

1997 based
on ref list ✓

New Forms of Counselling for the 21st Century

by R. Vance Peavy

Social theorists such as Anthony Giddens(1991) and Mike Fetherstone(1993)point out that post-modern, post-industrial conditions are dramatically affecting how people lead their everyday lives. The emerging social life conditions such as “de-traditionalization”, ascendancy of mental labor, computerization and roboticization of workplaces and cultural inter-mixing require that career counsellors re-define their methods of counselling practice (Peavy, 1994).

On the assumption that modernist counselling methods are no longer sufficient to meet the needs of help-seekers in post-industrial society (Peavy, 1996), new forms of counselling are emerging to more adequately serve the postmodern person. Four new counselling forms are 1) narrative counselling (Monk, et al, 1997); 2) activity counselling (Vahamottonen, 1994); 3) transition therapy (Young, 1997); and 4) SocioDynamic counselling (Peavy, 1998).

While differing in some respects, these new counselling approaches share a common, “constructivist” base. Further, they are indebted to sociocultural ideas (for example, Vygotsky, 1968), and they are all designed for 21st century social life conditions. They incorporate certain features of modernist counselling models (such as empathic attunement) yet each has distinctive features.

In the rest of this article, I will briefly outline the main tenets of SocioDynamic Counselling¹, which is a Canadian counselling innovation developed by myself in cooperation with research associates. It is now being implemented through professional development courses in Denmark, Sweden, and Finland. Training in this counselling perspective has begun at Geprge Brown College in Canada. In addition to typical youth and adult client groups, it has been found to be useful with unemployed steelworkers, immigrants, at-risk youth, and First Nations people. SocioDynamic counselling practice includes both individual and group counselling formats.

SocioDynamic counselling is generally constructivist which means that the focus in the counselling session is on meaning-making, as well as on the activity of the client and interactivity between counsellor and client. This form of counselling is holistic-integrative, uses “cultural tools” instead of psychological techniques, and is can be defined as a “general method for life planning”.

The vocabulary of SocioDynamic Counselling is concerned with possibility instead of pathology; with capacity instead of deficiency. It is concerned increasing the social participation of helpseekers rather than with compliance to expert counselling advice. I will now explain some of the central concepts in SocioDynamic Counselling.

¹ *SocioDynamic Counselling is a Canadian Trademark registered in the name of Dr. R. Vance Peavy. . To quote from SocioDynamic documents or to use documents for reasons other than teaching or publication, secure permission from Trademark holder.*

Life-space. The life-space of an individual is a metaphorical or imaginary context within which the person thinks, feels, and acts. It contains all of the meaningful memories, observations, experiences, assumptions, beliefs, values, and perceptions that are relevant to the person at any given moment. The concept of life-space partially replaces the concept of self. Life-space helps the counsellor and client to pay attention to patterns, coordination of life activities, relationships, and reciprocal influences. It is more of a social and linguistic concept than a psychological concept.

The SocioDynamic perspective assumes that each individual's life space has five interconnected sectors: 1) learning/work, 2) health and embodiment, 3) relationships, 4) creativity, rest, and re-revitalization, and 5) spirituality. A holistic counselling approach is used. The focus may be on a particular sector or some aspect of a sector at any given time, but the other sectors are never overlooked and are always back-ground for the specific focus of the counselling conversation.

Since the very idea of "career" is becoming irrelevant in cyber society, the concepts of intermittent, life-long learning, worklife skill transformations and appropriation, life-space planning, and resource networking replace many modernist career counselling concepts. To the extent there is anything resembling "career development" in postmodern, postindustrial society it is definitely a zig-zag, non-linear process. Counsellors should discard concepts

that are no longer viable in social life – even when the concepts are built-in to the professionalized institution of counselling.

Life space Mapping. Mapping is a core counselling activity and can be done individually or in groups. Theoretically, virtually anything – problem, relationship, family, future, and life space – can be mapped. The values of mapping are many and profound:

- A product(the map) is produced during the counselling session
- Mapping is a cooperative, participatory activity which engages and activates both counsellor and client
- Mapping is a visual method of identifying influences and patterns in the person's life
- Mapping both clarifies the present existential situation of the person and at the same time identifies points of ambiguity
- Mapping is a planning and future-projecting tool
- Mapping reduces fragmentation and supports holistic, synthetic understandings

Dialogical communication and voice. The preferred mode of communication in SocioDynamic counselling is Bahktinian-type dialogue that does not require symmetry and which recognizes the multi-voicedness of human experience and self. Dialogicality promotes participation, reciprocity, respect for

unicity, and acknowledgement of diversity and multiple realities. SocioDynamic Counselling does not assume expertness of advice on the part of the counsellor. In fact, both client and counsellor are viewed as experts – a team of experts. The counsellor is an expert on the dialogical-analytic framework for examining life space, and the client is expert on his or her own life. Working together, the two expert allies seek to resolve troubles, make choices, and plan activities to improve the existential status of the help-seeker.

