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Article 2: SocioDynamic Counselling: Blueprint for Helping Others
Navigate Post-Modern Conditions of Social Life

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The purpose of this brief paper is to introduce the reader to the theory and applications of *SocioDynamic Counselling*.

What is SocioDynamic Counselling?

SocioDynamic Counselling is a response to the post-modern conditions of living which more and more people find themselves in as the 21st century draws near. It is a clear alternative to conventional methods of counselling such as client-centred, cognitive-behavioral, and psychodynamic. Generally, it is a constructivist perspective for helping others. It is situated in the Human Science paradigm.

SocioDynamic counselling uses **vocabularies of proficiency** rather than vocabularies of deficiency. The assumptions that people are suffering from pathologies, disorders, deficits, neuroses, and deficiencies are not regarded as a suitable perspective for guiding the helping process.

SocioDynamic Counselling is based on an epistemology of participation and relation. What this means is that our knowledge is gained through participation with others and various features of our surrounding "worlds" We always learn, live, love and labor in the context of relationships. In other words, the human being is a **social being** living in a world of constructed and co-constructed relationships. Counselling itself is taken to be a **social practice** rather than an expert system based on psychology.

How is SocioDynamic Counselling defined?

SocioDynamic Counselling is defined as a **general method of life planning**. Main features include:

1. The counselling relationship is cooperative and co-constructed.
2. Clarification of the client's life space is a fundamental counselling activity
3. The principal tool which counsellors and clients use in clarifying and planning is mapping. "Mapping", "life-space", and "negotiatory conversation" are concepts that equip the *SocioDynamic Counsellor* to move beyond limitations of conventional counselling.
4. Personal and social realities are taken to be constructed and most construction is accomplished through the use of language. Therefore important language tools are metaphor, story, conversation, writing, mapping, and imagining future scenarios.
5. The emphasis is moved from behavior, positivistic thinking, deficits, and counsellor-as-expert to constructionist action, meaning-making, reflection, and creating future scenarios. This means that a principal goal of counselling is cooperate with the client in forming and initiating sensible personal projects(activities) which will enable the client to move in the direction which they wish to move in social life.
6. The emphasis is moved away from pathology, curing, therapy, and Utopian, romanticized goals(for example "self-fulfillment", "happiness" to a focus on achieving more empowered locations and more beneficial participation in social life. The *SocioDynamic* perspective focuses on meaning-making, planning, deciding, acting, voicing, and self-as-project.
7. The individual is regarded as a "whole" being and is not reduced to segments of his or her self in order to accomplish the aims of the institution. Generally each person is regarded as having four principal life areas where concerns may arise which call for counselling. These four areas are: health, work and learning, relationships and intimacy, and spirituality. These are interactive, configured systems of meaning which together comprise the self. For example, if an individual becomes unemployed, this trouble in the "work" sector of self will invariably interact with the person's other sectors of health, relationships, and, for

some, spirituality. *SocioDynamic Counselling* does not legitimate compartmentalized versions of counselling indicated by such comments as: "I am only a school counsellor and only deal with school problems"; "I am only a career counsellor and only deal with career problems"; "I am only a rehabilitation counsellor and only deal with rehabilitation".

8. From a *SocioDynamic* perspective, to exist is to exist in a moral space. Therefore the counsellor has a responsibility to be attentive to questions of spirituality and to questions of what is "morally good" in social life. It is very clear that individuals are struggling with confusions of identity and disintegration of both society and self. Counsellors have an obligation to assist individuals with the struggle for identity and for agency, and can do this mainly through dialogue and through implementing the "self-as-project" perspective with clients.
9. *SocioDynamic Counselling* is culture-centred. What this means is that the principal objective of counselling is to help members of a culture navigate or find cultural paths which make sense and which serve to sustain an identity and enable the cultural member to prosper – emotionally, spiritually, and materialistically. From this perspective, counselling is not guided by scientific hypotheses but by cultural hypotheses and what is usually referred to as local or common sense knowledge. This counselling perspective is particularly well-suited to counselling with immigrants, aboriginal people, and members of disenfranchised groups. It does not assume a majority culture position of superiority. Rather it assumes that cultures are designs for living, cultures vary and present many different and viable paths, and that, most of all, counsellors must let clients teach them about the cultural knowledge necessary for making cultural sense with clients who are members of cultures different from the counsellor. Much of conventional counsellor (and teacher and psychological) training makes cultural dopes out of practitioners. *SocioDynamic counselling* attempts to reverse this state of affairs.

