

NATIONAL AND KAPODISTRIAN UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS
SCHOOL OF LETTERS

MSC PROGRAMME IN COUNSELLING AND CAREER GUIDANCE

LABORATORY OF EXPERIMENTAL PEDAGOGY

CENTERS FOR VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 1ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

ATHENS (23-25-1-04)

**PROMOTING NEW FORMS OF WORK ORGANIZATION AND OTHER
COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMPETITIVENESS AND
EMPLOYABILITY**

With the Support of the European Committee

ATHENS 2004

Editorial Committee:

Christina NOVA-KALTSOUNI,
Assoc. Prof. of the
University of Athens
Michalis KASSOTAKIS, Prof. of the
University of Athens

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ASHFORD Nicolas
 CHIOTAKIS Stelios
 De HERTOG Friso
 DEKKER Ronard
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 GAVROGLOU Stavros
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 TOUMBAS Lambros
 TSIPOURI Lena
 TSOMBANOGLOU Georgios
 VITSILAKI Chrysi

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MULTICULTURAL COUNSELLING SKILLS- Necessity for the future

**Mika LAUNIKARI, CIMO & Dr Sauli Puukari, University of Jyväskylä,
FINLAND**

I Immigration as a challenge from a guidance perspective

Introduction

According to the Treaty of Amsterdam (1 May 1999) the policy on asylum, free movement of persons, visa policy, rules governing the crossing of the external borders of the European Union, immigration policy and the rights of nationals of third countries have become a full Community responsibility. Within a period of five years (by 1 May 2004) after the entry of the Treaty of Amsterdam the European Council should take a number of measures in the political fields above to progressively establish the European Union as an area of freedom, security and justice for all nationals.

The mobility of people in Europe will additionally grow when ten new countries (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) will join the European Union on 1 May 2004. This expansion, the biggest in the history of the EU when it comes to the number of countries, will bring 75 million new citizens to the community. On Mayday 2004, the total population of the European Union will rise up to almost 380 million people. This enlargement will probably lead to a more active labour force mobility, especially from the new EU member states to the "old" EU countries where the standard of living and salaries are higher.

The increasing number of immigrants and refugees in modern European societies directly influence the daily work of guidance counsellors who deal with clients from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds in employment and education sectors. Guidance counsellors have a key position in facilitating the integration of the migrant groups into all dimensions of life in their new home country.

Especially important in this context is to help immigrants acquire sufficient command of the language spoken in the country and other vital skills through education and training supporting their future employability on the labour market. However, many guidance counsellors have not been equipped with the specific competencies to cope with the challenge of cultural and ethnic diversity at their work.

Immigrants in Finland

There are currently 104 000 immigrants (2002) in Finland. The biggest immigrant groups come from the neighbouring countries and are represented by the Russians (24 000), the Estonians (12 000) and the Swedes (8 000). The Finnish society, just like any other society in Europe, is confronted with the fact that the immigrant population is growing quite rapidly and as a consequence also the number of nationalities these immigrants represent is increasing. This reality creates a challenge to our social system: on one hand, it is a question of accepting and recognising that we live in a multicultural society, and on the other hand, the strategies to support the integration of the newcomers in education and training systems and in the labour market will have to be developed.

In 2002, the average unemployment rate among immigrants was as high as 29 % while it was around 10 % among Finns at the same time. The significance of skills and knowledge is emphasised at all sectors of the Finnish society in the beginning of 21st century. The goal of the Finnish education and training policy is to raise the level of education of all citizens - including immigrants and ethnic minorities residing permanently in Finland - because working life constantly presents new skills requirements for all employees. Maintenance of the welfare society requires participation of all citizens in work, education and training. Lifelong learning and lifelong guidance are in a key role answering to these requirements.

Guidance and counselling for immigrants

Employment sector

All immigrants permanently residing in Finland are entitled to the same services in employment offices as Finnish citizens. In the biggest employment offices there are international employment consultants who are specialised in serving migrants. They help migrants find jobs and with other issues important to them.

Integration of immigrants in Finland is supported in many ways. Within five months after immigration, a personal integration plan for up to three years will be drawn up for unemployed immigrants together with representatives from the local employment office and municipality. The main aim of such a plan is that immigrants will acquire sufficient command of Finnish/Swedish language and other necessary skills needed to become employed. The key idea of the integration plan is first to identify the skills of immigrants, and based on the results received, help them on to find a job or get vocational training. Achieving these goals is further helped by integration training provided for adult immigrants that can take the form of labour market training courses or independent training. Vocational and preparatory training for immigrants is also arranged. The use of interpretation services will be increased in order to help immigrants benefit better from the services available at employment offices (Launikari 2003).

