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of eleven counsellors working in the Singapore
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Jin-Kuan Kok

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Dilemmas or no dilemmas: The role and
experience of eleven counsellors
working in the Singapore secondary
school system.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the
degree of Doctor of Education

School of Education
Durham University

27 FEB 2009

By
Jin-Kuan Kok
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Abstract

The role definition of school counsellors has always presented a variety of difficulties. This is especially true when changes occur because of local counselling movements or educational reforms which are closely linked to the contextualized socio-economic or political agenda. This is well documented in the literature.

This study is an attempt to make a critical enquiry into the ways in which school counsellors describe and experience their role working in the Singapore secondary school system. It is essentially exploratory and qualitative in nature. The aim of this study is to explore the internal landscape, their feelings and thoughts; their perceptions about their roles and work, and to examine the factors that contribute to their role descriptions and experience. The unique environmental factors that shaped and define their role and experience will be explored.

In-depth face to face interviews were carried out with the eleven participants involved in this study, two sessions for each participant. An adapted grounded theory methodology was used to guide the data collection and data analysis process.

The findings show that the role experienced by the 11 counsellors was less restricted to role-base and operates on a flexible role description regime. Most counsellors described their role as being defined by pupils' profiles, and by the counselling approach they used. These interviews revealed that role and job scope were ill defined, there was a mis-match of expectations held by the counsellors and within the overall educational climate, and some uncontrollable factors from the wider environment were found. The emergent over-arching theme of dilemmas was identified and factors that enable and inhibit the role of the counsellors as described by the participants were also highlighted.

As a result of this study, an ecosystemic approach is proposed.

Declarations

This thesis represents my work. No material contained in the thesis has previously been submitted for a higher degree in a university.

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List of abbreviation

| | |
|------|--|
| ACE | Affective and Career Education |
| ASCA | American School Counsellor Association |

| | |
|---------|--|
| BAC | British Association of Counsellor |
| BACP | British Association of Counsellor and Psychotherapy |
| ES | Express Stream |
| GP | Guidance Programme |
| MCYS | Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sport |
| MOE | Ministry of Education, Singapore |
| NCSS | National Council for Social Service |
| NS | Normal Stream |
| PCCG | Pastoral Care and Career Guidance |
| PSLE | Primary six leaving school examination. |
| SAC | Singapore Association for Counselling |
| STEP-UP | Social work to empower and utilize the potential of the pupils |

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Section 1 – Chapter 1, 2 and 3

This thesis is divided into three sections with a total of 8 chapters. Section 1 consists of the first three chapters: The introductory chapter (Chapter 1), the Literature Analysis (Chapter 2) and Methodology chapter (Chapter 3).

Chapter 1 – Introductory chapter

1.1 Introduction

This introductory chapter states the research topic, which is an exploratory study of the role and experience of counsellors in Singapore secondary schools. It explains the reasons for the topic chosen. It also explains the significance of the study. The research questions will be listed.

It starts by listing the aims of this study and discussing the background of the movement of school counselling. Aspects of the role change of the school counsellor are examined from a global level, and the unique contextual background of Singapore secondary schools is then discussed. This chapter also explains the history and contextualized development of the school counselling movement which initiated the debates about the role of school counsellors in the context of the US and UK

The topic of the role of the school counsellor has arisen frequently in the discussion and debate on the development of school counselling. Historically the role of school counsellors was equivalent to vocational guidance. As a result of the development and movement of school counselling in the educational system, the role of school counsellors has changed from a vocational focus to emphasise mental health, and later it moved to programmes and community focus (Bemak, 2000; Burnham, 2000; Gysber & Henderson, 2001). The roles of school counsellors have been broadened and other dimensions have been added.

School counselling roles are often difficult to define (Murray, 1995). Schmidt (1996) holds that the role ambiguity has existed since the early days of the guidance movement. Though school counsellors work in an educational setting, the school administration and

teachers, however, may have little idea of the role of the school counsellors. Also, counsellors may see themselves as ‘natural helpers’ and ‘respond to each and every type of request that comes their way’ (Johnson, 2000). Literature shows that the role of the school counsellors working in a school system is seen as an ancillary one and school counsellors have been suffering from role ambiguity (Brown, 1989), facing dilemmas (Baker, 2000), and identity crisis (Johnson, 2000), not being considered a central component of the school (Johnson, 2000).

1.1.1 Aims of the study

The purpose of this study is to offer a contribution to provide an illuminating understanding into the ways in which the counsellors working in the Singapore secondary school system describe and experience their role.

As a Chinese Literature Studies graduate of Malaysian Chinese origin, my world view and values initially were greatly influenced by traditional Chinese culture. In Chinese culture, to counsel in an educational system, really means giving advice and direction to modify behaviour to remedy and resolve problems. However, I was deeply impressed by my lecturers in the university who taught me counselling courses. They came from the United States the school of the humanity based counselling approach, who emphasized human growth and displayed a deep respect for human kind, including developing teenagers.

My first job attachment was counselling secondary school pupils in Taiwan. My approach was pretty much using listening skills and a person centred approach, as this approach was very popular in Taiwan in the nineteen eighties. My overall impression from working with teenagers was that their search for their own identity was of paramount importance to them. Teens are normally serious and sincere, they ask very important questions in life and they work hard to resolve those questions. But they were also very vulnerable, changeable, and easily fall prey to peer and environmental influences. This is probably due to the fact that they are still developing and uncertain of their own nature of this stage of

life. I enjoyed accompanying these young people in the process of self searching. Therefore many years later when I worked as a school counsellor in a secondary school in Singapore, I considered that talking and discussing their thinking and values, and trying to see the world from their perspectives to be a priority among many other responsibilities. Meanwhile, I also observed the job of a school counsellor in an American International school which my son attended, where it included conducting guidance curriculum and educational planning, such as helping pupils keep academic records and applying to college, beside the normal counselling job.

For my own education, I have been through different education systems in Malaysia, Taiwan and England. I have also accompanied my own two children going through different systems, and I realized that childrens' school experiences change with the underlying culture and educational environment of the country in which they are taught. Pupils from different countries have very different school experiences. They also face different challenges, so do the people working with them. My children's kinder-garden to year twelve education took place in various countries: American, Taiwan, England and Singapore. The most obvious change was when they came back from England after having stayed there for five years. Helping teenagers cope with changes, physical, social-emotional, cognitive etc was the key to working with them. Adolescence is a phase in life that has been traditionally considered the stress and storm period, during which all possible turbulence is possible. While I only had two, I wonder how the school counsellors cope when they have thousands of teens at the same time in a highly competitive learning school environment like Singapore. This prompted me to start this research to find out their role and experience.

The aims of this study are:

1. To obtain an in-depth account of Singapore school counsellors' perceptions, thoughts and feelings about their role.
2. To critically examine the factors that contribute to the way their role is constructed and experienced by them.
3. To identify key themes and issues arising from the interviews.
4. To build up a model of current school counselling in Singapore secondary schools.

5. If appropriate to recommend changes to the current school counselling model in Singapore.

In the following chapter, I will describe the local context of the Singapore secondary school system. I will outline the local Singapore education streaming system that gives rise to the pupils' profile and the socio-economic background in which the school counselling system is embedded.

1.2 Singapore education system

1.2.1 Socio-economical background of Singapore education system

After Singapore separated from Malaysia in 1965, Singapore embarked on a single-minded push for economic growth. The government focused on economic development in order to provide sustained welfare for its citizens at its initial stage of independence (Chan, 1976; Leung, 1988).

The ideology of survival remains pervasive and is repeatedly mentioned by politicians, even after more than 40 years of independence.

“As Singapore’s size is so small and its only resource is human capital” (Prime Minister Lee K. Y.’s speech in Yip, 1990; Prime Minister Lee S. L.’s speech, 2005)

This is a political statement quoted by many politicians during numerous public speeches. The Singapore government constantly reminds its people to stay ahead to sustain economic growth. This is a country where the initial survival needs are perceived as high and its people are constantly reminded of various threats of a social, political and economic consideration. Certain theoretical and ideological considerations are secondary compared to economic and political goals. In Yip and Sim’s (1990) words, “all of a piece, propelled by the logic of survival in a resource-scarce and stamp-size republic and a passion for ensuring that Singapore has a place in the community of nations.”

As far back as the year 1986, the Minister of Education announced that future policies in

Singapore would be guided by a few principles. First and foremost, “Education policy must keep pace with the economy and society”.

“Education is the key to the success of this new economic strategy. It is, in fact, the key to our national survival. We do not have any natural resource. We can only count on the skills and resourcefulness of our people” (Goh, 2001).

From this point of view, streaming and the continuous search for elites: the political elite, the bureaucratic elite and the professional elite (Chen, 1977) to govern the country is an important policy for Singapore and education is an important tool to achieve this goal. Through a rigorous and competitive education system, the government is energetically recruiting elites into governmental services to give direction and lead the country. It is believed that the elites know what is best for the country and they are in the best position to govern the country.

It is very clear that this pragmatic approach to the education system has been used as a tool for economical growth. The survival ideology has also been used by politicians as a strategy to motivate its people to work hard, to establish a strong foundation for the country and to be competitive in the global economy.

1.2.2 Meritocracy in the educational system

Education in Singapore adopted a streaming system of its own design to screen pupils at a young age. There were 4 streaming examinations in the past, one at the end of primary three, the Primary Six Leaving Examination (PSLE), the O Levels (N Level for those in the lower stream) after secondary school and finally the A Level after the pre-university stage.

Since its establishment in 1960, PSLE has been given to all 12 year old pupils. Pupils are then allocated different courses, namely, the Special, the Express or the Normal streams

(Yip and Sim, 1990). The Special course is offered to the top 10 percent of the PSLE cohort. The Express course, offered to the students who have done well in the PSLE, enables pupils to complete their secondary education in four years and together with the Special course pupils sit for GCE “O” level examination at the end of fourth year. The Normal stream pupils are divided into the Normal Academic and Normal Technical. The former would take the “N” level examination at the end of the fourth year and those who pass the “N” level examination would take GCE “O” level in the fifth year. The Normal Technical course pupils will be given courses focused on skill-based training such as office work typing, data keying or computer usage. After the O-level examination, the top 20 percent of the cohort who have done well and classified as academically inclined will be admitted to a two-year Junior college course and will sit for the A-level examination. They are the future economic and political leaders. Most of the remaining O-level successes will move on to polytechnics to take on courses with a technical or commercial focus to prepare them for work.

Streaming and emphasizing academic performance is very important in the Singapore educational system. It is believed education will train the elites and the elites will play the major roles in the development of the country.

“We must have qualities of leadership at the top and qualities of cohesion on the ground. This pyramidal structure of top leaders, good executives, well-disciplined civic-conscious broad mass can only be produced by our education” (Lee K Y, 1966 in Yip, 1990).

The above speech by the first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, the founding father of Singapore, spells out the mission of the Singapore education system during the initial stage of government and it is evident that the education system in Singapore is “backed up by a high degree of political will” (Tan et al , 1997: 4).

A high proportion of resources have been allocated to the better schools as the Ministry of Education has pronounced that, “Excellence in education can only be achieved through better schools”.

