DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 439 345 CG 029 916

AUTHOR Soong, Cecilia
TITLE Worldview and Counseling: Perceptions of Singaporean Students.
PUB DATE 1997-05-00
NOTE 6p.; In: Caring in an Age of Technology. Proceedings of the International Conference on Counseling in the 21st Century (6th, Beijing, China, May 29-30, 1997); see CG 029 879.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Counseling; Counseling Theories; Foreign Countries; High School Students; High Schools; Social Cognition; *Student Attitudes; *World Views
IDENTIFIERS Singapore

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the worldviews of Singapore students, comprised of Chinese, Malays, and Indians, and explores students' perceptions of and preference for counseling approaches. A modified version of Ibrahim and Kahn's Scale to Assess World Views (1994) was used to assess 970 Secondary Four students' worldviews with the independent variables being gender, age, ethnic group, religion, course of study, academic stream, home language, and socio-economic status. It states that people's worldview influences the kind of counseling they seek. This was evident from the quantitative data that determined that most students' worldview was optimistic and they preferred a relational approach to counseling. The client-centered approach was preferred, with its emphasis on trust-building, respect, and relationship development. Task orientation is reflective of the pessimistic worldview and was found to be the secondary worldview of students. Students with this worldview preferred a more structured approach to counseling such as the cognitive approach. (JDM)

# Worldview and Counselling: Perceptions of Singaporean Students

Cecilia Soong
Lecturer, National Institute of Education, Singapore

## Introduction

In the light of the multiethnic and multicultural diversity of Singapore, this paper first examines the worldviews of students, comprising Chinese, Malays and Indians. Secondly, as the theoretical assumptions and philosophical underpinnings of mainstream western counselling approaches are based on western values, the students' perceptions of and preference for such counselling approaches are explored in the local Asian context.

## Worldviews of students

Nine hundred and seventy Secondary Four students were surveyed. A modified version of Ibrahim and Kahn's revised *Scale to Assess World Views* (1994) was used to assess students' worldviews with the independent variables being gender, age, ethnic group, religion, course of study, academic stream, home language and socio-economic status. Of the four worldviews delineated by Ibrahim and Kahn, the primary worldview of the students was found to be the Optimistic worldview, characterised by human nature seen as basically good, harmony with nature with a possibility of power over nature in people-nature relations, and an emphasis on the inner and outer development of the person for the activity dimension.

The students' secondary worldview was found to be the Pessimistic worldview, characterised by human nature seen as basically bad, although there is possibility of a combination of good and bad. Human relationships are collateral-mutual, although there may be a tendency towards an individualistic slant. In people-nature relations, the belief is in the power of nature. For the Pessimistic worldview, the being dimension overrides, although doing is also emphasised.

### *Profile of students holding the Optimistic worldview*

For those students who held the Optimistic worldview, the variables that showed significant differences in their scores were religion, home language and socio-economic status. Students who were Muslims, those from Malay-speaking and low socio-economic status families had higher mean scores than the other groups.

Li (1989), alluding to the activity orientation, states that Malays show a laid-back attitude towards religion which they see as promising their future without the need to make an effort. Reflecting a being-in-becoming orientation, Malays are thus more satisfied in seeking happiness and developing the inner self through religion. In addition, other-worldliness and resistance to change characterise the cultural tradition of Malays (Maaruf, 1992). This is a reflection of the being-in-becoming activity orientation of the Optimistic worldview.

Anderson (1990) profiles the Malay Singaporeans' worldview as good (human nature) and harmony with nature (people-nature relations) which are features of the Optimistic worldview.

### *Profile of students holding the Pessimistic worldview*

As for the Pessimistic worldview, among those who held this worldview, higher mean scores that showed significant differences were found for males, those from the Express+ course and the Technical stream.

In Singapore, after children complete their primary education, they enter a secondary school, and are streamed to a Special, Express or Normal course. The Special course offered in schools known as Special Assistance Plan schools (which forms part of the Express+ course in this study), allows students to take both languages, English and a mother tongue at first language level. The other group of students that make up the Express+ course are from the independent schools which offer the Gifted Education Programme.

Express course students complete their General Certificate of Education, Ordinary (GCE 'O') Level in four years, while Normal course students have a fifth year to attain theirs. At the fourth year of the Normal course, students are awarded the General Certificate of Education, Normal (GCE 'N') Level. The academic streams in this study refer to disciplines like Arts, Commerce, Science and Technical.

A main characteristic of the Pessimistic worldview is to focus on the task or problem, and not too much on relationship issues. Males have been shown to be more objective, task-oriented and cognitively-inclined than their female counterparts.

According to information gathered from the in-depth interviews with teachers who take on the role of para-counsellors in schools, Express+ course students, being higher-ability students, are 'able to see the whole situation and know the consequences of their behaviour. As such, they know the changes they have to make, thus rendering counselling to be a strictly "business" arrangement'.