Education sector

The leading principle in the education sector is to ensure that foreigners (*i.e. asylum-seekers, refugees, immigrants, returning Finnish emigrants, and other foreigners*) and Finns have equal opportunities for education and training, guidance services and social benefits for students.

Education allows people to make conscious decisions about their own lives. School-age foreigners who live in Finland are entitled to the same basic education as any native Finn. Adult foreigners should also have access to the education they need in working life, to further education and to training aimed at maintaining vocational skills. The aim is that degrees and qualifications from foreign educational institutions and studies abroad, and working experience in other countries, should be a recognised basis when foreigners are planning and continuing their education in Finland. One further aim is to achieve a functioning bi-lingualism, *i.e.* to ensure that foreigners learn Finnish or Swedish as well as maintain their own first language and culture.

Some educational institutions provide foreigners with preparatory training for initial vocational education to help them complete their vocational qualifications. The length of the training varies from six months to a year. The aim of the preparatory training is to improve the language and other necessary skills of foreigners before they embark on regular vocational education.

Recent initiatives and developments in Finland

The Finnish Government adopts a Development Plan for Education and University Research for a six-year period every four years. The current plan covers the time span of 2003-2008. The strategic objectives stated in the Development Plan concerning education, training, educational and vocational guidance and counselling of immigrants can be summarised as follows: the competence level of teaching and guidance staff in educational institutions in the area of multiculturalism has to be raised so that the educators and guidance counsellors can better deal with the needs of immigrant clients in their daily work. Additionally, more resources are to be allocated to offer Finnish and/or Swedish language training to immigrants to support their integration in the Finnish society.

The Finnish Ministry of Education has defined seven areas that are important to be further developed in 2004 in the framework of the national education policy. One of these areas is called *Multicultural school and cultural conflicts*. The starting point there is that teachers and guidance counsellors should have more information on and extended knowledge of multicultural teaching and guidance, international cooperation, and cultural conflict reconciliation in schools as well as in the wider society. For that purpose separate funding is being allocated to offer in-service training on the above issues to teachers and guidance practitioners in Finland in 2004. The outcome from this should be: the better the educators and guidance counsellors are trained in the area of cultural diversity, the better information, guidance and counselling they can provide

their immigrant clients with, e.g. about educational and vocational opportunities in Finland as well as abroad, and to encourage them to make independently successful choices concerning their career and life.

Based on a national initiative a publication *Best practices in the field of multicultural counselling in Europe* (working title) will be compiled in Finland in 2004. The idea is to invite some 10-12 experts from various European countries to share their experiences and knowhow of issues relating to multicultural counselling competencies. The publication will be produced in English so that it will be professionally useful for the European/international guidance community. An additional aspect is that the book will be structured so that it can be easily used for both initial and continuing training of guidance counsellors all over Europe.

The Permanent Secretaries of the following three Finnish ministries - the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health - will be addressed by Finnish guidance experts to present a proposal for setting up a cross-sectoral and multi-professional national task force to map out what are the current guidance and counselling services available to immigrants in Finland, how those services are structured and resourced, and how they could be developed further to better meet the needs of the immigrant groups. It is estimated that the work of the task force could commence during 2004 provided that the high policy level authorities approve the proposal.

As a concrete example of activities carried out to promote multiculturalism and multicultural counselling in Finland are the plans to strengthen the role of multicultural counselling in the new counsellor education programmes at the university of Jyväskylä. Multicultural counselling will be integrated into the programmes as an essential element for all counsellors. Furthermore, there are plans that multicultural counselling could also be an option for specialization studies for those counsellors who are working in multicultural institutions or for whom these studies are a special interest for some other reason.

Higher education guidance and counselling services are among those areas which need to be further developed in Finland. Currently there are about 7.000 international degree-oriented students and well above 6.000 international exchange students in Finnish universities and polytechnics (Kinnunen 2003). Therefore, multiculturalism is a growing challenge also in higher education institutions, and a special attention should be paid to developing multicultural counselling skills of guidance and counselling personnel working with international students (e.g. Lairio & Puukari 2003).

