

1999 based on
ref list
✓

Peavy, R. V.
University of Victoria
Victoria, Canada

SELECTED SOCIODYNAMIC CONCEPTS AND FEATURES

SocioDynamic Counselling is a "spanning" perspective that appropriates concepts from various disciplines. It uses concepts from sociology, psychology, education, socio-cultural theory, economics and linguistics but is not dominated by any single discipline. It is rooted in the practices of *everyday life* and the meaningful life experience of people. It is constituted from cultural insights rather than psychological concepts and research "findings".

Everyday life is exceeding difficult to define. It is syncretic and functions from the logic of non-logics. The syncretizing impulse to harmonize contradictory elements of experience and to resist, excessive, non-humanizing technical rationality opens up extremely significant avenues of communication. This is important to counselling since all forms of counselling exist as frameworks for communication.

Two public personas providing images of syncretic everyday life are Madonna and Nelson Mandela. Madonna is at once feminist, musical icon, erotic, creative artist, female hero, intelligence and capability personified, and person of grace. She lives at the borderlines of various genres of being human and resists domination by various cultural specializations. She is simultaneously superficial and deep, wild and gentle. She is a being of many voices.

Nelson Mandela is revealed in his life as prisoner, grass-roots leader, sensual being, and undeniable voice of emancipation from colonizing, dominating cultural forces. Nelson Mandela is magnificent not because he represents some cultural specialization (religious leader, scientist, politico, economic achiever, or revolutionary guru), but because he has

arisen from and personifies existence in everyday life and is a voice representing resistance to oppression for everyone, everywhere. Both Madonna and Mandela are images for postmodern and 21st century life and for humans as *homo creator*.

Sociodynamic counselling is a postmodern, socio-cultural practice which takes human life to be relational and garden-like rather than individual and machine-like. Cultures are gardens, designs for living, and exist as networks of symbolic systems. Humans live in their cultural gardens, not as objects of specialization, but as beings tied together in relational networks of everyday practice and communication. More and more human life becomes symbolic life.

Further, SocioDynamic Counselling is designed around the observation that humans exist in multiple realities—there is no single one-right-way. We are continuously evolving and changing. Moreover, the contexts in which we live are themselves in varying states of change. It is crucial that counsellors perceive their work to be dynamic and to perceive that the lives and contexts of those whom they try to help are also dynamical. Postmodern daily life is closer to ambiguity than to certainty. In SocioDynamic Counselling counsellors learn to use ambiguity as a source of dynamical knowledge and as starting points for investigation in counselling.

Sociodynamic Counselling is generally constructivistic. This means:

1. Selves, relationships and societies are taken to be *socially constructed*,
2. Counselling itself is a co-constructed process and will vary according to the cultural contexts and the social locations of persons within those contexts,
3. Counsellors and those seeking help are participants in a semiotic network; hence meaning and its articulation and meaningful action are the focus of the counselling activity,
4. What counts as solutions or resolutions within counselling are interactional achievements. The counsellor is *bricoleur*; the counselling process *bricolage*..
5. SocioDynamic Counselling is *a general method for life planning*. A wholistic method, the focus is upon various sectors of daily life: work, relationship, spirituality, health, and recreation—depending upon the needs of help-seekers.

Postmodern people increasingly become zig-zag people. Relationships to work become more plastic, more interactive and certainly more symbolic. As digitalization and robotization spread to more and more sectors of economic production, working life becomes more mental. This produces an ever wider and more dangerous gap between those members of society who have the symbolic skills, or are able and willing to acquire them, for successful work in a knowledge society and those members who either do not have symbolic skills and are either unable or unwilling to acquire them.

When a person presents her- or himself to the counsellor for assistance, the "whole" person is there. While the specific concern of the person usually falls primarily into one of five life sectors: work/education; health; relationship/intimacy; spirituality; or creativity/renewal, any concern typically implicates some or all the other areas of the person's life space. So if one works as a counsellor in an employment service, it is to be expected that most persons requesting counselling service will have some form of worklife concern.

However, regardless of whether the person is facing unemployment, need for training, job adjustment, retirement, or whatever—the counsellor should never, for one moment, forget that a whole person is being encountered. If I have lost my job, then my health, my relationships, my work skill status, my personal renewal needs, and my spiritual life will also be implicated. I do not wish to face a counsellor who is insensitive to these interactive factors of my life and who remains focussed only on the narrow issue of my job-finding.

What does the SocioDynamic Counsellor Do?

The SocioDynamic counsellor uses *cultural* tools to assist help-seekers to construct resolutions or solutions. What are sociocultural tools? The Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky(1896-1934) used the concept of psychological tools as a cornerstone in his theorizing about human leaning and development. According to Vygotsky we come equipped with "natural tools" such as memory; imagination, attention, perception, thinking and emotionality. What Vygotsky termed "psychological tools" are those symbolic artifacts—symbols, metaphors, texts, graphs, maps, artwork, and the many

aspects of language— which individuals learn to use in order to implement their natural tools successfully.