In this way the high ability pupils will not just be identified but “are fully developed, and given the incentive to achieve maximum production” (Moor, 2000).

Though there were some initiatives to bring about changes in 2004, the Government advocated integrated programmes or more flexible curriculums, and tried to give more autonomy to local schools; the primary three streaming was eliminated; the 3 others remain. However, most primary schools still continue to stream pupils to allocate them according to their ability. This has created some discrepancies between policy and implementation and many would question how much decentralization can/will the strong state allow? And how much autonomy people can/will exercise if all along the school culture has been focusing on academic achievement (Gopinathan & Tan, 2000)?

1.3 Counselling in Singapore secondary schools

The counselling system in Singapore secondary schools is also closely linked with the pastoral care system. A whole school approach and infusion approach has been adopted. School counsellors deal with pupils with education and career issues and at the same time take care of the effective and developmental issues of the pupils. Besides the above mentioned functions, the counselling service in the school system has always been working with pupils with behavioural issues.

1.3.1 Career guidance and counselling

Singapore is one of the countries that have made the strong link between education and the economy (Ashton and Sung, 2003). Therefore there is a strong link between career guidance and counselling in the school counselling system. Education is one of the systems that support economic growth, training workers to fill jobs. Therefore career guidance is one of the concerns that was identified during the survival stage of education development (Tan, 1991a, 1991b, 2002a, 2002b).

The Pastoral Care and Career Guidance (PCCG) department was established by the then Minister of Education (MOE) Tony Tan to focus on the planning and implementation of guidance programmes in schools (Ministry of Education, 1987). In 1993, all the secondary schools had PCCG in place to give guidance and counselling to pupils with regards to their career choices and make them aware of opportunities in the working world. This PCCG stage coincided with the era of “efficiency – driven education” (Ministry of Education, 1994). The purpose of the educational policy was to achieve educational goals with the optimal use of resources. It is another attempt to make the education system “more efficient”.

Before the introduction of PCCG, pupils who needed counselling were those who had problems with school work and those who had been repeatedly misbehaving. “Counselling services” was interpreted as the dispensation of advice (Khoo and Soong, 1992). After the establishment of PCCG, counselling began to adopt a more proactive and developmental approach (Ministry of Education, 1997).

The school system in Singapore requires the school counsellors to be involved in career related guidance activities. This includes planning, implementing, and evaluating the effectiveness of the programme activities (Ministry of Education, 1994, 1999). The duty of the Guidance Specialist and Guidance Officer trained by the Ministry of Education (MOE) is more programme based rather than dealing with problematic behaviour. The role is more prevention and education oriented.

The Affective and Career Education (ACE) programme evolved from the PCCG when the affective components were identified as essential needs for the pupils.

1.3.2 Affective and developmental components

The aim of the ACE programme is to develop “well balanced individuals who are able to

face challenges, manage changes, work productively, live compassionately and contribute to society” (Ministry of Education, 1997a, 1997b). ACE covers five key areas for developing life skill competencies: Personal Effectiveness, Interpersonal Effectiveness, Effective Learning, Transition to Work, and Fostering a Caring Community. The schools adopt a whole curriculum approach, where the affective education was infused into the normal curriculum. All secondary schools are encouraged to set aside one period of class, which is equivalent to at least 35 min, in some schools 50 min to one hour of curriculum time per week, for life skills development through a series of group guidance activities. Besides the infusion approach, some schools used an “addition” approach whereby a specialist teacher or counsellor would provide career guidance or counselling to pupils through planned group guidance sessions, career assessment activities, and face-to-face counselling outside curriculum time.

1.3.3 Counselling and disciplinary issues

Singapore schools have a multi-tier discipline system complemented by a pastoral care and guidance programme. The tiered system works as follows:

1. All teachers are at the front line to deal with the discipline issue in schools. They have been equipped with a 9 hour training course on counselling skills that comprises empathic listening and attending skills.
2. If the intervention is unsuccessful and the case requires specialised attention, referral is made by teachers to the Teacher-Counsellors, Part-Time School Counsellors, Full-Time School Counsellors or an external counsellor employed by the school.
3. External referral to Guidance Specialists from the MOE or other professional agencies such as the Child Guidance Clinic, when the pupils need intense intervention.

For recalcitrant pupils, schools will turn to external agencies like the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), the Juvenile Court, family service centres, religious organizations and self-help groups to help such pupils (Lim, 2004).

From the referral system, it is obvious that the teachers and the school based counsellor will be dealing with the pupils' problems or difficulties at the outset. The behavioural or disciplinary issue will be dealt by the disciplinary master or mistress before being identified as needing professional help for more intense psychological problems. Obviously, the school based counselling system is closely linked with the disciplinary system. School counsellors will work hand in hand with the disciplinary master/mistress on the cases.

Public caning in front of the school during assembly is common for serious offences and counselling is carried out after the punishment. MOE gives permission for the school principal and discipline master to administer corporal punishment when necessary. The definition of serious offence may vary. It may refer to vandalism, bullying, intimidation, theft, defiance or rudeness to teachers.

In secondary schools, disciplinary punishment will be carried out by the discipline master while counselling is provided by either the school counsellor or the teacher in charge of PCCG. It is stated clearly in the Handbook on School Discipline issued by the MOE that all disciplinary cases involving corporal punishment should be followed up with counselling (MOE, 1997). It is recommended that corporal punishment be followed by reflection on the part of the pupils, and the work of school counsellors is to help pupils be more responsible in their choice of behaviour. In older pupils, such as the post secondary pupils, counselling will be given before the administration of punishment so that the pupils will be prepared, and accept responsibly, the consequences of their behaviour.

1.3.3.1 The compatibility of discipline and counselling

Esther Tan (2002a), the Head of the Psychological Studies Academic Group, wrote about the compatibility of the two issues of discipline and counselling in education. She holds that the two concepts in a holistic manner. The three aspects of discipline, namely:

developmental, preventive and corrective aim at the ultimate goal of helping the pupils to be in self-control. If pupils are motivated to learn, know the ground rules and exercise self-control, there will be little need for discipline.

Esther Tan (2002a) cited Wolfgang's (1999) three phases of counselling approaches to support her view: the "Relationship – Listening Phase", the "Confronting – Contracting Phase", and the "Rules and Consequences Phase". The three phases mentioned above were instrumentally used to produce a behavioural change in the pupils. During the Relationship – Listening, an affective approach to counselling developed by Carl Rogers is used. Pupils will be allowed to "talk it out", with the purpose in mind of providing a non-judgemental acceptance, warmth and respect so that pupils will be able to use this therapeutic relationship to reflect and develop insights. During the "Confronting – Contracting Phase", pupils are granted the power to decide how they will change. Counsellors will give encouragement so that the pupils will be able to live up to a mutual agreement for behavioural change. The approach used is very similar to that of a Reality Therapy developed by William Glasser (1965, 1972, 1998). Glasser stressed personal responsibility for behaviour. During the "Rule and Consequences Phase", the counsellor will emphasize the consequences of breaking a rule. If a student breaks a rule, he has to bear the consequences.

Adrian Lim (2004) presented a paper about "An exploratory study of school social work and counselling practices in Singapore secondary schools". He also holds that discipline, counselling and punishment can be reconciled.

From the above description of the counselling approaches used in Singapore, the two seemingly incompatible concepts of "discipline and counselling" seem to be complimentary. Esther Tan (2002a) wrote, "both are motivated by care and concern for the well-being of the recipient, and both aim at bringing about behavioural change, problem-solving, personal growth and development. When properly implemented, both discipline and counselling can succeed in fostering in our students the values of respect,

self-discipline, social responsibility and moral integrity, the foundations for character building and affective education.

1.3.3.2 The challenge of integrating counselling and discipline

According to the definition given by BAC, counselling is a special kind of relationship and aims to facilitate personal growth. The personal and emotional aspects which counselling needs to deal with can be rather sensitive. Because teachers or school staff work in a school setting, an instructional style of approach has been used. Hornby et al. (2003) cited Lane (1996) to suggest that teachers tend to use more helping strategies at the directing and advising end of the continuum rather than at the supporting and counselling end. Much research has been done to confirm that relationship is the determining factor for successful counselling across different theoretical approaches used in counselling (Norcross, 2002). The counselling relationship makes a consistent contribution to psychotherapy independent of the different schools of approach or specific techniques used. Counselling is seen as an essential element of the pastoral care in the school system. In practice, this special element in counselling refers to a special kind of counselling relationship that facilitates awareness and growth.

Most of the pupils referred for counselling may not see themselves as having a problem. They are basically involuntary clients in the first place. Difficulties arise when the teachers, or school staff in the pastoral team, try to counsel pupils using a more directive, or instructional approach, as the pupils may not open to teachers or school administrators in the education system (Hornby et al, 2003).

Hornby et al (2003) suggest that it is difficult for teachers to fulfil their counselling and guidance role. That was the main reason why the counselling and guidance role gradually became specialized and guidance specialists and school counsellors are increasingly becoming professionals. Therefore when counsellors need to deal with disciplinary cases, there is potential strain in the relationship. Hue (2007) researched the relationships

between school guidance or counselling and discipline and it was found to be challenging to integrate the two components.

1.3.4 Engaging external counsellors and working with the community

Adrian Lim (2004) wrote his research papers on the counsellors in Singapore secondary schools and found that there were various sources of counsellors in the secondary schools: full-time counsellors trained by the MOE, the religious schools that provide their own pastoral counselling team, and professional counsellors from an external counselling centre, student care centre or various family services or community care centres. The diversity of sources of counsellors also indicates close collaboration between schools and community counselling services in dealing with pupil needs. This study shows that the counselling service in Singapore secondary schools has already loosely adopted a multi-agency approach.

1.4 Statement of research area

The school counselling service in Singapore, after the Second World War, initially focused on career guidance. The role of school counsellors then was basically to give information and instruction. The development of school counselling services and the dominant counselling discourse has been growing and changing globally. The role of counsellors has been undergoing changes in other countries such as the UK and US. Singapore is ever changing, and has grown into an educational hub in the region with an incredibly fast pace of development over the years. Will the role of the school counsellors remain the same or will it continue to evolve as the school educational environment and counselling movements in other parts of the world change?

Due to its unique situation in the Singapore school system, the initial counselling service

here is inseparable from the school disciplinary system. It seems evident from the publication of the local researchers Adrian Lim and Esther Tan that care and control work hand-in-hand. It follows that the counselling approach could be more directional and advice giving. It will be appropriate to find out from the counsellors themselves, rather than from the handbook, what their role and job scope are, specifically, to better understand their views and the internal landscape, the inner feelings and experience of the counsellors working in the Singapore secondary school system.

As discussed earlier, counselling requires a facilitating relationship to build rapport and to effect change. When disciplinary issues are concerned, the pupils referred would be probably mostly involuntary clients. Is it really true that the two components of discipline and counselling compliment each other and there is no conflict between them? How would the counsellors describe their experience when working with involuntary clients facing disciplinary or other behavioural issues?

My research focuses on the role and experience of school counsellors working with Singapore secondary schools pupils. There is a lack of research in this area.