Developing multicultural counselling skills are not the only way to respond to the above challenges. A recent study showed that generally the international students in Finland were rather satisfied with the teaching and guidance services provided, but many of them found it difficult to get to know people and make friends in Finland. This is a clear indication that there is a need to develop a new type of campus culture which is more open to get the international students involved in social activities and relations outside

the formal studies. In addition, the study revealed that about half the respondents had experienced some form of unjust behaviour, such as social exclusion or even racism during their stay in Finland. Although part of these results can be attributed to the communication culture in Finland which is not often actively open to people from other culture, this is still a serious message which has to be addressed carefully. (Kinnunen 2003)

II Multicultural Counselling Skills through Training

Introduction

The researchers of multicultural counselling underline that besides general counselling skills, special multicultural skills are required of a counsellor. Experiences of counsellors concerning their multicultural competence are connected to the nature of the client's needs of counselling, the counsellor's possibilities of counselling, cultural distance of the counsellor and the client, client's gender and his or her earlier experiences (refugee, migrant).

All counsellors are ethnocentric to a certain extent: they believe that the values and world view of their own culture, people and race are better than those of the others. This affects significantly the way in which they interpret life experiences and set behaviour norms. To be able to help a client, a counsellor should broaden his or her world view and way of thinking. (Daniels & D'Andrea 1996.)

Many studies of multicultural counselling (e.g. Armour 1997, Hackney & Cormier 1996; Herring 1997; Locke 1986; Sue & Sue 1990) point out that it is necessary for the counsellor to recognize the culturally bound nature of a counselling process, the difference between the counsellor's and the client's cultural expectations and standards. The counsellor has to be prepared also for cultural differences during the counselling process and recognize the problems of different cultures.

The foundations of the new training

The important aspects above were the starting point for developing an in-service training course on multicultural counselling carried out in Finland in 2002. The training course was partially based on the ideas developed in the European *RAINBOW* project 1999-2001 (for more information see <http://rainbow.cimo.fi>). A team of Finnish experts in multicultural counselling designed the course in which altogether 33 school counsellors and immigrant teachers from different regions of Finland participated. For facilitating the teaching and learning process on the course the participants were divided into three small groups. Each of these groups had one teacher responsible for giving feedback on the distance learning tasks and supporting the members of the group in their activities both during the contact teaching periods and during the distant learning periods.

The course consisted of three two-day contact teaching periods and two distance learning periods. The first contact teaching period was held in March 2002, second in June 2002 and the last one in September 2002. During the first distance learning period a virtual learning space - developed during the original Rainbow project - was used.

Objectives of the training course

The objectives were to provide the participants with

- 1) basic ideas on intercultural communication and basic concepts related to multicultural guidance and counselling
- 2) applicable counselling approaches to be used with multicultural clients
- 3) understanding of ethical issues in multicultural counselling
- 4) updated knowledge on how guidance and counselling services of immigrants are organised in Finland and in other European countries

Key elements and content in the course

The most important element that was focussed on during the training was to increase/develop intercultural awareness among participants. A great deal of activities, training materials, some of the distance learning tasks and a number of discussions dealt with this specific issue from different perspectives.

One key dimension in the course was sharing thoughts and experiences among participants. This sharing was especially used while dealing with distance learning tasks between the contact teaching periods. Creating professional networks and personal relationships was emphasised, e.g. the last distance learning tasks were focussing on building local networks with immigrants and guidance practitioners in various institutions that offer services to immigrants. The participants found these tasks being of great help to their everyday work and also with regard to gaining more understanding of different cultures.

The main content themes were:

- Key concepts and processes in multicultural counselling
- Multicultural society and intercultural communication
- Multicultural guidance and counselling systems and good practices in selected European countries (Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Iceland, Norway)
- Cultural differences in counselling and culture-sensitive counselling in practice
- Multicultural counselling competences
- Ethics in multicultural guidance and counselling

Overview of the contact and distant learning periods

The overall working time for the students to complete the training was 120 hours during a six-month period (March-September 2002).

The first 2-day contact teaching period in March 2002 gave an overview of the main theoretical concepts and ideas related to multicultural society, intercultural communication and multicultural counselling.

The first distance learning period (April-May 2002) was based on tasks related to multicultural counselling competences and practices. Each course participant completed individually three tasks on the internet in the virtual learning space at the Rainbow www-service (<http://rainbow.cimo.fi/>). A discussion forum available there was also used, for instance, in sharing experiences on good books, films and other forms of art dealing with multiculturalism and cultural diversity.