Where has *SocioDynamic Counselling* come from?

The theoretical scaffolding of *SocioDynamic Counselling* is derived from intellectual sources different from those which have engendered

conventional counselling. Since the *SocioDynamic* perspective is rooted in observation and interpretation of on-going everyday cultural life experience and praxis, it is possible to describe this perspective as trans-theoretical. The *SocioDynamic* perspective is a spanning framework which draws forming ideas have come from various intellectual well-springs: pragmatic philosophy, social constructionism, symbolic interactionism, cultural and emancipatory psychology, social theory, and existential thinking. Six of the most important source books for *SocioDynamic Counselling* are:

- G.H. Mead(**Mind, Self and Society**, 1934) As a pragmatic thinker, George H. Mead made very important contributions to an understanding of the **nature of existence as social**.
- Peter Berger and Thomal Luckmann(**The Social Construction of Reality**, 1966). This book laid the foundation for understanding how selves and societies are **socially constructed**.
- Richard Rorty(**Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity**, 1989). This philosophical work clearly and convincingly points the way to seeing our times and our lives as contingent, creative, inventive, language-based and open to re-construction.
- Karl Jaspers(**Man in the Modern Age**, 1930). It was reading this book when I was on leave and staying in Greece in 1981 that I began to think about forming a new kind of counselling. One of his most compelling quotations for me is:

If the individual is to take a decisive grip upon the mechanism of his life, and establish a dependence on himself as an individual, all the while forming ties with others on a solid base of trust, then his philosophizing must first be a study of what is our present conception of human existence.

We are always something more than what we know of ourselves. We are not what we are simply once for all, but we are **processes**; we are endowed with pos-

sibilities though the freedom we possess to make of ourselves what we will **by the activities upon which we decide.**

- Anthony Giddens(**Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age**,1991) This is the best contemporary analysis of the relationships between individuals and social contexts which has been written so far.
- Donald Schon(**The Reflective Practitioner**, 1983) Describes how competent professional activity(for example, counselling) is less grounded on formulas, techniques and scientific knowledge gained through academic study and classrooms than it is on the art of observing, reflecting and relying on improvisation according to problem confronted. In this book Schon also discusses how university academics have become dominators who seem to require little justification for their dominator perspectives and who require that their students follow the model of technical rationality and instrumental reason in preference to virtually all other ways of knowing and doing.

What are some of the alternatives of the SocioDynamic Perspective?

Table 1 outlines some of the ways which SocioDynamic counselling offers alternatives which differ from mainstream counselling.

Table 1. SocioDynamic Alternatives

Objectionable Mainstream Counselling assumptions	SocioDynamic Alternatives
Knowledge is regarded as a collection of objective facts Scientific knowledge is regarded as the most useful knowing	Knowledge is viewed as constructed and infused with values of creators Cultural knowledge and wisdom regarded as the most useful knowing
The best way to gather knowledge of others is by testing and other objective, value-free means	The best way to gather knowledge is by listening and co-constructing and interpreting life stories

Table 1. cont'd.

Problems are defined in terms of individual shortcomings, deficits, and pathologies

The individual has something wrong which can be corrected by interventions, treatment and and expertise

Problems are defined holistically including psychological, sociological and cultural meaning. Problems lie outside of individuals and are socially constructed, for the most part [the problem is the problem, the person is not the problem]

The good life is based on individualism, efficiency, and accumulation of wealth and material resources. Most of the advantages go to the powerful members of the majority culture and members of professional and managerial classes.