1.5 *Research questions*

My initial research aim was: To gain a critical understanding of how counsellors in Singapore secondary schools both describe and perceive their role. In order to get answers to my research question, I have designed a few very broad questions for my participants. The purpose of asking broad questions is to find out the role and experience of the school counsellors working in the Singapore secondary school system. The broad based design was meant to give room for themes to emerge rather than imposing my own preconceptions on my study. From informal conversations with some counsellors in the field it became clear that the post of school counsellor requires a lot of dedication and is very demanding. The counsellors shared with me their joy and heart-ache moments prior

to the study. I therefore designed the following five tools to answer my basic research question for my study:

1. Can you describe your role and work as a counsellor working in Singapore secondary schools?
2. Can you describe what you do when pupils are referred to you?
3. How would you describe your experience as a school counsellor?
4. What are the contextual factors that enable or inhibit your ability to carry out your role as a counsellor in the local school system?
5. Have you any experiences you wish to describe or comments to add?

The first four questions are designed to explore and uncover the experience of the counsellors working in a school system. They describe what they do, why and how they conduct their counselling service in the ways they do. The questions were broadly designed and open-ended so that the counsellors could share their experiences and their views in depth. This, in Miles and Huberman's (1984) words, creates an exploratory and descriptive, instead of confirmatory, study (Miles & Huberman, 1984: 43). The last question was added in case there were aspects that the researcher might have overlooked, and gives the counsellors a chance to express their views on areas that are of importance to them.

1.6 *Significance of the study*

In 2008 Singapore MOE succeeded in placing a school counsellor in each secondary school. This creation of a comprehensive counselling system is of immense importance. It shows that the significance of school counselling is appreciated and the need for it in schools is rising. From our earlier research (the counselling history in the UK and US), it is apparent that counselling is an essential component in education, counsellors are integral to the educational team not merely an appendage to it. Teachers normally refer difficult

pupils for counselling services and thus counsellors are seeing pupils from the worst behaved side of the spectrum of pupils' conduct, or working with the most needy pupils, probably facing emotional, behavioural or disciplinary issues. A better understanding of how counsellors work with the pupils referred to them, their challenges, their struggles, their passions and their dreams etc, will increase our understanding of the pupils and the education system as a whole. A better understanding of what the role of school counsellors is, and their experiences, may help schools to make the best use of counselling and, ultimately, help pupils to enjoy a successful school experience.

This study fulfills a significant and timely need by providing a deep understanding into the experience of school counsellors in the Singapore secondary school system as it reaches another milestone. It allows us to get as close an understanding of the counsellors' thoughts, feelings and values as possible. There is a lack of such study in the Singapore school system.

This study seeks to uncover common themes of most vital importance to counsellors working in Singapore secondary schools, and to discuss them in depth. The resultant findings will enhance understanding in the wider education community and may serve as a useful basis for future, similar studies on a larger scale.

1.7 Overview of the thesis

This thesis is divided into three sections with Section one, the introduction (Chapters 1 to 3); Section two the data analysis (Chapters 4 to 6), and Section three the discussion and conclusion (Chapters 7 to 8).

Chapter 1 gives the background information on the development of school counselling. Examples of how the role of the school counsellor has changed in the UK and US are briefly reviewed. The unique Singapore school context and the development of counselling services are also discussed. This chapter also presents the purpose and areas of the research.

Chapter 2 presents the relevant literature relating to this study. It describes the development of the counselling movement and the counseling discourse globally. The role of the school counselors has evolved from vocational guidance to personal counseling, to a community based, multi-disciplinary approach. The relational and dialogical approach initiated by Martin Buber, and echoed by Carl Roger will be analyzed. There follows a discussion of more recent post-modern approaches which place emphasis on the wider context. Solution-focused and systemic approaches are reviewed as these two approaches are pertinent to the school counselling setting.

Chapter 3 explains the method and procedure of the research. Ethical issues are discussed. It gives information about the research participants. It also explains the criteria for judging a qualitative research study.

Section two displays the results of the analysis derived from grounded theory methodology. The similarities of the 11 cases are compared and the job scope and role, as described by the participants, is classified according to the themes of remedial, developmental and preventative work. To answer the research question about what the counsellors do when pupils are referred to them, the data shows how individual, group, family and community approaches were used. This session also details how counsellors build rapport with pupils to empower them to make decisions in order to solve their problems. Another overarching theme found throughout the study was the dilemmas which the counsellors faced. The causes of these dilemmas, the enabling and inhibiting factors from the wider context described by the counsellors are displayed and discussed.

Section three discusses and summarizes the research findings. The pattern derived from the study is compared with the literature analysis in Chapter 2, the unique educational system in Singapore discussed, and the contextual uniqueness is analyzed. As a result of this study, an ecosystem counselling model is proposed. It also presents the conclusions and implications of the study. Future research possibilities are discussed.

Chapter 2 – Literature analysis

2.1 *Introduction*

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the literature on the changing roles of school counsellors. The second part of the literature analyzes the counselling approaches relevant to this study.

In the following, I will present the changing roles of the school counsellor as a result of the contextual education reform and implication of government policy in a wider context.

2.2 *Counselling movements in the United States and United Kingdom*

2.2.1 *School guidance as vocational guidance*

The counselling movement in the US has a rich history which started in early 1900 (Herr, 2003), when school guidance programmes focused on vocational guidance and vocational education and were conducted by teacher counsellors. Parsons, who was the Father of Counsellors (cited in Davis 2005: 117), clearly stated that the role of the counsellors in education systems was to help students get jobs by training them to be productive workers.

Counselling in the UK has a long history that pre-dates the modern era (Fosket & Lynch, 2001). It has a unique pastoral care meaning and it is referred to as providing pastoral care to pupils. The school adopts the pastoral care structure to help teachers promote students' personal and social development. Traditionally, teachers in the British school system were expected to take on the guidance role. Hornby et al (2003) observe that over the past thirty years, the British school system has been placing a lot of emphasis on providing pastoral care to all levels of pupils. One practice is to assign a tutor to all pupils, who assumes the administrative, guidance and disciplinary role. Besides taking care of pupils' personal and social development, there was an emphasis on career guidance.

The guidance role historically was then focused on dissemination of career information.

2.2.2 From vocational guidance to personal counselling

In the 1960s there was public interest in the work of Sigmund Freud and Carl Rogers on the perspectives of counselling. The development of the positive relationship has led to the inclusion of affective components into the practice of counselling. The counselling movement in the US focused on working with personal or individual issues and the counselling movement in the school setting is no exception. Counselling in school had become focused on pupils' personal problems. The affective role of counselling became prominent (Baker, 2000). The focus was on individual pupils and the service was more personal, using psychotherapeutic skills to address pupils' psychological problems (Sink, 2005).

School counselling developed in the UK in the mid- 1960s, as part of a cultural movement imported from the United States (Jenkins & Polat, 2006). The humanistic approach was the focus of this movement and individual counselling models using psychotherapy techniques were employed in school counselling.

There have been some changes as the counselling component has become an essential part of the pastoral care structure (McGuinness, 1989, 1998). School counselling has begun to grow. Bor et al (2003) noticed that the counselling service began to be offered by professional school counsellors. However, the shift from teacher counsellor to professional counsellor was rather limited, as some schools continued to operate under the teacher guidance or teacher counsellor system rather than using professional counsellors. There was a significant decline in the number of school counselling posts (Robinson, 1996 in Jenkins & Polat 2006). Jenkins & Polat (2006) note that the decline of the school counselling service in the UK was due to the narrowly defined role adopted by the school counsellors, besides the lack of support of the larger educational context.

Since the name of the British Association of Counsellors (BAC) changed to British

Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) in 1997, the psychotherapy component in school guidance and counselling services has been highlighted. “Psychotherapy” means dealing with psychological and emotional problems. Therefore, it is important to have counsellors professionally trained and equipped with those skills necessary to be competent in dealing with the sensitive emotional and psychological problems of vulnerable school children.

BACP guidelines emphasize more specifically the detailed skills and personal qualities required by school counsellors. BACP gives advice on special training needed for school counsellors and many schools in the UK have taken up their advice to employ professional counsellors instead of relying on teachers or other school staff. The role of the professional counsellors is to work with pupils to enhance psychological and social well-being. However, the guidance from BACP is aspirational rather than mandatory in form (Jenkins & Polat 2006).

2.2.3 From personal counselling to community focus model

In 1983 there was a change in the role of school counsellors following the report entitled “A Nation at Risk” (Davis, 2005: 19) in the US. There had been a significant decline in academic performance in public schools and this alarmed the education sectors. The very core of the principles and values of school related professionals, including the school counsellors, was summoned to change. Academic achievement and performance has become the chief emphasis of the education and school related professionals. As a result, school counsellors became more accountable and were required to prove their contribution to the educational process in the education system. (Davis, 2005; Green & Key, 2001; House & Hayers, 2002; Lapan et al, 2002)). The role of the school counsellors has changed from promoting psychological well-being to enhancing meaningful participation in school to raise the educational standard as a whole. The effectiveness of the school counselling programme that operates on a one-to-one basis was severely questioned by the public in the US. The practice of spending most of the time of the school counsellors on

counselling a small number of individual pupils was criticized as inefficient use of public resources.

With this change, school counsellors are advised to work across disciplines and they needed to work closely with the wider community. Therefore school counsellors, psychologists, and social workers, as well as medical professionals all join hands to provide a coordinated service in order to improve the educational system. The psychological well being or the mental health dimension has been minimized. When work with pupils encountered psychological issues, school counsellors are advised to refer the pupils to the community expertise, and emotional or psychological issues will be dealt with by the school counsellors on a short term basis. As the result of this educational reform, the role of the school counsellors has been reformed. US society wanted to know what the school counsellors were doing to assist the pupils to do well in school. Thus there was a change in the role of the counsellor with an emphasis on co-ordination of programmes and consultation with parents, school staff and professionals in the community (Mullis & Edwards, 2001; Lapan, Gysber & Petroski, 2003; Myrick, 1993; Gysber & Henderson, 2001).

In the UK, the declining school counselling service has once again become a subject of intense and renewed policy interest as a result of the implication of The Children Act 2004. The Children Act provides the legal framework for the Green Paper "Every Child Matters" (DfES, 2003) to be implemented. This policy called for a major review of various professionals who work directly with school age children including the role of the counsellors within schools. The provision of counselling services will undergo a shift from an individual focus to a community and multidisciplinary focus (Polat, 2005). This calls for a radically revised role for the school counsellors. School counsellors are advised to work with multi-disciplinary teams including the parents, school staff such as form teachers, mentors and administrators and expertise in the community to benefit the pupils (Polat, 2005; Jenkins & Polat, 2006). The multi-disciplinary teams are required by law to participate in the development of an integrated service.

2.2.4 From remedial to preventive and developmental

Previously, in one to one personal counselling models, counsellors work primarily with individual pupils on their personal issues. The nature of the counselling approach was regarded as remedial. Under the new approach the emphasis has become more developmental and preventive.

Preventive programmes in the school counselling system have gained attention since there was a concern about being merely reactive if the counselling focused on remedial work only. Remedial work is regarded as down stream helping, while the preventive work, up stream helping.

