do not reside in persons. "Problems" are usually located in relationships, interactions, or in the contexts as social-structure features of situations. Personal troubles are almost never pathological, nor a function of "personality". They usually signal a glitch in interaction/ communication or conflict with social policy or structure.

3. There is no " one right way" to perceive truth or reality. Rather, social life is composed of multiple realities. Some may be better or worse than others, but these differences are open to negotiation— which may result in rejection, revision or acceptance of the particular view or version under consideration.

4. Counselling is a general method for life-planning. SocioDynamic counselling approaches the person as a whole being who is trying to lead a coordinated life and trying, at the same time, to resist pressures to fragment and submit to categorization. Therefore the term "counselling" is preferred over the various sub-classifications which counselling has fallen into, such as: "career" counselling, "vocational" counselling, " personal" counselling, "mental health" counselling, "educational" counselling and so on. Each of these categories represents vested interests of institutions, and the

professional members who subscribe to the specific category. Every person who seeks counselling comes to the counselling session as a whole person—not as a sub-part. The various aspects of one's entire life are implicated in various degrees as one experiences decision-making, self reconstruction, or planning and action in which one engages.

5. The concept of resistance is abandoned. An individual is ready or not-ready, knows how, or does not know how, experiences meaning or does not experience meaning. Thus rather than construing a client as "resistant" it is more useful to construe them and their actions as not-yet-ready, or as not knowing how, or bereft of meaning in regards to the actions under consideration.

6. Culture-centredness. This implies that useful knowledge and guidance about improving one's life situation is much more likely to take the form of cultural knowledge, cultural wisdom, ceremony and ways of everyday practice, than the form of scientific findings or professional theorizing. Of course, the counsellor should be conversant with various psychological and sociological theories of human behaviour. These are alternate models of reality. However, great care should be taken to see that these "scientific" models are not allowed to displace or usurp "local" or common-sense understandings. Abstract models may stimulate new ways of construing, but they should not be permitted to become dominator discourses. As people we live on the level of everyday social life, common sense, and cultural understandings. We do not thrive when our sense of the everyday is displaced by academic, theoretical, expert systems of knowledge/guidance/persuasion. SocioDynamic counselling is committed to directing helping processes back to the stream of everyday experiencing.

7. Emphasis is upon the present and future. Building scenarios of preferred futures is an extremely important activity in SocioDynamic Counselling.

8. Change is always already underway. What is necessary is to invent ways of making the best of change and learn how to join change is ways that help one succeed in moving along the cultural pathways one wishes to travel.

9. SocioDynamic Counselling seeks mutually useful connections with technology. Humans think, computers collate and transmit. Computer-generated decisions are technical; human decisions are personal. Human life is experiential, emotional, and complex far beyond present day computing capacity. Technical devices such as computers, VCRs, television sets, telephony, and the amazing micro-chip can assist people and processes in many ways. Most of this assistance stems from information transmission, display, integration, analysis, coordination, and generation. However, we should resist any and all efforts from those who would like to make computerization and technology replace or supplant human values. Technology can all too easily be used to support homo economicus and can contribute to de-humanization of the workplace, fragmentation of the family, surveillance which violates individual privacy and pollution of the environment. Technology is a

great slave but a terrible master. When considering the use of technological systems or devices in the context of counselling and guidance, it is well to ask:

- How will this enable me to do my basic tasks of counselling better?
- Will adoption of this system or device have a degrading effect on the humane dimensions of my workplace, my client's life-space or the conditions under which I believe counselling should be delivered?
- Is there a clear distinction being made between information and knowledge?
- What will I have to give up if this comes into play? Are there unstated trade-offs?
- Will adoption of this system or device in order to solve one type of problem end up creating even worse problems?
- Is the main impetus for adopting this technological entity that of efficiency, or economy, or effectiveness? If so, how do these goals affect the humanistic goals of care, fair treatment, democratic discourse, moral choice, agency, and personal meaning?

10. SocioDynamic Counselling can be practiced as one-to-one, group, or microelectronic processes such as telephony, Internet, or video- conferencing. It has been successfully used with youth and adults of all ages. However, the humanistic considerations raised in 9 above should be part of any decision to join counselling and technology.

WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL SOCIODYNAMIC PROCEDURES? As in all other forms of counselling and therapy, interpersonal communication skill and competency are prerequisite to the successful use of other counselling procedures. SocioDynamic counselling is not a technique-oriented form of counselling. However, beyond the application of good communication skill, there are four main SocioDynamic counselling activities:

1) cooperative relationship,
2) life-space mapping and clarification,
3) personal activity project construction, and
4) mindful problem-solving.

- **Cooperative, participatory, democratic relationships** in which counsellor and client join forces in the service of assisting the client of improve his or her life condition under consideration. The client and counsellor both bring resources to the counselling alliance.
- **Life-space clarification**. This is carried out primarily through the activities of story elicitation and mapping. Working together, the counsellor and client map pasts, futures, and presents. This activity enables the client to coordinate and articulate various complexities and temporarily "freeze" them in visual displays. This activity typically generates "voices" and stimulates client awareness of social location and positioning in social life.
- **Personal activity project construction**. A personal activity project brings deciding, planning and action into a single coordinated process which is based on personal meaningfulness for the client. Many personal activity projects take the form of "bridges" or "ladders" by means of which the

client and counsellor create a framework for the client to use in moving from one social location to a more desirable location.