The good life is based on reciprocal self-determination, whereby care is extended beyond self to include others — each is a part of the “web of life”. Self is a function of context relationships and social life.

Power is gained through professional training. Academic knowledge is deemed legitimate and superior. An expert stance on the part of the counsellor leads to minimal concerns for power distribution and promotes dominator control. The counsellor uses status, expertise, and “interventions” to maintain control over the clients and the counselling process.

Power is distributed. Both client and counsellor contribute to, and construct, knowledge, relationship and plans of action. Each has something of importance to contribute to the counselling process. The goal is to make the counselling process democratic, participatory, transparent, improvisational, open to new information, and reflective

The concept of self is construed as a set of variables which can be measured psychometrically, and which are established through a mix of genetic coding, conditioning, and learning. The self is thought to be relatively stable throughout the life-span

The term “self” refers to organized configurations of meaning which are located in the brain. Each system of meaning can be voiced. The self is evolving, changing, multi-voiced and expressed as stories and conversation — not as traits or variables.

Table 1. cont'd.

<p>The vocabulary of conventional counselling is professional, scientific, managerial, or in some instances utopian, and framed in terms of popular psychology and/or new age philosophizing. Much of the formal language of counselling is directed toward deficits and pathology. Counselling vocabulary frequently apes psychotherapy</p>	<p>The vocabulary of SocioDynamic counselling is the everyday language which people use in their daily life. It is based on the proficiencies of people. It includes metaphorical, poetical, cultural symbols, and moral reasoning.</p>
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<p>Conventional counselling is infused with the values of technical rationality. This presents the real and constant risk of technological devices supplanting human factors in counselling. Personal decision making is easily supplanted by technical and expert decision making. Unintended consequences of technological applications in counselling can offset any gains in efficiency, economy, and participation.</p>	<p>An underlying premise of the SocioDynamic perspective is that human life is a network of interconnectedness. A fluid flow of information which is open to all and not controlled by dominator groups is enormously beneficial to members of most cultural groups. Information technology can provide individuals with virtually instant information with which to supplement other ways of knowledge construction. The replacement and supplanting of human factors is resisted.</p>
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How Can I get more information about *SocioDynamic Counselling*?

SocioDynamic Counselling is largely the result of my last 15 years of study, research, and reflected-on-practice of counselling with a diversity of clients. I have a Canadian trademark of the term "SocioDynamic Counselling" since I wish to continue to direct the development of this new form of counselling and I wish to discourage superficial co-option of the SocioDynamic perspective by others who may have more of a commercial interest than I

do. At present [4-Jun-98] the best sources to learn more about this Canadian invention and how to get training and mentoring in it are:

TORONTO For information on the Constructivist(SocioDynamic) Career Counselling Certificate Program at George Brown College in Toronto, Ontario, contact: Pat Goyette email pgoyette@mailexcite.com

TORONTO For information on the Under Construction Project for at-risk youth sponsored by the Toronto Board of Education contact: Emil Boychuk email emilboyc@path.com.com

VICTORIA For information on constructivist career counselling courses via internet at Camosun College, contact: John Conklin www.camosun.bc.ca/~conklin/pages/vance/conhome.htm or email conklin@camosun.bc.ca

VICTORIA For information on SocioDynamic/constructivist counselling short training workshops, contact: Marie Hoskins email MHOSKINS@HSD.Uvic.CA or Vance Peavy email: drpv@pacificcoast.net

VANCOUVER For information on constructivist counselling, contact: Val Ward email vgward@compuserve.com

YUKON TERRITORY For information on the application of the SocioDynamic perspective to work re-integration counselling and to staff relations, contact: Jack McNeill email Jack.Mcneill@gov.yk.ca

DENMARK For information on constructivist counselling training in Denmark, contact: Bente Hojer, email bente.hoejer@get2net.dk or Helle Sorenson AOF Holstebro Fax: 45 97428382 or Inge Kjaer email: ILK@RUE.DK or Anmari Luundgaard email AL@RUE.DK