Sink (2005) cited an insightful tale told by Egan and Cowan (1979) about “upstream” and “down stream” helping (in Sink, 2005: 77-78). “Down stream” helping is similar to “fire fighting” in that the counsellor tried to dive in and rescued pupils one by one from the river. But when the counsellor thought about the reasons for the pupils being thrown in the river and yelling for help, he went upstream. To the counsellor’s amazement, he found a very large person standing by the bridge and tossing the pupils into the water. The counsellor thus was motivated to stop the occurrence of future tragedies rather than working on diving to save the pupils one by one. To apply this story in the school counselling setting, the “down stream” help is the remedial help provided for the pupils when there is a problem, whereas the “upstream” help is the preventive and developmental guidance that counsellors provide for a large audience of pupils to prevent future difficulties from arising.

Sink (2005) suggests that downstream helping is reactive, and is appropriate in many situations. However, he stresses that the upstream helping is more preventive in nature, and needs to be employed much more frequently than it traditionally has been (Ibid: 77). Three examples he cited were: Prevention of teen pregnancies through education, creation of drug-free schools and teaching abuse prevention skills. Hornby et al (2003) also advocate a model for counselling in schools which includes a remedial, preventive and

developmental focus.

In the US, a new title “Professional school counsellor”, is used rather than “school guidance” staff or “school counsellor”. This change of name used is critical, in Bemak’s words (2000), “It reflects the change in the school counsellor’s role and function”. In the UK, government has initiated and proposed a radical change of the role of all professional working with young children, including that of the school counsellors.

2.2.5 *Role debate*

Since the provocative report of “A Nation at Risk”, a debate on the role and functions of school counsellors was evoked and it continues after more than three decades. Despite the efforts of the American School Counsellor Association (ASCA) and other accreditation organizations, which clearly stated the role definition, and some even identified school counselling models and suggested how the allocation of time should be made in the school setting (Burnham, 2000; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001), the debate continues. The debate and discrepancies between the theoretical framework or counselling models and actual implementation of the role persists (Bemak, 2000).

ASCA clearly states that school counsellors are functioning in three main areas: counselling, consultation and coordination (1990). There are two main school counselling models proposed which are widely accepted by the schools in the US, namely, Myrick’s model (1993) and the model according to Gysbers and Henderson (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). Myrick (1993) proposed a comprehensive developmental model of school counselling. The role and functions of a school counsellor includes individual counselling, small group counselling, classroom guidance and consultation with parents and school staff. Under the model according to Gysbers and Henderson (2001), counsellors’ roles include guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services and system support. Responsive services refer to development and supervision, whereas system support includes evaluation, coordination, staff development and supervision.

In the UK, the debate focuses on the possible challenges faced and the enormous scepticism and hesitation when the role of the school counsellors moves from personal counselling to more collaborative and multi-disciplinary team models. Jenkins and Polat (2006) identify this emerging profile of a school counsellor as having a flexible role description. School counsellors will have to work within multi-agency teams or community based approach. This emerging role description is seen as likely to present major challenges to the existing role-based focus of school counsellors.

2.2.6 Discussion and summary on role debate

The role of the school counsellors has changed over the years and continues to become more professional as a result of the changing educational environment. New dimensions are added to broaden the scope of the school counsellor's role. In the US, the role of school counsellor has evolved from vocational guidance to personal counselling. Later it developed into a developmental and preventive model which involved the work of management/implementing and evaluating guidance and counselling programmes. The role of a school counsellor is expanding from dealing with pupils' personal problems to managing a counselling programme connected to the resources in the community. In the UK, however, the psychological dimension has been added to the role and functions of school counsellors; school counselling is distinctly separated from the traditional pastoral care role which focuses on career guidance and school guidance. At the moment, the school counsellors in the UK are in the process of adopting a community and multi-agency teams based approach.

The education setting in Singapore is different from that of the US or UK. Guidance and counselling were used as generic terms and all teachers were equipped with basic counselling skills to help to detect or monitor pupils at risk, but there were teacher counsellors or full-time or part time counsellors to deal with counselling issues. The generic use of the terms guidance and counselling is similar to that of Hong Kong

secondary schools where teachers employ counselling skills in guiding and interacting with pupils though they are holding teachers jobs and are not trained as professional counsellors (Hui, 2002).

In 2004, MOE announced its intention to increase resources to support teaching. The Minister for Education Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam promised that more teacher-counsellors and school counsellors will be provided for all schools. In 2006, MOE unveiled a \$250M plan to boost the teaching profession and it was clearly stated that the purpose of the initiative was to ensure that the teaching profession continues to attract, motivate and retain good teachers in the field. The plan was to create a full-time school counsellor for each school by the year 2008.

This is now 2008 and MOE has succeeded in creating a full-time counsellor for each secondary school. The reason behind creating a full-time school counsellor is to lighten the workload of the teachers, and in doing so to ensure that the teaching profession remains attractive and fulfilling. Counselling service is seen as a support tool for the education system, so that teachers can have “more time and space to reflect on their teaching, experiment with new pedagogies and upgrade themselves professionally” (Shanmugarathnam 2004). Counselling is also seen as additional expertise, “to help our teachers who may need to manage an increasing number of children with counselling needs” (Ibid).

The increase of counsellors in all schools as an additional resource to help the teachers to better advance their teaching pedagogies also indicates an increasing need among teachers for help to manage their pupils. From the speech given by the Minister of Education (Shanmugaratnam, 2004) the role of the school counsellors was seen as a supportive role in the educational system.

The British Association of Counsellor (BAC) stated the definition of counselling as follows:

Counselling is the skilled and principled use of a relationship to facilitate self-knowledge, emotional acceptance and growth, and the optimal development of personal resources. The overall aim is to provide an opportunity to work towards living more satisfyingly and resourcefully.

(BAC, 1991: 1)

Hornby (2003) notes that the goals of counselling stated by the BAC are very similar to the overall goals of education. The goals of counselling are to help facilitate self-knowledge and emotional acceptance. The issues that the counselling services address, such as personal growth and career awareness, are actually part of the educational components. Every child should be valued (Buber, 1947) and school is a nurturing place (Battistich et al, 1997; Sink, 2005) to develop individuals to their fullest potential so that pupils can lead a successful life in the future. All the knowledge gained and learning in school is to prepare pupils for a better future, to be able to live a satisfying life and to live resourcefully.

An examination of the literature shows that counselling is an integral part in the education system and it is also an essential component in education (Hornby, 2003). Therefore counselling in school should be more than just a supportive system or supportive services. There is research evidence to show that counselling services have a positive impact on pupils (Border & Drury, 1992; Whiston & Sexton, 1998).

Singapore's educational system has always emphasised high academic standards. When countries in other parts of the world reacted to falling school academic performance by giving more homework and assessments and evaluations to raise the academic standard (Ryan, 2007), Singapore secondary schools tried to reduce the amount of homework and give more flexibility to pupils to cultivate the creativity and enhance thinking skills (Shanmugaratnam, 2004, Gopinathan & Ho, 1997). The counselling movements that gave rise to the role change of the school counsellors found in the literature were mainly

triggered by some historical and/or contextual incident (such as “Nation at Risk” in the US, and “Every Child Matters” in the UK). As Singapore has not been through the similar educational reformation, will the role of the school counsellors in Singapore develop in a similar way? The unique education system in Singapore has always emphasized meritocracy and high academic performance. Do the school counsellors need to join hands with the other teaching staff to enhance academic achievement? The debate about the role of the school counsellors in the US and UK centres on the theme of whether or not academic performance should be the main focus and how counsellors can contribute to the success of all pupils in the school system. How relevant is the role of the school counselling movement developed elsewhere in the world when applied to the Singapore secondary school system? Singapore is a country that places great stress on community values. Community is always put before self. Do the family and the community play a part in the school counselling system?

From the beginnings of the school counselling movement, achieving academic success or contributing to the success of the school experience has been identified as the main emphasis of the role of the school counsellors (Schmidz, 1996). Remedial work seems less important as compared to developmental or preventative programmes. There are other authors who argue that counselling should be an essential element of the pastoral care which schools provide for their pupils (Hornby et al, 2003), as there are increasing numbers of pupils nowadays exhibiting emotional and behavioural problems (Thompson and Rudolph, 2003). Counselling helps to remove obstacles to learning and thus helps children to achieve educational goals. Davis also acknowledges this dimension to counselling where school counsellors attend to “the personal, social, and emotional needs that might interfere in the learning process” (Davis, 2005: 27). The empirical research done by Jenkins and Polat, (2006), highlights the potential benefits of individual counselling in the school setting. Therefore, the benefit of minimizing or removing the remedial component to focus on a larger audience of pupils with developmental and preventive programmes is still debatable. There are also many practical difficulties to be faced, such as the sharing of confidential data and relationships with other professions,

when a multi-agency or community approach is adopted (Jenkins & Polat, 2006). For these reasons the role of school counsellors is still receiving fervent discussion after more than three decades in the US and the same old topic is still hotly debated in the UK since the promotion of role change by the Green Paper, “Every Child Matters”.

In the following, relevant counselling literature will be analyzed, which includes the relational counselling approach, the brief solution focused approach and the systemic approach to counselling.

2.3 *Relational counselling approach*

2.3.1 *Martin Buber’s ‘I and Thou’*

Buber wrote about “I and Thou” (1958). The I – Thou relationship brings our focus to a genuine dialogical relationship. Buber wrote “All real living is meeting” (1958), for meeting gives rise to meaning and through meeting with the Thou, man is no longer subject to causality and fate. It follows that our belief in the reality of the external world comes from our relation to other selves (Ibid: 193). This is a positive dimension of human relationship that could make it possible to bring out the best and the potential of another person. It is through social relationships and interaction that we get knowledge of the world.

According to Buber (1947,1958, 1988), one of the possible causes of peoples’ problems springs from their relation with others. This construction of self and other, explains how individuals develop psychological problems in their relation with others. This relational dialogical philosophy deeply influenced the father of humanistic psychotherapy Carl Rogers (1961) and Friedman (1985,1994).

2.3.2 *Carl Rogers’ core conditions in counselling*

Rogers started client-centred therapy. He holds that unconditional positive regards, empathy and being congruent are the core conditions for therapy and counselling (1961). These conditions are necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. “Necessary” means “essential”, and sufficient means no other condition is needed. With these core conditions, a client will feel accepted and will be able to freely explore himself. This therapeutic relationship is confirmed by research and literature as the warm relationship of a counsellor, the compassion, caring, good intention, genuineness or sensitivity; that is what matters in bringing change in clients. Truax and Carkhuff (1967) emphasized empathy and understanding “It is not the technical parts, but the quality of the human dimensions that would bring the significant change in the clients” (Corey, 1982; Kensit, 2000).

Another distinction of the Rogerian humanistic approach is that it takes note of the frames of reference the client expressed. Thus it is not imposing the counsellor’s perspective but understands the client from his or her perspective. Applying a person-centred approach in counselling young people involves respecting their internal references, nurturing the “self” by unconditional acceptance to bring out self-awareness and to facilitate change using an unconditional, positive attitude (Boy & Pine, 1968).

The personality change theory from this humanistic approach emphasizes freeing the inner ‘self’ of the person from the feeling of being threatened (Boy & Pine, 1968). When youngsters are constantly criticized, they will become defensive. When they start to deny and defend themselves, some of their experience may not come to their awareness. Those experiences, especially the negative ones, they will not be able to deal with effectively.

