

Internationalisation of Counseling Psychology: Constructing Cross-National Consensus and Collaboration

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Les analyses SWOT présentées par les auteurs dans cette édition spéciale *Perspectives internationales sur la psychologie du counseling* proposent de nombreux éléments en faveur de l'élaboration d'un plan stratégique destiné à la division «Psychologie du Counseling» de l'Association Internationale de Psychologie Appliquée. Condenser les multiples possibilités en un nombre limité de thèmes fédérateurs relève d'une avancée réaliste et significative dans la conception d'un plan stratégique pour la division 16. Les rubriques de ce plan pourraient être les suivantes: a) définir la psychologie du counseling d'un point de vue international, b) cristalliser une identité professionnelle supranationale c) encourager l'avènement de modèles, méthodes et connaissances propres à un pays et d) stimuler la collaboration internationale.

The SWOT analyses presented by the authors in this special issue on International Perspectives on Counseling Psychology propose numerous possibilities for building a strategic plan for the new Counseling Psychology Division (16) in the International Association of Applied Psychology. Reducing multiple possibilities to a few common themes may suggest a realistic and meaningful way forward in formulating a strategic plan for Division 16. Elements of this plan might include (a) defining counseling psychology from an international perspective, (b) crystallising a cross-national professional identity, (c) encouraging construction of indigenous models, methods, and materials, and (d) promoting international collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

To signal the formation of the Division of Counseling Psychology in the International Association of Applied Psychology as well as to foster its development, the authors in this special issue on International Perspectives on Counseling Psychology have described the current status of counseling psychology in their countries and suggested how the discipline might be

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advanced in the coming years. The authors, each leading proponents of counseling psychology in their own countries, have discussed the challenges faced by counseling psychologists and suggested possibilities for advancing the discipline. Their SWOT analyses propose numerous possibilities for building an action agenda for Division 16. However, there are more possibilities than can be pursued by a new Division with limited resources. Distilling multiple possibilities into a few common themes may suggest a realistic and meaningful way forward in building Division 16. Thus as I studied the articles, I strove to identify a few critical themes that could be converted into a set of objectives that might chart the Division's immediate future.

Of course, the selected themes and implicit objectives require wide discussion and modification before they can be reformulated into a strategic plan for the Division. At this point, I identify selected themes only to prompt discussion and debate within Division 16. Each counseling psychologist who reads the articles in this special issue will settle on their own list of themes. I seek only to initiate a dialogue among Division 16 members by highlighting four themes that could eventually become objectives in a strategic plan. The themes deal with (a) defining counseling psychology from an international perspective, (b) crystallising a cross-national professional identity, (c) encouraging construction of indigenous models, methods, and materials, and (d) promoting international collaboration.

DEFINING COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY FROM AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Division 16 can assume leadership in attempting to construct a definition of counseling psychology that spans countries and serves the international community. In some countries, counseling psychology seems already to be tightly defined and explicitly understood. For example, in Hong Kong "counseling psychology is understood as the application of psychological knowledge, psychotherapeutic skills and professional judgment to facilitate enhanced human functioning and quality of life" (Leung, Chan, & Leahy, this issue). In Canada, "counselling psychology is the fostering and improving of normal human functioning by helping people solve problems, make decisions, and cope with stresses of everyday life" (Young & Nicol, this issue). In other countries, counseling psychology is loosely defined and implicitly understood. For example, in South Africa counseling psychology is described as having a positive focus with an emphasis on health, well-being, and problem-solving (Watson & Fouche, this issue).

While the authors in this special issue present a range of definitions, with varying degree of explicitness, they all seem to share the root conception that counseling psychology concentrates on the daily life adjustment issues faced by reasonably well-adjusted people, particularly as they cope with

career transitions and personal development. Jennifer Nicol and Richard Young, the President of Division 16, extracted the essential meaning of this modern conception of counseling psychology by writing that ultimately counseling psychologists assist individuals to link their lives to the social context in which they live. Young's deduction raises awareness that the complexity of postmodern life has increased the salience of culture issues for counseling psychology. Making choices and adaptations is difficult enough for individuals who live in stable cultures and communities. They are required to adapt to predictable circumstances and travel well-worn paths. The adaptive difficulties increase for individuals who live in less stable cultures and communities. They must construct and manage a self in a medium of transforming life trajectories and emerging career pathways.