Human face. This feature is an implementation of Levinas’s splendid philosophy of the self-for-the-other. It is in the primordial encounter with the face of the other that our moral responsibility appears. The counsellor who presents a human face has not succumbed to indifference, nor to bureaucratic anonymity, nor to trivial, fleeting attention. Instead, the counsellor who presents a human face is, in that very act, acknowledging an obligation and responsibility to the other as a moral being and as a sign of infinity. When one cares and helps the other, one helps all others. Perhaps the most important choice a counsellor ever makes is whether to voluntarily and fully open to the other, or not.

Meaningful action. From the SocioDynamic point of view there is a very important distinction to be made between “behavior” and “action”. Billiard balls and atoms “behave” but only an actor acts. The human person is an actor and this implies motive, purpose, and meaning. A further importance of action is the premise that we learn best by doing--by acting. Therefore SocioDynamic

counselling strives to engage people in meaningful activities or projects in the service of achieving goals and learning “how to do”.

Vocabulary of possibility. Most people who seek counselling have nothing to be cured of. Therefore counselling is not therapy. Rather it is a planning and capacity developing process. SocioDynamic counselling does not utilize vocabularies of pathology and deficiency of clinical psychology, psychiatry and psychotherapy. Instead it employs language which stimulates attention to potentiation, choice-making, advantages and disadvantages of various options and possibilities. The SocioDynamic conception of self is that it is composed of voices which taken up residence within the person. Instead of utilizing traits and behavior change, the SocioDynamic perspective attends to voices, meaning, and activities by means of which the individual appropriates tools for making sense in the social life of the culture in which the person is living. This makes for a concept of a self which is evolving, temporary, voiced, and more linguistic and social than psychological. Emotions are important in SocioDynamic counselling but in a way quite different from conventional counselling. Emotions are interpreted as the way in which the body and mind both know each other and communicate with each other. Emotionality is a way of knowing just as rationality is a way of knowing.

What does the SocioDynamic Counsellor do?

The SocioDynamic Counsellor presents the other with a human face. This is accomplished through dialogicality in communication and in action. The

counsellor believes that it is desirable to join the other in co-constructing new and better ways of thinking and doing in regard to the trouble the other is experiencing.

The counsellor guides the life-space examination process, while the other supplies the content of his or her life-space – or at least that portion of it which is relevant to the reasons for seeking counselling in the first place. The counsellor attempts to elicit stories/narratives from the other concerning the issues that the other brings to the counselling encounter. The stories are used both to understand and open up new doors for acting and new plans for cultural pathways, which will move the other in the direction, he or she wishes to go.

Together, the counsellor and other develop plans of meaningful action for the other to carry out in pursuit of his or her goals. In this work together, they use cultural tools: language – both spoken and/or written and mapped, cultural knowledge and artifacts, and culturally sensible insights, maxims, images, art, music, and role-play enactment. An assumption underlying SocioDynamic counselling is that supporting the client's successful participation in social life is the most fundamental achievement that counselling can make. "Social life" includes work, familial/relational, personal, health, re-creative, and spiritual activities.

SocioDynamic Counselling, just as the other new forms of counselling mentioned in the opening paragraph of this article, is evolving and "under construction". These new forms of counselling are revisionary attempts to place

strong and valuable intellectual resources in support of postmodern counselling and counsellors.

For the most part in postindustrial societies, the days of factory life, behavior modification, and reductionistic thinking are over. We need “new wine” and “new bottles” for postmodern consumers of counselling.

References

Fetherstone, M.(1995). *Undoing culture: Globalization, postmodernism, and identity*.

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers.

Giddens, A.(1991). *Modernity and self-identity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Monk, G., Winslade, J., Crocket, K., & Epston, D. (1997). *Narrative therapy in practice: The archeology of hope*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Publishers.

Peavy, R.V. (1994) Visions of the future: Worklife and counselling. *Ohjaus kaytanto-bulletin*. 3, 1994. Pp. 11-32.

Peavy, RV(1996). Counselling as a culture of healing. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*. 24, pp. 141-150.

Peavy, R.V.(1997). *SocioDynamic Counselling*. Victoria: Trafford Publishers.

Vahamottonen, T., Keskinen, P.A., & Parrila, R. (1994). A conceptual framework for developing an activity-based approach to career counselling. *International journal for the Advancement of Counselling*. 17, pp. 19-34.

Vygotsky, L. (1968). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press

Young, G. (1997). *Adult development, therapy, and culture: A modern synthesis*. NY: Plenum Press.

Biographical note. Dr. R. Vance Peavy is professor emeritus at the University of Victoria, and independent scholar residing at NorthStar Research and Innovation in Counselling, Victoria, B.C., Canada. Dr. Peavy has received national awards in both Canada and Sweden for his contributions to the profession of counselling in both countries. He has served as editor on four academic journals and has authored over 100 publications. He has been a practicing counsellor since 1955.