Likewise, Technical stream students, by virtue of the nature of their training in technical work, are more likely to focus on hands-on experiences, thus reflecting a task-oriented preference, a characteristic of the Pessimistic worldview.

Preference for counselling approaches

As for the students' perceptions of counselling approaches, they preferred the cognitive and client-centred approaches to counselling, with significant differences found for the variables course of study, academic stream, religion and home language.

*Course of study*

Express and Express+ course students were found to prefer the cognitive and client-centred approaches respectively, and Normal stream students the behavioural approach. A consideration in the preference for a cognitive approach, according to Mabey and Sorenson (1995) is time, which renders a structured, problem-focused way of working more amenable. This is particularly so in the case of Singapore society which is excellence-driven and examination-oriented, where time is a precious commodity. For students here, time is absolutely devoted to academic pursuits.

Moreover, being students, they want to think for themselves. This is especially so among the Express students because of their ability. They are logical, good at expressing themselves, and the teacher who is the counsellor does not have to probe. According to a teacher who counsels her students, 'It is much easier to counsel Express course students; the teacher explains and the student is able to see the whole picture. They know what they are doing is not acceptable, and if they persist in this misbehaviour, they know the consequences. They see the picture, accept it and make the required changes.'

Social workers, who represent the group of professional counsellors, said during the qualitative interviews that Express course students were more vocal about how they felt

about certain things. They also tended to be more thinking, more analytical, and even more critical of what the counsellor had to offer. Such Express course students are not only able to put together their opinions, but also to initiate and elicit comments from others in the counselling session. Thus, according to this social worker, a cognitive approach is more palatable for this group of students.

According to a teacher, the focus in counselling is always on the clients for them to direct their own behaviour. Especially for students in the Special (Express+) course who have capabilities but not given the chance to show their talents, they like to be given responsibilities. 'If I let the student take responsibility and make his own decision, it works better,' commented a teacher. In the experience of another teacher, better students in the Special (Express+) course are said to be 'switched off'; 'they won't listen to you as they have already made up their minds; they think they know what to do and they know what's best for them; they think they can handle because they have better academic results'.

Another teacher counselling Special (Express+) students delineates the same kinds of problems this group of students present: self-concept, academic achievement and family expectations. Such students expect their teachers who are counselling them to listen to them, especially their feelings about coping with academic pressures from parents who hold great expectations for them to excel academically. In such a context, Express+ course students would want their teacher who is counselling them to understand their predicament after having listened to their woes, a definite call for the client-centred approach.

A preference for the client-centred approach can be explained by the adolescents' need for relationships. Mabey and Sorenson (1995) explain the person-centred approach in their book *Counselling for Young People* that 'empathy requires counsellors to attempt to see the world through the client's eyes, to temporarily suspend their own perception ... as young people frequently describe their interactions with adults such as their parents and their teachers as difficult and problematic'. The counsellor is confronted with the question when working with adolescents, 'Is the counsellor willing and able to be alongside the young person as they explore the confusion, the rebellion and the failure?'

Unconditional positive regard - the intrinsic valuing of the counsellee without imposing conditions of worth - is also of particular significance when working with young adolescents as their sense of self-worth is often low. Young people also seek counsellors who are genuine and authentic, who respond as one human being to another; they want a relationship where there is equality and trust. In the context of such a therapeutic relationship where there is a sense of safety and security provided by the counsellor, the adolescent will be able to trust the counsellor, and expose his sensitive feelings and thoughts which is usually a difficult thing to do (Leve, 1995).

From the qualitative data culled from the in-depth interviews with the counsellors, there was a pervasive sense that the key to working with Singaporean adolescents was to build a trusting and accepting relationship which epitomises client-centred counselling. These sentiments are voiced by a social worker who enjoys working with youth, 'One basis of making counselling work is that you must have established a relationship; otherwise, you really can't have anything to fall back on. This is

particularly so when working with adolescents as they are in this particular stage in their life where they are more anti-authority and where they rely a lot on peer influence. They are basically struggling with a lot of, "I've a right to decide for myself ... you can't tell me what to do ...." Yet, when they say that, they do not know what to do for themselves, and when the counsellor does tell them, they get very indignant.'

As they are experiencing a lot of struggles in this period of their life, if the counsellor comes from a 'let me advise you; let me tell you' stance, a lot of problems will arise. Teenagers do not want counsellors to come from that professional, authority angle. 'They can't accept that initially; only when you have that kind of relationship with them that they can take it - that's the tricky part,' concluded the counsellor.

According to counsellors, Normal course students are lacking in both language ability and intellectual capacity to engage fruitfully in counselling encounters using the client-centred and cognitive styles. Hence, they would be more comfortable with a directive approach, akin to behavioural methods where they do things rather than talk about their feelings or think over their situations. Moreover, as most problems presented by Normal course students are behavioural in nature, for instance, truancy, smoking and vandalism, behavioural approaches are found to be more befitting and appropriate.