Division 16 might consider establishing a task force to define, from an international vista, what counseling psychology is. They could attempt to articulate a cross-national conception of counseling psychology that is consensual and convergent. The international view would consist of multiple perspectives on the same issues and ensure that the definition of counseling psychology used by IAAP has both depth of meaning and breadth of usefulness. A consensual and convergent definition would ease the emergence and foster the development of counseling psychology in countries where it is a fledgling discipline. Of course a full definition of anything requires also stating what it is not, which in this case raises the issue of professional identity.

CRYSTALLISE A CROSS-NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Part of the difficulty in crystallising a coherent professional identity for the discipline of counseling psychology across countries, and even within some countries, is stating what it is not. A majority of the panelists indicated that counseling psychologists present a diffuse identity because they engage in a wide range of activities with varied client groups across diverse life situations in different kinds of settings using a range of theories and techniques. This multiform activity presents both a strength and a weakness in crystallising a professional identity, especially within the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP). On the one hand, multiform activities increase the vitality and attractiveness of the discipline for its practitioners. On the other hand, multiform activities cause vagueness about what counseling psychologists share in common. Within counseling psychology, it is considered a strength to be a generalist, yet applied and professional psychologists in other sub-disciplines strive to be specialists. In a sense, counseling psychology's specialty is generality. As Division 16 moves forward within IAAP and around the globe, it needs to balance the roles of generalist and

specialist in promulgating a clear professional delineation that makes its work distinctly recognisable to clients and colleagues yet does not constrain the innovation and creativity for which it is known.

This role balancing represents a major challenge that is not easily met because the adjective “counseling” is used to denote the discipline of “counseling psychology”. Several authors in this special issue raised the concern that the use of “counseling” as an adjective has been and continues to be problematic in identity crystallisation. Actually, some counseling psychologists have thought the name a mistake, starting with the President of the Counseling Psychology Division (17) in the American Psychological Association when the Division first took that name (Scott, 1980, p. 35). In India, counseling is performed by many different disciplines. In Japan, counseling is viewed as a technique of Rogerian psychotherapy. Thus some colleagues in Japan are considering the use of “lifespan developmental psychology” rather than “counseling” to conceptualise and professionalise counseling psychology as a distinct discipline. One wonders if part of the success of the new profession of “life coaching” can be attributed to its name. In Hong Kong, counseling is viewed as an intervention strategy grounded in psychology yet shared by mental health and educational professionals. In France, some view counseling psychology as a peripheral approach to treating personal difficulties (Bernaud, Cohen-Scali, & Guichard, this issue). In short, many mental health specialists view counseling as a process used by clinical, organisation, and school psychologists, and by social workers. Turning what they view as a generic technique into an independent discipline is fraught with difficulties for Division 16.

Making the task of crystallising a coherent identity among members of Division 16, within IAAP, and across nations even more difficult is the general lack of a reasonably distinct evidence base. As noted by Young and Nicol (this issue), counseling psychology has often looked to other disciplines and specialties in search of a paradigm to guide its practice. They briefly recount the history of how counseling psychology adopted frameworks first from the psychology of individual differences, then from developmental psychology, later from social psychology, and now from multiculturalism and social justice. They encourage counseling psychologists in Division 16 to concentrate on the action between counselor and client in formulating and articulating its core paradigm. Following such a path would emphasise counseling psychologists’ unique contributions to counseling process research. Such an emphasis on *process* issues could be augmented by attention to *content* issues that have been unique to counseling psychology such as fostering human development through work and relationships.

Division 16 might consider establishing a task force to examine how counseling psychologists across the globe can explain who they are and how they differ from their more established counterparts such as social workers

and clinical psychologists. Such explanations need to be addressed, differentially, to both colleagues in the helping professions and to the public who may benefit from counseling psychology interventions. In many countries, the public has no idea how counseling psychology differs from clinical psychology. Willingness to consult a counseling psychologist is at issue, especially for individuals who do not know what counseling psychologists do.