2.3.3 The relationship in counselling

The talking/conversational/dialogical approach of the counsellors is one which shows an intention to work towards a therapeutic relationship, and thereby promote behavioural

change (Kramer, 2003). Talking in counselling invites reflection and inquiry into meanings (Robinson, 1988; Czubaroff, 2000; Strong, 2003). Research supports a relational view of therapy (Cooper, 2004). Norcross (2002) confirms the therapy relationship as essential in psychotherapy and counselling. In his conclusion, he writes “The therapy relationship makes substantial and consistent contributions to psychotherapy outcome independent of the specific type of treatment” (Norcross, 2002: 441). This therapeutic relationship is also being applied in cognitive-behaviour therapy. According to one study, the relationship between the quality of the therapeutic alliance and clinical outcomes tended to be as strong in the cognitive-behavioural condition as it was in the interpersonal therapy one (Krupnick et. al., 1996).

2.3.4 Discussion of “relationship” in counselling

The relationship mentioned above pertains to the counselling relationship between the counsellors and the counselees. While Carl Rogers has advanced our understanding of the importance of the core conditions that contribute to personality changes, the core conditions initiated by Rogers have been criticized as insufficient to bring about personality changes, though they are necessary for personality changes (Corey, 2005: 184).

The person-centred approach focuses on the individual theories of selfhood and concepts of human beings. This individual approach dominates the current psychological framework of understanding human beings. It operates from an individualistic perspective and it explains human problems from the intrapsychic point of view. This individualistic conception of self and intrapsychic approach to counselling include traditional psychoanalysis: the Freudian, Adlerian and Jungian theory; the humanistic approach which includes Rogers’ and Perls’ gestalt therapy; and cognitive therapy etc (Corsini & Wedding, 2008).

The individual approach to counselling understands a human being from within the person

himself. A person is treated independently as if the changes of a person's self concept will automatically bring changes in real life situations, as if the individual is living in isolation from his environment or community which is seen as having nothing to contribute to his problems. It is intrapsychic, rather than interpersonal. It has contributed greatly to our understanding of human beings by intrapsychic dealing with internal conflicts. However, it doesn't explain the external, wider context that might have contributed to the development of problems. There are situations when individuals are rather helpless and powerless to initiate change or maintain change if the surrounding environment remains unchanged. Di Thomas writes about the individualism of western culture tending to locate the 'problem' in the person and forgetting that the wider social and political sphere in which the person lives has an impact on him/ her (Thomas, 2006: 22). He concludes that the approach of counselling practice that emphasizes privatization of distress (or emotion as a whole) is not effective or relevant as it neglects influences from diverse and complex causes from the fragmented society. We need other theories that help us better understand human beings, which include interpersonal factors and contributions from the wider environment.

Actually, the relational aspect advocated by Buber should not be confined to the understanding of the relationship between the counsellor and client. The relational self is also one of his contributions to our understanding of human beings as he explained when he wrote about "when two people meet and encounter" (Buber, 1947, 1958); though his use of language was a bit vague as it did not clearly point to a particular kind of relationship. Buber did shed light on our therapy or counselling approach, calling for attention to the relationship between the client and his or her most significant relationship that may have caused trouble in his or her life. There may be some other underlying social or relationship issues from the broader background of our clients that might have contributed to their problems. Therefore we have to understand our clients from a wider perspective, instead of solely treating them as individuals.

2.4 *Postmodern counselling theories*

Postmodern theories also emphasize a conversation/dialogical relationship, but differ from the relational approach by placing more focus on the social environment factors that influence individuals. These theories have affected the way we approach counselling as meanings are context-bound and our clients make meaning through telling and retelling their story (White & Epton, 1990). It is believed that people's understanding of themselves and their world may be accessed through discourse (Potter & Wetherall, 1987). During conversation, it is worth referring to the contexts, languages and the narratives (Williams, 2002). Perhaps the counsellor can also pay attention to the multiple competing stories in the process of interaction (Winslade, 2005), the better to understand and empower pupils. In order to better understand individuals, counsellors may need to acknowledge the mainstream counselling and psychology that stresses individual need and accommodate the social psychology which emphasizes the individual as a product of environmental influence, while maintaining that change is possible.

The Rogerian approach is criticized as being too individual and the postmodern counseling approach holds that we cannot fully grasp the clients' world without actually understanding the world they are in. Using the individual framework to understand clients is similar to completely "dislocating individuals and their problems from the larger cultural context" (Sinclair & Monk, 2005).

Sinclair and Monk (2005) criticize the modern approaches to counselling which tend to locate human problems within individuals as distinct and separate from social, cultural and political contexts in which they live and insists that we should not dislocate individuals and their problems from the larger cultural context. Hermans & Lyddon (2006) also suggest we as counsellors should listen to the multiple voices of the social context. Relying solely on insight-based change is considered as not applicable (Erford, 2003: 93). The insight should be coming from all possible sources, from the individual plus the complexity from the environment.

2.4.1 *Family systemic approach*

The family systemic approach to counselling understands the individual's problem from the family relationship rather than from the intrapsychic framework of a person. As human beings are born in the family, we depend on the nurturing and survival support from the family. Pupils' problems may be seen as a symptom of how the family functions, not just the malfunction of the individual. This perspective is grounded in the following assumptions that an individual's problem may (1) serve a purpose for the family, (2) be unintentionally maintained by the family processes, (3) be a function of the family's inability to operate productively, or (4) be a symptom of dysfunctional patterns handed down across generations (Corey, 2005: 424). In order to work with the pupils, we need to engage family members, especially the significant others of the pupils, the parents or the primary care giver.

This family relationship therapy is important when working with children or teenagers. Many authors (Dinkmeyer, Carlson & Dinkmeyer, 2000; Myrick, 1993) advocate that school counsellors should consult the adults, especially the significant adults in their lives, because children and adolescents are often powerless to make changes. Family systemic approach believes every family member is caught up in a circular interaction, a chain reaction that feeds back on itself. A change in one member of the family will trigger off other changes in another. However, it would be rather frustrating to work with an individual alone if, when he or she goes back to the system, the problem will perpetuate itself. Therefore it is advisable to involve parents when working with pupils to ensure a long-term effect.

2.4.2 *Solution – focused brief counselling*

Working with pupils, counsellors can always use various techniques such as behavioural contacting, art and play therapy which is more experiential learning etc. Because the

school setting is always busy, with many time constraints, there has recently been a trend toward solution-focused brief counselling in school (Davis, 2005; Hornby et al, 2003). Erford (2003) contends that a brief counselling model would be more suitable when a time-limit setting such as a school context is concerned.

As opposed to other counselling approaches which focus on analysing the problems or making diagnoses, a solution-focused approach focuses on implementing realistic, effective solutions to the problems pupils face. It has been regarded by teachers and school counsellors as an effective tool for working in a school setting. Reasons cited by most authors are as follow: it is practical, time-sensitive, and effective in a school setting (Murphy, 1996; Davis and Osborn, 2000; Davis, 2005). Thompson (2002) presented Solution focused as an effective approach in the school counselling setting. The key concepts and principles underlying this approach are that it capitalizes on strengths of the pupils and it focuses on encouraging the pupils to respond differently when the same crisis arises. So the issue is not the problem, it is our response to the situation. When pupils' strengths are identified and they can respond positively and differently to the problematic situation, a solution is found.

2.4.3 Ecological multimodal approach

Ecological multimodal approach is one of the models that take note of the ecological environment and the systemic issues of the pupils. It has a theoretical framework originated by Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979). This is a technically eclectic counselling approach developed by Arnold Lazarus (1989). Compared with the traditional counselling approach that gives attention to the intrapsychic dimension, it acknowledges the importance of the interpersonal dimension. Lee (2004) further developed an integrative ecological multimodal approach for working with adolescents in the Asian context. Using this approach, the traditional counselling techniques focusing on therapeutic relationship will not be overlooked, but will be balanced with emphasis of the ecological and environment context. The standard conceptualization of emotional and

psychological problems is still utilized when working with pupils. However, the immediate family members, extended family, peer groups, school, religion, community values etc will be taken into consideration in the effort of helping the pupils

2.5 *School comprehensive counselling programme approach*

Both the Myrick (1993) model and the model according to Gysbers and Henderson (2001) in the US require the role of the school counsellor in be involved in both supporting the pupils and the supporting network of the pupils. Besides the traditional role of individual counselling, the role and functions of a school counsellor proposed by both the above mentioned systems includes consultation with parents and school staffs. It seems that the approach of counselling has been diversified to include the group and big classroom approach. Counsellors are no longer working in isolation or being reactive to the problematic situations. It seems a multiple approach is preferable. The role of the school counsellor has been broadened to include the role of counselling, coordinating and consulting. The role of consultant is to “help consultees to think of their immediate problems as part of the larger system, and not only to understand how problems are solved but also to understand how they were developed, maintained, or avoided” (Kurpius & Faqua, 1993: 598). As multi-disciplinary teams are involved, the role of the school counsellor using a comprehensive counselling programme will include leadership, advocacy for change, teaming and collaboration.

2.6 *Integrated approach/ multi-disciplinary approach*

In the UK, the government initiated a radical legislation change and the model of school counselling will be moving towards a more collaborative and multi-disciplinary team approach. Government will be focusing on teaching all the people who work closely and directly with pupils including parents, teacher and community expertise to spot potential problems with young pupils and treat them in the bud. This requires a close collaboration

of a team's various expertise. It emphasizes school partnership and integrated services.

This multi-team approach is seen as challenging as it questions the basis and the ethos of counselling that emphasise the basic human right to confidentiality even in young children (Jenkins & Polat, 2006).

2.7 Chapter summary and discussion

The counselling theories developed from the main stream of counselling movements, especially the individual counselling approach, are part of the product of the humanistic movements in Western countries. How relevant is it when applied to the country which emphasizes collectivist and community values? It is generally agreed that systemic counselling theories locate and discuss human difficulties as being inseparable from the family and society that contain the individuals. However, when applied to a school system, what are the factors that would enable or inhibit the counselling service, especially given the socio-economic system and unique education system in Singapore? Is there a specific model needed when working with children in the school system in Singapore?

School counselling is essentially different from other forms of counselling in that the pupils are still in their developmental stage, and there are factors particularly concerned with the developing teenagers. Dealing with the developmental needs (the cognitive, social, emotional and physical development) of school children is the general role of school teachers, and those developmental needs are actually part of the educational components in the school system. Are we able to compartmentalize and have a clearly defined point beyond which we leave the social and emotional development of children to the school counsellors? Or should academic success be the focus in the school experience so that counsellors need to be included in their roles only to promote academic achievement as advocated in the US system (Schmidz, 1996; Studer, 2005)?

As early as the 1960s (Wrenn in Davis, 2005), when Gilbert Wrenn's publication "The counsellors in a changing world" appeared, the need to refine the role of school counsellors was highlighted. The era when the focus on an individual approach gained prominence seems to be passing away. There is a call for the role refinement and re-definition of professional role boundaries as the needs for counselling in school settings are changing in response to the changes from the wider environment.