- **Mindfulness framework for decision making, planning and problem solving**. This is a method of seeking solutions which directs attention both toward the individual's ways of thinking (reflection, self-observation) and toward the social structures which are framing or contextualizing the "problem".

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SOCIODYNAMIC (CONSTRUCTIVIST) COUNSELLING, see:
Publications:

Carlsen, Mary Baird (1988) MEANING MAKING. New York: W.W. Norton.

McLeod, John. (1997) NARRATIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY. London: Sage.

Monk, G. et al (eds.) (1997) NARRATIVE THERAPY IN PRACTICE. Jossey-Bass

Peavy, R. V. (1998) SOCIODYNAMIC COUNSELLING. Victoria: Trafford Publishing.

Peavy, R.V. (1998) KONSTRUKTIVISTISK VEJEDNING: TEORI OG METODE. Copenhagen: RUE email: rue@rue.dk website: www.rue.dk

Peavy, R. V. (1996) CONSTRUCTIVIST COUNSELLING AND THERAPY: TWO INTERVIEWS (Professional videotape). Cont. Studies in Ed., University of Victoria

Peavy, R.V. (1998) WHEN STRANGERS MEET (Professional Videotape) Contact the author at: drpv@pacificcoast.net.

What some clients and counsellors have said about their counselling experience with constructivist-oriented (sociodynamic) counselling

CLIENTS:

- [Adult client] For the first time, when we did the map, I saw what the problem really is—I am amazed! Now I have some place to go and I see how I can do it.
- [Youth client] I really enjoyed working together—it's good to hear other ideas and to clear up your own.
- [Immigrant client] Doing the map showed me where I need to do some things—I also liked the way you talked to me in words I could understand.

COUNSELLORS:

- [First Nations client] I studied theories of counselling before I became a counsellor. I am a Cree and constructivist theory is much closer to our view of the world than any of the other methods I studied about. I find it good for my FN clients.
- [First Nations client] I am a Blackfoot and this form of counselling is close to the world-view of my people. It had given me a lot of help in my counselling.
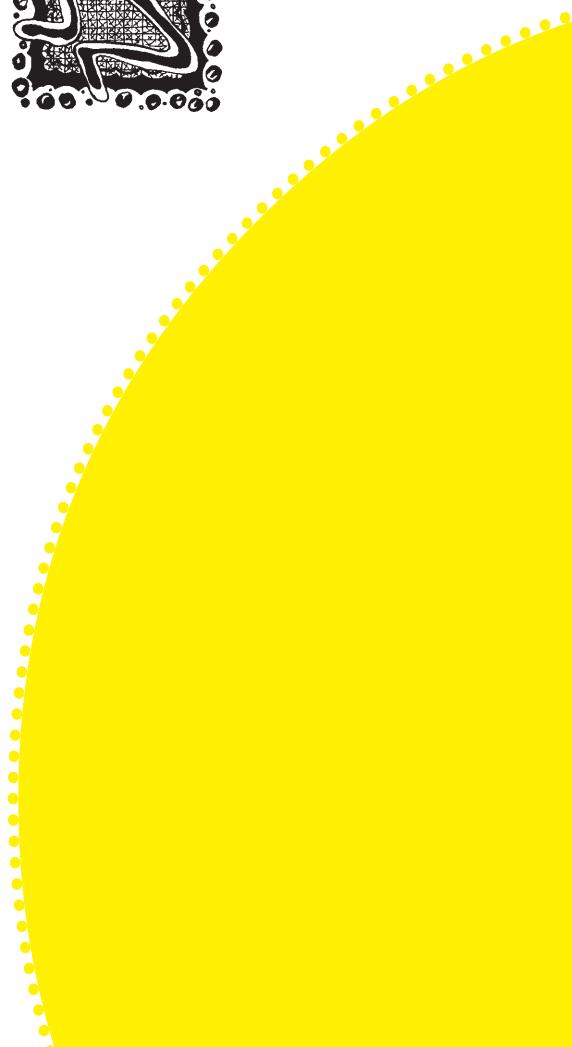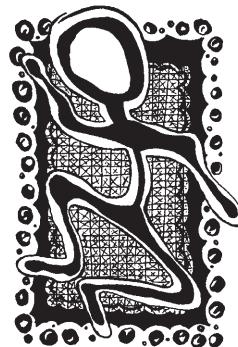
- [School counsellor in Sweden] My student clients and I find our spontaneous experience with mapping is that it is a very powerful tool. It becomes much more natural to talk with students about the context they are living in when I take this perspective.
- [School counsellor in Sweden] In many cases the mapping had made it clear to both of us what we are talking about. Personally, I feel that this gives me permission to also add a little more of a "philosophical touch" to our sessions.
- [Canadian counsellor] After studying and reading about constructivist counselling I felt like I had been a "closet" constructivist for a long time, perhaps without really knowing it. This has inspired me and I think I can counsel at-risk youth effectively after all.
- [Canadian counsellor] It took me a while, but after I began to realize that the client and I are working together in a joint construction way I felt a great freedom and inspiration. I never got this feeling in my years of studying counselling at the University graduate program.
- [Swedish counsellor] I see my role as more reflective and more cooperative than before. I really find the mapping inspirational—and jointly constructing the personal activity projects.

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SocioDynamic COUNSELLING
A CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVE

This book belongs to:

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