Several authors in this special issue have suggested that a specific path toward cross-national identity crystallisation is to assist national psychological organisations produce accreditation guidelines and procedures as well as relevant and transparent professional standards. Such work could aid universities to initiate or enhance their programs.

ENCOURAGING INDIGENOUS MODELS, METHODS, AND MATERIALS

While in need of a consistent definition and a coherent professional identity, counseling psychology cannot be the same in every country. As Arulmani (this issue) indicated, counseling psychology must not be “tied to the apron strings of the West”, which would only serve to disconnect it from the social realities and specific needs in each country. It seems unlikely that empirical methods from North America can be easily adopted in cultures that have more intuitive and experiential practices. To flourish internationally, counseling psychology cannot be viewed primarily as a Western specialty rooted in logical positivism. To advance counseling psychology around the globe, Division 16 must formulate and implement strategies that facilitate development of indigenous psychological theory and research that are grounded in the specific cultural context where they are practiced. This work might begin by building an international data base that describes models and methods that have been used successfully in particular contexts and specific circumstances.

Along with encouraging the construction of indigenous models, methods, and materials, Division 16 should support the expansion outside the West of training opportunities for new professionals. Many of the leaders of counseling psychology in the countries included in this special issue have been trained in the Euro-American tradition. If not actually trained in the West, their research and practice have been strongly influenced by the literature from these regions. The production of indigenous theories and techniques must be accompanied by arranging opportunities for professionals to be trained in their use by the experts who constructed them.

PROMOTE INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

Needless to say, indigenous development does not mean isolation. Globalisation of the economy and continued internationalisation of counseling

psychology has led to increased contacts and exchanges among counseling psychologists worldwide. Promoting interaction among counseling psychologists around the globe is a core mission of IAAP and its Division 16. To accelerate this interaction among counseling psychologists, Division 16 could form a task force to advance the virtual community that is emerging. Using technology, a coordinating committee could prompt members of the Division to coalesce into developmental relationships that advance professional practice, share mutual interests, and promote collaborative research. The recent foray into the international dimensions of Counseling Psychology within the United States as described by Leong and Leach (this issue) may serve as one promising source of support for this movement towards increasing international collaboration.

Globalisation has presented new opportunities and challenges for counseling psychology. Rapid change is a phenomenon to which individuals, families, groups, institutions, and societies must adapt. Counseling psychologists exist in part because of their prior success in helping individuals and communities manage transitions. As Pryor and Bright (this issue) suggest, a great challenge for counseling psychologists in the coming decade is to assist individuals and communities “embrace and enjoy change as much as they continue to embrace stability and predictability”. Counseling psychology traces its roots to the first decade of the 20th century when the vocational guidance movement helped immigrants and migrants from farms to factories adapt to the modern industrial era. In the first decade of the 21st century, counseling psychologists can lead the way in helping world workers and the global community adapt to the postmodern information era. In this regard, it may be possible to organise international networks of practitioners and researchers to collaborate in addressing issues raised by the global economy and the restructuring of the world’s workforce along with the migration and change it continues to occasion.

Of course, there are other topics around which Division 16 could build virtual communities. Thus, the Division might consider actually forming a few select special interest groups that concentrate on a particular topic of wide concern and thus actively promote the continued internationalisation of counseling psychology. These virtual communities could concentrate on issues of social justice, multicultural counseling, migration, and career in different contexts.

CONCLUSION

By describing counseling psychology in their own countries and how Division 16 might be useful, the authors in this special issue on International Perspectives on Counseling Psychology have explicitly prepared the ground on which to build Division 16 and implicitly offered a preliminary blueprint

for its architecture. Their ideas should now prompt discussion and dialogue among Division 16 members with the goal of formulating a strategic plan for how Division 16 will contribute to the international advancement of counseling psychology. Based on their insights and inspiration, the strategic plan may include efforts to define counseling psychology from an international perspective, crystallise a cross-national professional identity, encourage construction of indigenous models, methods, and materials, and promote international collaboration.

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