Role refinement leads to a change of counselling model. There seems to be a greater need for collaboration among the various parties involved in the lives of pupils to work together for the benefit of the pupils. Is the new, emerging, integrated and multi-disciplinary counselling model a new dawn for pastoral care (Harris, 2006)? And what would it mean for the secondary schools system in Singapore?

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the rationale for the choice of research methodology. It gives reasons for the adoption of qualitative research design. It explains the adapted grounded theory methodology and semi-structures used.

It gives details of the procedure involved including sampling, initial contact, meeting participants, signing contracts, interviews, ethical issues, research journal etc.

3.2 Research design

3.2.1 Qualitative research

The purpose of the study was to explore the counselling experience of eleven counsellors working in Singapore secondary schools. This study focuses on the experiences shared by the participants.

As opposed to a quantitative approach which is more hypothesis-testing or empirical verification, the qualitative research design emphasizes the exploration of meanings. It seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of the participants (Hammersley, 1992). It aims to “provide an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience” (Lichtman, 2006). A qualitative research design was chosen as it suits the research purpose. The goal is to find out about human experience, human interaction and human relationship, the thoughts and feelings of counsellors working with pupils in need.

3.2.1.1 Subjectivity in qualitative research

The possible difficulty of qualitative research is subjectivity.

As Hatch (2002) said, “The knower and the known are taken to be inseparable” (p.10). It can be true that the researcher is part of the world of study and the world of the researcher is deeply influenced by the world studied. Hatch proposed that by being reflexive we could overcome these difficulties. Qualitative researchers do not claim themselves to be “objective scientists”. Being aware of what influences play a part in our understanding of a particular situation will help the researcher to be more reflexive.

In my case my preconceived understanding from my previous counselling training and experience can be a possible bias. I was actually one of them as I had done the job before, as a school counsellor doing the same job facing similar challenges. The role of an insider (previous experience) and of an outsider (a researcher) can colour my interpretation, and it can possibly contaminate my understanding of the current situation of my interviewees. To minimize this bias, I have recorded almost all of the interviews, which I transcribed and showed to my interviewees, during my subsequent visits, to make sure that I have not imposed my opinions on them. Some of the interviewees did correct my wording. Only one interviewee declined to have her sessions audio taped, but she did not mind if I jotted down the notes during interview. From these notes I tried to complete her actual descriptive sentences immediately on the same day of the interview. She was kind enough to proof read them later. By this method, I hope the use of participants’ checking, not in a strict sense can help to create better understanding of the subject at hand. According to Flick (1998), this type of “triangulation” is not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation (Flick, 1998: 230). Triangulation is not so much about getting “truth” but rather about finding multiple perspectives for knowing the social world. And it has been fruitfully applied to social science research (Richards 2005 in Marshall and Rossman 2006). I have tried to avoid imposing my reading or understanding on my participants. I tried to understand from the perspectives of the participants as much as possible. This is what Charmaz emphasizes, “try to find out what the research participant defines as real as they live in it” (Charmaz, 2003: 523).

Besides taken the precautions mentioned above, I considered myself fortunate that the

previous school I worked with was an extremely top ranked school whose pupils' profile was very different from that of my participants' in this study. Though some of the counselling experience was similar, most of the experience shared by the participants was rather new to me.

3.2.2 Interview

Vidich and Lyman, in Denzin and Lincoln (2003), mention that qualitative research in sociology was "born out of concern to understand the other". It must then need to employ all sorts of methods and approaches to get intensive and descriptive information sharing from the participants.

Interviews are very common in qualitative research studies (Brenner, 1978) as it encourages the interviewees to talk freely and openly. Cohen and Manion (1989) hold that it is one technique initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic, description, prediction or explanation (Cohen & Manion, 1989: 307). Besides the sharing on the part of interviewees, there is dialogue during the interview session.

I have chosen interview as a method to get access to these intensive and descriptive accounts of experience sharing. By having a two-way dialogue or a conversation with the participants, I should have a greater chance of getting in touch with the participants' inner world of experience. This in-depth description of information was obtained through a two-way interaction (Lichtman, 2006). This two-way interaction approach also provides time and space for clarification and expression. This method of data gathering needs professional skills to do it well and it has the potential of providing rich and highly illuminating material (Robson, 1993: 229).

This approach allows the participants' perspective on the phenomenon under study to be unfolded as the participants view it (the emic perspective), not as the researcher views it

(the etic perspective) (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

3.2.3 In-depth semi-structured Interview

The questions designed belong to the category of semi-structured interviews (Appendix 3). As a new researcher, and having the stress of time constraint, I felt that some guided questions would give a basic framework for the research studies. The semi-structured questions prepared prior to the interview sessions serve as an interview guide.

3.2.3.1 Dichotomy classification between structured and open-ended

There are actually some tensions existing between the totally open-ended questioning style and a semi-structured approach. According to the typology classified by Powney and Watt (1987, Ch 2) semi-structured, means similar to a formal interview (or structured interview). Powney and Watt make a basic distinction between respondent interview and informant interview. In the former, the interviewers remain in control throughout the whole process and, to some extent, the agenda is fixed and the schedule of the interviewer is what matters. Whereas in the latter, the interviews are concerned with the interviewee's perceptions within a particular context so a non-directive conversation is preferred. This distinction appears to have derived from the tradition of survey research on one hand, and clinical interviews on the other hand. Survey research is a more scientific seeking for random sampling and ensures representativeness as in the traditional quantitative research studies. Clinical interviews encourage the informants to have an open conversation. According to this distinction, it seems that the informant interview is better for research where we want to get as close an understanding of individual views, thoughts and feelings as possible. It thus seems to indicate that the data collected via this approach is closer to the informant's perspectives. Mason (1996) seems to view it in the same way, that it will generate a fairer and fuller representation of the interviewee's perspectives. I am fully aware of the potential limitations of a fully structured design. However, I disagree with

the dichotomy distinction in the classification set by Powney and Watt. The reasons for categorizing cannot be reduced to two contrasting positions, respondent versus informant; closed versus open conversation, as if there is no somewhere in between along the continuum. I believe that human interaction is more complex than a dichotomy classification. There are many factors in the human enquiry, and the researcher's attitude towards human interaction and dialogue conversation, and how the interview was conducted etc would count for the research findings.

3.2.3.2 Semi-structured yet open-ended

Cohen and Manion (1989) advocate the advantages of open-ended questions which are more flexible and may help the conversation venture into more depth and help to clarify misunderstandings and allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what that respondent really believes. Such open-ended questions can result in unexpected or unanticipated answers (Cohen and Manion, 1989: 313). However, there are risks in this totally open-ended question approach. Cohen and Manion (1989) identify some of the disadvantages of open-ended questions compared with the closed ones: the possibilities for loss of control, and in particular in being more difficult to analyze.

The major difference between formal interviews which are sometimes called "structured" or "semi-structured" interviews and standardized interviews is that the formal encourages flexibility. However, in the latter researchers enter the interview setting with predetermined questions that they will ask in the same order and manner. Building flexibility into the structured interview, especially in semi-structured, allows room to probe further or ask follow-up questions based on the interviewee's response. Following the lead of interviewees is desirable if we want to get in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or situation.

During my interview sessions, I have used questioning techniques, such as elaboration,

probing, non-direction, giving wait-time etc. I used open-ended questions to probe and to explore the experience of the counsellors and I gave room for possible new themes emerging from the dialogical interaction during the interview. I showed sensitivity during my interview sessions when the participants expressed hesitation or were struggling, paid attention to what the participant had to say in their own words/voice and observed facial expression and non-verbal communication. Most importantly, I kept the flow of conversation un-obtrusive for the participants.

3.2.4 Adapted grounded theory methodology

3.2.4.1 Many versions of grounded theory

There are at least three versions of grounded theory: the early version according to Glaser (1978), the later version by Strauss (1987) and that of Strauss and Corbin (1990). Glaser opened up a new way of thinking about social research by emphasizing the discovery of theory grounded from the empirical data instead of setting out to test hypotheses, the conventional scientific way of social research. Charmaz (2003) takes the approach further by introducing a constructivist grounded theory aiming toward interpretive understanding of subjects' meaning.

The similarities among the above mentioned versions are the method of inquiry and the product of inquiry of the approach. The method of inquiry refers to there being no preoccupied dogmatic imposition in the process of inquiry, and the product of the enquiry refers to the discovery and the narrative nature of the approach where the research finding is grounded in the data. Grounded theory aims to generate a conceptual theory or model from the data and ensure that the theory is grounded in the data. Therefore it requires of the researcher a sensitivity to empirical evidence. The data collected needs to be coded and categorized. This theory was proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967, 1978). Glaser emphasized two levels of coding, namely substantial coding and theoretical coding. The former refers to first-order coding closely related to data; the latter refers to theoretical

coding and involves second-order conceptualisations of how these substantive codes might “relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into the theory” (Glaser, 1978: 55).

During the process of data analysis, the researcher needs to do constant comparisons to find out the similarities and differences (Glaser, 1978). By doing comparisons, the data goes beyond the descriptive level to a conceptualised level. The concepts are generated from the data instead of using or forcing the researcher’s preconceived concepts into the data. Therefore a grounded theory approach was conceived as a way of generating theory through research data rather than testing ideas formulated even before the data collection. The generated theory serves to “explain what is going on in this world” (Glaser, 2002). It is believed that the conceptualised key aspects of the data yield meaningful interpretations about the phenomenon being studied.

3.2.4.2 Rational for grounded theory

My initial justification for using the ground theory approach is that I think the grounded theory approach is suited for social research study because it avoids the imposition of preconceived ideas on, and misreading of, the social phenomenon or research subjects. The rigorous process analysis helps slow down the interpretative process. I think slowing down the process of interpretation is good as it helps us to be more observant and to be patient enough to wait for the data to speak for itself. Through constant comparison and inductive analysis, the themes and theory emerge from the data and will be grounded in the data. Hence the bias will be reduced if not eliminated, and objectivity is better enhanced.

3.2.5 *Epistemology discussion*

My initial stage of research was not without struggles. My struggle using this method was realist ontology and positivist epistemology grounded theory. My mind was not

settled until I read Annells' article. Annells (1996) puts it, "Grounded theory method has traditionally been sited in a post-positivist inquiry paradigm" but she continues, "it is evolving and moving toward the constructivist inquiry paradigm". This released me from the struggle of trying to reconcile diverse perspectives of grounded theory. Annells further suggests that, "It is vital to recognize the method is subject to evolutionary change with differing modes resultant it is therefore not static in regard to philosophical perspective" (Annells, 1996: 391). In the era when grounded theory was proposed, there was no constructivist, and the narrative or post-modern approach was yet to burgeon or flourish. However, the analyzing process that grounded theory emphasizes a lot uses human cognition as a mode of analysis. In order to produce the themes while searching through the data, I feel that the researcher does not have a value-free stance during the sorting out of data. Moreover, constant comparisons require the faculties of reasoning and conceptualising. The whole process can be quite constructivist. Going back and forth over the data, using deductive (identifying themes to name the categories) and inductive (checking of data), cognition may interact with the researcher's training background and previous learning experience. The ecological background, the social-economic context and cultural nourishment with which the researcher has grown up are all the make-up of the researcher. This constructivist stance is not limited to the research, construction of meaning, and interpretation of data, but it also happens within the information gathered from the field. The meanings given by the participant, and the feelings interviewees have, can be a kind of construction.