*Academic stream*

Results from the quantitative data showed that, in terms of academic stream, Science students scored the highest mean in their preference for a cognitive approach. This is also evident from the teachers' and social workers' comments during the interviews about Science students who demand factual information, who are more analytical, logical, objective, who want a framework, and who want things to be right or wrong.

On the other hand, students from the Arts stream preferred a behavioural approach. The teachers' and social workers' explanations are that Arts stream students in Singapore are typically students who are ranked lowest academically, predictably in the Normal course. Hence, their problems approximate those of the students in the Normal course, thus justifying Arts' students' preference for a behavioural approach to counselling.

*Religion*

Students with a Christian faith scored the highest mean for a preference for a cognitive approach. This can be explained by the many references in the Bible that bespeak the role of the mind in Christian living. Some of these are Isaiah 43:18, 'Remember not the former things, neither consider the things of old.' Romans 12:2 says, 'Be not transformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind ....' In Philippians 4:8, Christians are charged, 'Whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think of these things.'

Hindus scored the highest mean for the preference for a client-centred approach, whilst Muslims are more inclined to a behavioural approach. Plausible explanations that Hindus have an inclination towards a client-centred approach can be traced to Hindu beliefs, particularly the moral values that believers should uphold., like telling the truth, being responsible and showing respect. In addition, Hindus are taught the

importance of self-realisation, an essential Client-Centred Counselling goal. Besides, Hindus also strive towards self-preservation, self-development, other existential-humanistic goals in Client-Centred Counselling.

Muslims preferred a behavioural approach partially because Koranic teachings prescribe the importance of 'doing something good'. Moreover, a preaching stance akin to 'Do this, don't do that', couched in a set of social prescriptives is rampant, reflective of a directive and behavioural approach. In actuality, the definition of counselling according to the Koran is that of advice-giving.

*Home language*

From the quantitative data, students from English-speaking homes indicated a penchant for a cognitive approach, scoring the highest mean, whilst those from Indian-speaking families preferred a behavioural approach. Possible explanations are that 'counselling is a very verbal thing, for instance the use of circular questioning and reframing in English, necessitating a high level of cognitive functioning,' according to a social worker. Such techniques are characteristic of the Milan approach to family therapy, where asking questions prompts changes in one's belief systems. Thus, to this social worker's mind, 'it works better with better-educated, English-educated and more cognitive families where people are more cognitive, reflective, and who would sit down and think'.

Students from Indian-speaking families showed a preference for the behavioural approach to counselling. In Indian families where the father as the head of the household wields an authoritarian reign over the family, especially the children, such Indian children are accustomed to a didactic and directive style. This could have been vicariously learnt, and it may cross over to the counselling context as well, thus explaining their preference for a behavioural approach.

## Conclusion

One's worldview influences the kind of counselling help one seeks. It was evident from the quantitative data that bearing in mind the primary worldview of Singaporean adolescent students was Optimistic, they preferred a relational approach. The client-centred approach to counselling, with its emphasis on trust-building, respect and the development of relationships, was found to be the other main approach of the students.

Mindful of ethnic influence and the fast pace of Singapore society, task orientation is also accrued significance, hence the students' preference for a structured approach like the cognitive approach to counselling. This task orientation is reflective of the Pessimistic worldview which was found to be the secondary worldview of the students.

## References


Anderson, J.D. (1990) Groupwork with families: a multicultural perspective. Social Work with Groups, 13(4), 85-101.

Leve, R.M. (1995) Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Li, T. (1989) Malays in Singapore: Culture, Economy and Ideology. Singapore: Oxford University Press.

Maaruf, S. (1992) Some theoretical problems concerning tradition and modernization among the Malays of Southeast Asia. In Yong, M.C. (ed) Asian Traditions and Modernization. Singapore: Times Academic Press.

Mabey, J. & Sorensen, B. (1995) Counselling for Young People. Buckingham: Open University Press.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

# REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

## I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

| | |
|---|---|
| Title: Sixth International Counseling Conference, Beijing, May 1997<br>Counseling in the 21st Century | |
| Author(s): William and Lois Evraiff (Compiled the Proceedings) | |
| Corporate Source: | Publication Date:<br>May 1997 |

## II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Level 1

[X]

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A

[ ]

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B

[ ]

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

*I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.*

Sign here, → please

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Signature: William Evraiff | Printed Name/Position/Title: William Evraiff, President | |
| Organization/Address: Northern California Graduate University<br>1710 S. Amphlett Blvd., #124, San Mateo, CA 94402 | Telephone: (650) 570-5261 | FAX: (650) 573-8118 |
| | E-Mail Address: admin@ncgu.edu | Date: 1/10/00 |

ACES

(over)