In addition to natural and psychological tools, there are technical or physical tools such as a computer. A counselling meeting is a certain kind of learning situation and is sociocultural in nature.

When people come to the counselling session, we cannot say that they are completely independent beings. If that were the case, there would be no need for counselling in the first place. However, if counselling is a process of learning, and this process is successful, then the individual is more or less an independent agent in charge of his own learning and actions at the end of the counselling. Using cultural tools appropriated from the cultural context(s) in which they are embedded, counsellor and help-seeker decide, plan and construct solutions.

What Cultural Tools Are Used in SocioDynamic Counselling?

There are many cultural tools used in SocioDynamic Counselling. I will briefly discuss three:

- Life-space(a field of self-organizing meanings in which the person is always embedded)
- Mapping(the core counselling activity in SocioDynamic Counselling)
- Human face (a distinctly human way of being with others and a resistance of dehumanization)

Life space

A life space is field of meanings in which the person resides. It is at once a semantic space, a metaphorical space, and a self-organizing, relational space. It is semantic because it contains all meaningful experiences, knowledge, relationships, assumptions, and values held by the individual. It is metaphorical in that it is articulated by the use of language(speech and discursive writing) and through other cultural tools such as mapping, visualizing, artwork, music, poetics, reverie, and re-constructive role-play. It is self-organizing in that a person is constantly engaged in activities which he or she believes are sensible.

Life space is relational in that human existence itself is most fundamentally relational. Everyday living is a tension between being a self-responsible agent who independently chooses and being a being-in-relation who co-constructs and negotiates with others about what to do next.

Mapping: A core activity in SocioDynamic Counselling

Mapping is a cultural tool for planning, understanding, deciding, and communicating with others. Every person is potentially *homo cartigraphicus*. The cartographic experience is rooted in visual, kinesthetic, emotional and cognitive experience, and in memory and imagination as well. Mapping is a way of working from the inside-out and a way of finding and creating meaning and a place for ourselves in the particular context.

Children naturally draw maps and doodles. For children mapping is a way of interweaving emotional feeling and external forays into the world. Finding one's way in the world consists of looking at new possibilities, remembering where we have been, recognizing where we are now positioned and combining these various knowledges into a map which lays out a sensible path forward for the person to take in sociocultural life.. A life space map is an attempt to locate ourselves in a fluxing, ambiguous and uncertain world.

To make a map is to produce a document of a certain aspect of our life and can reveal the patterns of influence in which we are engaged.

As a cultural tool, the concept of map of quite a powerful. Mapping 1) clarifies and shows the coordination of life activities, 2) brings past, present and future into relation with one another, 3) is a context for analyzing and planning, 4) is an opportunity for articulating strengths, barriers, impulses, etc., 5) articulates patterns of influence; 6) allows for the construction of preferred futures, 7) uncovers implicit or tacit knowledge, and 8) links life activity, critical experience, and relational experience into a coherent pattern. Mapping helps inform a person existentially : Who I am, where I am, and what I am doing and what it is that I desire.

Human face. A distinctly "human" face is one which conveys respect, care and an ethical responsibility for "another". A "human face" is the face of a counsellor who listens deeply,

feels a responsibility toward the other as a distinct, unique human being, who practices dialogical communication, and who is guided by a patient, respectful attitude.

A human face is distinguished from "faceless" bureaucracy, from indifference, from a desire to control and dominate, and from the face of the objectively detached expert. SocioDynamic Counselling is a perspective which requires counsellors to remain open to the subjectivity of others and to develop, through continuous learning and reflection, an objectivity toward themselves. This is the basis for their being able to "face" others in a distinctly human way.

Study Resources for SocioDynamic Counselling

Peavy, R.V.(1997). A constructive framework for career counseling. In Sexton, T., & Griffin, B.(Eds.). *Constructivist Thinking in counseling practice, research, and training*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Peavy, R.V.(1998) *SocioDynamic Counselling*. Victoria, B.C.: Trafford Publishers at www.trafford.com

Peavy, R.V.(1998). *Konstruktivistisk Vejledning: Teorie og Metode*. Copenhagen: Radet for Uddannelses-og Erhversvejledning.

Peavy, R.V.(1999). *Konstruktivistisk Vagledning*. Stockholm: Trinom.

Peavy, R.V.(1999). *Sosiodynaaminen Ohjaus*. Helsinki: Psykologien Kustannus Oy.

Peavy, R.V.(1999) SocioDynamic Counselling and the Dawning of a Knowledge Society. Keynote address at the annual conference of the National Career Development Association, Portland, Oregon, June 30, 1999.

Peavy, R.V.(1999) A SocioDynamic Perspective for Counselling. Unpublished document, 20p.

Peavy, R.V.(in press) *Guidebook for Training Constructivist Counsellors*. Copenhagen: RUE.

Peavy, R.V. (1994). Constructivist counselling and therapy: A demonstration. Professional videotape of two constructivist counselling interviews demonstrating mapping. Continuing Studies in Education, University of Victoria, Victoria, Canada. Tel: + 250 721 7874