I am aware that different research paradigms cannot be synthesized easily. I also believe that the social world is not static. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) emphasize that there is not a single paradigm distinctly for qualitative research as multiple theoretical paradigms are applied to qualitative research methodology. Since the ultimate aim of the qualitative approach is the interpretive understanding of human experience, it is multiparadigmatic in nature (Nelson et al in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003: 7). In the process of gathering or generating data, I keep this in my mind.

3.3 *Research procedure*

3.3.1 *Sampling*

The recruitment of participants is important, as it may affect the outcome of the research (Rubin and Rubin, 1995 in Seale, 2004). The purpose of this study is to explore counsellors' perceptions of their jobs, and discover what the role of school counsellor means to them. It is anticipated that in-depth interviews will encourage the expression of feelings, thoughts, beliefs and values. Due to the personal nature and the intensity of sharing emotional experience, I have chosen a "snowball sampling" (Lichtman, 2006) strategy. This sampling method may be criticized as non-random in nature or for being ad hoc. Patton (2002) argues that the quality and depth of information obtained is more important in qualitative research. Mason (1996) holds that "snow-ball" sampling can be used to produce a sampling frame and is able to produce intellectual puzzles (Ibid) for social processes and explanations. I believe this is the best strategy to generate data for my study because random or representative sampling may not be effective nor does it work efficiently due to the time consuming and the intimate nature of in-depth interview. Sharing of in-depth emotions need a trusting relationship between the researcher and participants and it would be difficult to develop such a relationship with a total stranger given the limitation of the timeframe. Litchman (2006) asserts that it is important to have rapport with participants 'in order to generate meaningful and useful data' (ibid: 19). Establishment of rapport is especially vital in a study where participants are invited to explore and reveal aspects of their feelings and thoughts that can be very personal (O'Donoghue, 2003: 18). I started with some counsellors whom I knew of and who were currently working in a school setting. They introduced to me some of their friends to recruit into my study. Most of the participants do not know each other. I have recruited counsellors doing counselling and running different programmes for different secondary schools so that they can provide me with a range of information and experience.

3.3.2 Access and entry

Once I had identified the interested participants, I called to introduce myself and explain the purpose of my study. To those participants that I already knew, I immediately sent an information sheet (Appendix 2) and interview questions (Appendix 3) by email after the initial telephone contact. For those counsellors introduced through friends, I called to make appointments to meet them at a time and place convenient to them. Most of them suggested I meet them at their work place, which was either school or counselling room. During my visits, I did the following: 1) Introduced myself; 2) Explained my research areas 3) Proposed to them my research contract; 4) Explained their right as a participant to withdraw at any point without giving any reasons. The purpose of the initial contact was to build rapport and to convey their level of involvement if they agreed to participate in my study, and to give them an opportunity to ask questions about my research areas before agreeing to sign the research consent form (Appendix 4).

Two of the full-time counsellors from two different schools requested that I seek permission from their school principals before the interviews were conducted. I thus sent a letter of informed consent (Appendix 1) to the principal of the school. I am infinitely grateful for the help of the gatekeepers of data, in my case it was the school principals who give me permission to interview their school counsellors. However, there were a few schools and student counselling centres which did not give me a reply despite several attempts and hence access to their information was denied.

3.3.3 Profile of participants.

The profile of the research participants includes full-time and part-time school counsellors, counsellors trained by MOE who are stationed in a school or employed by two different schools on a part-time basis. There were also counsellors from organizations such as the Family service centre and Community Care Centre whom the schools engaged to run

guidance programmes or psycho-educational programmes or workshops on preventive strategies. I have 9 female counsellors and 2 male counsellors.

The table below gives information about my research participants in respect of their basic demography, counselling experience and qualifications. I have included counsellors with diverse backgrounds and experiences to enrich the research findings. Most full time counsellors employed by the schools may not need to run STEP-UP (Social work to empower and utilize the potential of the pupils) programmes and may not be doing various workshops mentioned in this study. Most schools engage outside counsellors from other agencies to run those programmes and workshops for the schools. It was for this reason that I involved counsellors from various backgrounds in order to hear their voices and to find out their experience of working with our secondary school pupils.

The similarity across all the participants is that they are all working with Singapore government secondary school pupils. The pupils they work with ranged from the age of 13 to 17 at the time of interviews. Pupils were then studied at the levels of Sec one to Sec 4 (in the Express Stream) or Sec 1 to Sec 5 (in the Normal Stream). The schools at which the counsellors work are mainly neighbourhood schools (meaning a mixture of Express Stream and Normal Stream pupils as compared to those Special schools with solely Express Stream and Music, Language or other Elective Programmes. (Special schools rank higher academically in Singapore). One of the schools is a Catholic secondary school.

| | M/F | Age | Job | Counselling experience | Degree in Counselling training |
|-----|-----|-----|-----------------------------|---|--|
| 101 | F | 42 | Full time school counsellor | 17 years teaching, 2 year full time counselling | Advanced Post Grad Dip in Counselling & Guidance; Dip in Sch based Counselling |
| 102 | F | 61 | Part time | 38 years teaching, 1 | Diploma in School based Counselling |

| | | | | | |
|-----|---|----|---|---|--|
| | | | school counsellor | year counselling | |
| 103 | F | 40 | Full time school counsellor | 4 years counselling | Diploma in School based Counselling |
| 104 | F | 58 | Part time school counsellor | 23 year teaching 4 years counselling | Diploma in School based Counselling |
| 105 | F | 26 | Part time school counsellor | 5 years counselling | BA major in Social Work & Psychology, MA in Social Science (Specialize in Counselling) |
| 106 | F | 31 | Counsellor from FSC | 9 year counselling | BA in Psychology Post Grad Dip (Social Work) |
| 107 | F | 27 | Counsellor from FSC | 3 years counselling | MA in Social Science (Specialized in Counselling) |
| 108 | F | 24 | Counsellor from FSC | 3 years counselling | BA in Social Work |
| 109 | M | 28 | Counsellor from Community Care | 5 years counselling | BA in Social Work |
| 110 | F | 29 | Counsellor from Community Care | 5 years counselling | BA in Social Work |
| 111 | M | 27 | Counsellor from FSC | 4 years counselling | BA in Social Work |

Table 3.1 Demography of research participants

3.3.3.1 Participants' experience

The participants of the study range from counsellors who were rather new in the field to 9 years of counselling experience. I have tried to include counsellors who work with secondary school pupils on different levels of involvement such as, full-time in-house counsellor, counsellors that the school involved in various programmes such as Guidance Programme (GP), STEP-UP Programme and other remedial counselling services, to provide a variety of job scopes, and probably a variety of experiences.

Participants 101 and 103 were formally teachers and later became full time counsellors; 102 and 104 are retired teachers and a vice-principal. This is a trend in Singapore schools. The local MOE has recruited many retired teachers and provides a track for the teachers to change career from teaching to counselling. Participant 102 has had 38 years of teaching and other administrative experience in the educational system. Participant 104 had 23 years of experience as a teacher before her earlier retirement. The rest of the counsellors are from family service centres and community care centres that the secondary schools engaged to help with the counselling service and to run workshops in schools.

3.3.3.2 Participants' education profile

All the participants received formal counselling training. The counselling qualification for former teachers is Dip in School based Counselling. MOE provides training for them. Participant 101 has an advanced post graduate diploma apart from having the training from MOE. The other counsellors from external agencies are mostly trained in Social work or psychology by the National University of Singapore and some of them took on a higher degree such as post graduate diploma or MA degree in social science or counselling.

3.3.4 Ethical issues

3.3.3.1 Informed consent

All the participants were invited to participate in the research and contracts were signed after my initial visit when everything was explained to them.

I was very aware that doing qualitative research studies, the participants were actually doing me a favour by sharing their personal thoughts and feelings and supplying information to me for my studies. Therefore the level of involvement, the right and benefits/incentives were clearly spelt out, so that the participants were well informed of what was going to happen and had the opportunity to decline or withdraw from participation without giving any reasons.

All the participants agreed to participate and gave permission for the interviews to be audio taped and transcribed except for one counsellor. She was not comfortable with the audio recording and she insisted that she did not even want to disclose the names of the schools she was working with although I reassured her that names of schools would not appear in writing. She was afraid that she might be identified. She stated that Singapore is a very small country and the identification of a counsellor is comparatively easy compared to other countries. However, she did not mind me jotting down notes during the interview sessions. I showed that I respected her anonymity and reassured her that the data collected will be treated with care and all the information coded will be kept anonymous. She felt much relieved and expressed willingness to share her experience and feelings as long as there was no audio recording.

3.3.4.2 Confidentiality

I explained to all the participants that their names will be kept anonymous so that their

personal identity will not be disclosed. I showed them how I would identify each participant with a number (101, 102, 103....111) and that the transcript of every interview session would be given a number. For example, the transcript of the first interview session with participant 101 will be named 101; transcript of second interview session with participant 101 will be named 201; transcript of first interview session with participant 102 will be named 102 and the second interview session with participant 102 will be named 202.

I also informed the participants that they would be given a chance to read my transcript and they were free to let me know if there was any part of the sharing that they would not want to be quoted in my report. All this effort was to ensure the participants' security so that they could speak freely without worrying that any information shared with me would put them in an embarrassing and regrettable situation.

3.3.4.3 Relationship with participants

I have tried to invest time to build a trusting relationship with my research participants. I met the interviewees for two sessions of interview each, each session lasting for about one hour, except for the combined sessions. 107 and 108, and 109 and 110 are combined interview sessions, meaning I met two counsellors who work for the same organization together. They suggested they meet me together as they were involved in the same programmes. I had in total four meetings with each participant. The first visit was a half an hour brief introduction and explanation of my research, that session was also for the purpose of rapport building. After the two semi-structured interviews, I visited them one by one again to show them the script and gave them a souvenir.

Besides, there were numerous emails and phone calls. I felt that the participants were sincere and in the spirit of helping me with my research, they have gone extra miles to share with me some very deep feelings. I was very shocked when one participant expressed an intention to resign as a counsellor, commenting that to continue work with the secondary school pupils will result in their early death. It was after the recording session

while we were walking out of the counselling room. I assured the participant that everything I observed and heard would become anonymous data and will be analyzed and that was fine. I also repeated that anyone could withdraw from the study if they had reservations.

On one occasion, a school counsellor was near to tears and she was about to cry in front of me. She described about her dilemma of wanting to do more for the school pupils but facing some restrictions. I was very much tempted to hug her but I waited and observed before continuing the conversation with her. I showed empathy verbally, and she explained later that it was because of the school system that she felt like she was “fighting fire” all the time. It was not the interview questions that distressed or upset her.

On another occasion, the school counsellor shared a dilemma she was in and she asked my opinions because she thought I should know as I have worked as a school counsellor. I was naturally tempted to give my views, but I refrained from doing so. She later shared with me that she found the interview session made her think and reflect on the practice and her usual ways of working. She even thanked me for the therapeutic effect of talking to me.