The second 2-day contact teaching period in June 2002 was used as a follow-up session for processing the issues of the distance learning tasks further and to give the participants an opportunity to learn from international experts about good practices as well as guidance and counselling systems developed for immigrants in other European countries. In addition, three specific cultures - Kurdish, Islamic and Russian culture according to the participants' wishes - were presented in short workshop by immigrants who have lived in Finland for a number of years.

The second distance learning period (July-August 2002) was used for networking purposes: the course participants were expected to start setting up personal-professional networks in their own region with immigrants and immigrant organisations as well as with personnel of organisations offering guidance, counselling and advisory services to immigrants.

The third 2-day contact teaching period in September 2002 included group discussions where the networking experiences were shared among the participants. Lectures and other activities during this last contact teaching period summarised the topics presented during the course and raised questions dealing with the future challenges of the multicultural guidance and counselling.

Pedagogical approaches used during the course

Pedagogical approaches used during the course all had the same goal: a special emphasis was made to create an open and supportive atmosphere which encouraged all participants to share their ideas, present questions and constructive criticism. An important part of the pedagogy was to concentrate on selected key concepts, deal with them first in small groups and afterwards discuss the most relevant aspects with the whole group of 33 participants. These key aspects were also present in all the distance learning tasks.

The participants were given literature and material lists on multicultural counselling which they could use during and after the course. The distance learning tasks and discussion in the small groups were used for linking theory with practice. This theory-practice linking was supported also by giving the participants individual feedback on their distance learning tasks.

One group work method developed by Vance Peavy (see Peavy 1993, 1997) has proved to be an especially good method to be used at the beginning of an in-service training. The method is used for developing personal strengths, which in this case were focussed on multicultural counselling. Each participants in a small group comprising about 5-8 members

tells told a story about a guidance or counselling situation where he or she has been able to successfully be of help to a client from another culture. Meanwhile the other group members write notes on all kinds of strengths (knowledge, skills, empathy etc.) the story-teller has which enable him or her to be of help. The participants then share their observations, and at the end of each feedback round, give the story-teller their notes. The group leader supports the group and makes brief oral summaries to facilitate the group process. Genuine positive feedback with notes to be read again later on is a very powerful way of helping people to become more aware of their strengths in multicultural counselling and to encourage them to further develop their strengths.

Discussion

The in-service training course addressed both the *universal trend* and the *focussed trend* in multicultural counselling. The universal trend emphasises that every guidance session contains multicultural issues: all individuals belong to many cultures that have different values (see also Fukuyama 1990). *The focussed trend* emphasises the importance of culture-specific understanding and the special nature of certain cultural groups. According to this trend, a cultural group is defined mainly by race and ethnic background. People should be seen both as individuals and as members of a culturally different group (Sue et al. 1992) believe that the universal and focussed multicultural approaches are not necessary contradictory. Both offer views that can enrich our understanding of multicultural counselling.

Daniels and D'Andrea (1996) emphasise that the trainers of school counsellors have a crucial role in decreasing counsellors' ethnocentrism. They point out that a single-course approach is not an adequate way. In our experience, an in-service training course consisting of three contact teaching periods and two distance learning periods can already provide a good starting point for developing teachers' and counsellors' multicultural competence.

Locke (1990, 18) notes that in multicultural study counsellors' education the crucial point is to learn to work with people from different cultures rather than just to study cultures at a theoretical level (Locke 1990, 18). This idea was one of the main reasons for the last distance learning period focusing on networking which encouraged the participants in creating personal contacts with immigrants and experts working with immigrants. The experiences of these networking activities appeared to be very positive and rewarding for the participants. We do need theoretical introductions and reading books helps in reflecting our first-hand experiences, but without working with people the theory cannot be linked to everyday reality. It is for the people (ourselves and our clients) we are learning multicultural counselling competences!

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Contact info

Mr. Sauli Puukari
Ph.D., Senior Lecturer
University of Jyväskylä
CIMO
Department of Teacher Education
Counsellor Education Programme
P.O. Box 35
40014 University of Jyväskylä
FINLAND
Tel. + 358-14-260 1886
Fax. + 358-14-260 1741
Email: puukari@edu.jyu.fi

Mr. Mika Launikari
M.Sc.Econ., Senior Adviser
Centre for International Mobility
Euroguidance Finland
P.O.Box 343
00531 Helsinki
FINLAND
Tel. +358-9-77477744
Fax +358-9-77477064
Email mika.launikari@cimo.fi