FINLAND For information on counsellor training using constructivist methods in Finland, contact: at the Ministry of Labor: Teija Felt email: Teija.Felt@pt2.tempo.mol.fi or Timo Vahamottonen email: Timo.Vahamottonen@pt4.tempo.mol.fi or Anita Keskinen email: Anita.Keskinen@pt2.tempo.mol.fi

SWEDEN For information on constructivist(SocioDynamic)counselling, contact Jaako Honkanen email jakhon@educ.umu.se or Edmund Edholm email Edmund.Edholm@educ.umu.se

ICELAND For information, contact: Marin B. Jonaskottir email marin@islandia.is

Publications by R. Vance Peavy

Peavy, R.V.(1997) *SocioDynamic Counselling*, Victoria: Trafford publishers. Contact: www.trafford.com email: sales@trafford.com Toll free tel: 1-888-232-444

Peavy, R.V.(1998) *Konstruktivistisk Vejledning: Teori og Metode*. Copenhagen: RUE email rue@rue.dk

Peavy, R.V.(1996) Professional Videotape: *Constructivist Counselling and Therapy: Two Interviews* Available from: Continuing Studies in Education, University of Victoria, Victoria B.C.

Peavy, R. V.(1998) Professional Videotape: *When Strangers Meet*. Contact: drpv@pacificcoast.net

Also of interest: J. Raskin. Contact by email: raskinj@matrix.newpaltz.edu This will put you in touch with a newsletter called **the Constructivist Chronicle** and you can go from there. For more information and consultation on constructivist counselling practice, research, theory, training, and mentoring generally, and *SocioDynamic Counselling* specifically, contact Dr. R.V. Peavy email drpv@pacificcoast.net or Tel: 250 384 0612 or Fax: 250 384 8304

TABLE OF PRACTICAL FEATURES OF SOCIODYNAMIC(CONSTRUCTIVIST)COUNSELLING

1. Works directly with the experiencing processes of clients, with minimal interference from abstract theory
2. Is based primarily on cultural hypotheses and local knowledge— does not elevate counsellor to expert role
3. Counselling relationships are democratically constructed— both client and counsellor have important contributions to make in constructing a working alliance and a dominator role is presumed for neither
4. The counselling discourse uses a vocabulary of proficiency— stressing client strengths, good experiences,
5. and constructive possibilities. Vocabularies of diagnostic categories, deficiency and pathology are rejected.
6. Recognizes the social nature of everyday life— people are developed through relationships, networks, and group membership. SocioDynamic counselling itself is defined as a social practice.
7. Uses “mapping”—this is a major development which allows client and counsellor to produce visual products which clarify, coordinate, unify, and organize the amorphous aspects of client life which are only “talked about” in conventional counselling.
8. A non-linear, mindful method of problem-solving is used which approximates how good decisions are made in everyday life.
9. Is culture-centred, thus perceiving many cultural paths rather than subscribing to the “right ways” of a dominant culture. This makes SocioDynamic Counselling a valuable method for use with marginalized or minority group members: First Nations, immigrants, refugees, at-risk youth, are examples where this form of counselling has been successfully carried out.
10. Spans various disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, social theory and economics. The core of this approach is local, cultural knowledge; however other sources of ideas and knowledge can also contribute but not dominate. The SocioDynamic perspective has a distinct ontological status as an entity unto itself. However, as a constructed process, an openness to other source of data is maintained.
11. People are seen as moral beings. A counsellor has a responsibility to be informed and open to moral, spiritual, and ethical discussions with clients as the client so desires.
11. To both clients and counsellors, SocioDynamic Counselling seems both immediately sensible and inspiring. In part this is due to the fact that it is wary of using abstract ideas or interventions, but remains close to everyday experience and uses language which is culturally sensible to the client. The inspiration aspect seems to arise from: the democratic, cooperative method of relating and communicating; the fact that the counselling process produces “products” and “sensible activities” and is not confined to “just talking”. It is a process that also emphasizes mutual respect. Finally, due to the assumption of multiple realities, there is more room for people who are different and who reside in different cultural niches.