These were moments, of which there were many, when I felt that I was close to them and I felt for them and was very touched and amazed by their dedication and sacrifice. I paid another brief visit to each of the participants after the two interview sessions. I felt that I could not leave my research field without showing my gratitude. They have trusted me by sharing with me their inner thoughts and feelings. I gave each of them a souvenir. Two participants invited me for lunch as it was lunch hour. Most of them said I could always call them to confirm details or for clarification.

I feel that I have built very good friendships with my participants; probably they saw me as an insider who understood their experience. There was trust between us. One counsellor emailed in between the two interview sessions for some advice on personal

matters (not related to the interviews). I tried to give her a few general guidelines but nothing too personal. I found handling my researcher and participant relationship needed a lot of sensitivity.

Throughout the whole research process I was reminded that I had to keep a professional relationship with them, the relationship is close and based on trust, but not so personal or intimate that it might affect my perspective when dealing with data.

I took advice from Seidman (1991 and 1998, in Marshall & Rossman, 2006) who advocates the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee should have the following characteristics: rapport, interest, attention and good manners on the part of the interviewers. Seidman also stressed that building rapport with interviewees is very important, but he emphasizes “too much or too little rapport can lead to distortion of what the participant reconstructs in the interview”.

I also took advice from Marshall and Rossman (2006) to build a trusting relationship, to constantly convey the attitude and message to the participants that they had the knowledge about their experience and their views were valuable and useful.

3.4 *Data collection*

3.4.1 *Interviews*

I identified these few broad topics to guide the interview, and it was not meant to set limitations to my research. The actual interview questions designed were open questions, meaning the questions were not meant to be answered in a simple way such as “yes” or “no” but were broadly designed for the interviewees to share their experience and their views in depth. I had informed the participants that there were no right or wrong answers and they can choose to answer the questions in whatever way they want. I believed that when participants disclosed their inner feelings and thoughts without fear of being judged or other reservation, it would be closer to the local real life situation of context under study.

My main research question was to get a description of the role and experience from the counsellors' perspective.

During the first session: General questions about role/job/experience were asked

1. Describe your counselling experience with pupils.
2. Share your most satisfactory moment of your job.
3. Can you share some of the challenges faced?
4. How do you think pupils can be helped (normally what do you do when pupils are referred to you and how)?
5. How do you feel about working as counsellor in a school setting in Singapore?

During the second session questions about relating to the wider context were asked.

1. How do you relate the pupils you counsel to the wider context (parents/ school/ or society)?
2. Are there any factors that enable or inhibit the way counsellors carry out their role in the current Singapore secondary school system?
3. Is there anything you would like to add?

Compared with the initial design of the interview questions, I have changed the three interview sessions to two interview sessions with each participant, because:

1. Most of the questions were answered during the first interview session.
2. The voluminous data collected and the answers given by the participants were quite similar and repetitive after a while. There was no new theme found from the interview sessions. When I came close to the end of the second interview with the participants, I decided the saturation point was reached

3.4.2 Recording

All of the interview sessions were recorded using a digital recording device except for one participant as mentioned earlier. All the recordings were clear except for interview session 109/110. We were having the interview in a counselling room when the cleaner of the building started to vacuum the outside carpeted area. The noise was very loud and in adjusting the recorder I accidentally turned it off. As a result, half of the recording session disappeared. Fortunately I kept my written record and was able to trace the wording and sentences of the participant immediately. During the next session, the participant helped me to fill in some of the missing parts of the information. This participant was really helpful and tried to take care that the recorder worked throughout the second interview session by holding it and speaking directly into the device. The interviewee did not want the evidence of my research to be lost or have to repeat the same conversation twice. When I asked why they did not mind the recording, they said no-one would recognise their voice.

3.4.3 *Transcript*

I did all of the transcript myself within a day or two, except for one week when there were three interview sessions. I then had to stretch my work schedule to the following week. At the beginning, I kept rewinding the tape as some of the participants spoke very fast. Initially one transcript needed 6 – 8 hours to complete. I gradually become more experienced. I did not rewind that often and I learnt to type according to what I could hear from the recording, with the help of my written notes. I listened to each recording 5 to 6 times and towards the end of a few interview sessions, I managed to complete one verbatim script within four or five hours. The transcript was done without trying to “tidy up” the transcripts or to make it sound better. Therefore the script appears with the colloquial Singish style of verbal language, many “ya”, “lah”, “you know” etc.

I have enclosed two transcripts in this thesis. (Appendix 6 (a), 6 (b))

3.5 *Data analysis*

After the transcript was done, I listened to the tape one more time and went through the scripts line by line to double check them against my written notes to ensure the accuracy of the data. I employed an adapted grounded theory strategy and developed an analysis.

The transcripts were read and reread many times. I wrote memos and notes when I visited my research sites and after meeting my interviewees. I always took out my journal to make some entries when I thought of something. I was warned that my memory would certainly fail me if I did not do so. In order to participate rigorously in the research, I regularly met one of my seniors, who had just completed her EdD thesis to discuss some of the issues faced doing research. She gave me invaluable feedback on the various aspects of research.

3.5.1 *Coding and emerging themes*

I sorted out data of emerging themes following an inductive approach of analysis (Hatch, 2002: 162 – 179; Glaser and Strauss 1967). I coded the transcripts manually by identifying the themes and categories. There were more than 100 themes at the beginning of coding. I then grouped some of the themes of similar nature together to reduce the volume and to make the data more manageable.

The use of grounded theory helped me to slow down my judgment and interpretation, I had to constantly compare and identify the emerging themes.

3.5.2 *QDA computer software*

A computer software QDA later helped me with the retrieval of data with a much faster

speed. It also provides data organization. When the data was coded with a particular theme, all the data coded under the same theme can be printed out side by side. It helps the comparison process within a single case or across all the cases. The coding system also helped me identify the different repeated concepts and categories of the data.

3.5.3 *Criteria of soundness*

In the quantitative research, the criteria of soundness are based on: internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. Lincoln and Guba (2003) propose an alternative construct for the criteria of soundness for qualitative research: 1) credibility (parallel to internal validity); 2) transferability (Generalizability in quantitative research); 3) dependability (Reliability in quantitative research); and 4) confirmability (the conventional concept of objectivity)

3.5.3.1 Credibility

The purpose of credibility is to demonstrate that the enquiry was conducted in such a manner that the subject under study was appropriately identified and described. Lincoln and Guba (2003) hold that, the credibility/believability of qualitative research should be “credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities”. Therefore as a researcher, the detailed and in-depth description of the problem/setting need to be provided to show the complexity of the process. The interaction was embedded with data derived from the setting.

3.5.3.2 Transferability

Lincoln and Guba argue that the usefulness of a research finding for others in similar situations depends on how well this finding applies to another context. In order to make

the findings applicable to another similar context, researchers need to show as transparently as possible how the data was gathered. Detailed descriptions of the research participants, and other possible contextual and cultural factors that might have an effect on the research findings, or contribute to the issues under study need to be given. Thus the reader is in a better position to make decisions or judgements as to how well the theories generated, or patterns found, can be transferred to give insight into understanding another similar situation.

Qualitative research findings are not for making generalizations, however, with the dense description given, the transferability aspect will be made clear.

3.5.3.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the possible constant results if the studies were to be repeated. It is impossible for qualitative research to be replicable as the social world is always being constructed and constantly changing. Therefore the concept of replicability is a problematic concept in qualitative research. Kidder (as cited in Fielding & Fielding, 1986) argues that “what matters is that each additional piece of evidence is consistent with the other observations and not that each observation is identical”. So as long as the results of different research are consistent rather than contradicting, it is considered dependable.

The social world exists in a continually fluid state, however, and as researchers we need to ensure dependability by consciously trying to account for changing conditions in the study. These attempts to note the changing conditions of the setting and subject under study are useful for the reader to note and to judge for dependability.

3.5.3.4 Confirmability

The confirmability proposed by Lincoln and Guba captures the traditional concept of

objectivity. Lincoln and Guba stress the need for the research findings to be confirmed by another person. The heart of the issue is whether the logic and interpretive nature can be made transparent to others. The reader can agree with or confirm the interpretation made and conclusions drawn. I have kept the voice recordings and transcripts of my every interview session well and this research evidence of data will be available for checking for confirmability.

Guba and Lincoln (2003) use “authenticity” as a criterion for qualitative research. It reflects the turn of the social inquiry a farewell to criteriology (Schwandt, 1996). Miller (2004) suggest that “All we sociologist have are stories. Some come from other people, some from our interactions with others. What matters is to understand how and where the stories are produced”.

For this study, descriptions of the local socio-economical background and the meritocracy in the local education system were given. I have detailed the data gathering process and the voice of the participants was extensively quoted verbatim. Readers can make judgments about the insights gained in this study and apply them in theorizing about social life.

3.6 *Data interpretation*

3.6.1 *Logic of interpretation*

Mason (1996) emphasized that the organization and sorting of data were not conceptually neutral activities. I have tried to make sure that the themes emerged from, and are grounded in, the data. The analysis is derived from working “up from the data” rather than imposing some theory and dipping into the data for fragments to support it. Therefore the quotations of excerpts in the next Section are constitutive of the development of sub-themes and later to the main theme of the study, rather than illustrative of any preoccupied themes. Some quotations are chosen and some are not because the chosen

ones were more typical and illuminative to a particular theme. They are particularly articulative of, and probably representative of a particular topic under study.

3.6.2 Contextual components in the data

Fielding and Fielding (1986) coded Simmel's contention that "all social life has a contextual dimension that gives it a form and an interpretative dimension that provides it with content". In Singapore's unique context: the social-economic dimension, the unique educational system that is based on meritocracy, the wider culture and society or the traditional Chinese values about success and academic achievement, the traditional teaching or counselling styles adopted by the system, and the movement of the school counselling system, to name a few, that would probably help to confirm or account for the logic of interpretation for this research study.

Fielding and Fielding (1986) suggest the utility of the interpretative effort by searching for plausible alternatives (1986: 36). They emphasize that when doing research we have to bear in mind that there is always more than what is on the surface of the text. Therefore, I took into consideration the contextual components when I did the data analysis.

Section 2 – Research finding and analysis

Section two of the thesis displays and analyses the research findings. It consists of chapters 4 – 6. These chapters discuss the two central themes that emerged from the analysis of data for which an adapted grounded methodology approach was used.

The two over-arching themes emerging from the data are: the roles of the counsellors and the dilemmas faced by the counsellors working with Singapore secondary schools.

The first central theme describes the roles of the counsellors, how they relate to the pupils referred to them and the work they do. This theme emerged from the comparison of the similarities of the participants. The counsellors describe what they do when pupils are referred to them. Various approaches that counsellors used were summarized and analyzed under the themes of remedial, developmental and preventive. The counselling models that participants used to build rapport with pupils were also described.

The second central theme that emerged was the dilemmas faced by the counsellors. This dilemma includes contextual and environmental factors. I have also included a summary on factors that enabled and inhibited the roles of the counsellors.

Overview of chapters 4 – 7

Chapter 4 describes the role of the counsellors when working with different profiles of pupils. The profiles of pupils include mandatory counselling, self-harm and abuse cases which are deemed to need immediate attention; behavioural and disciplinary problems where remedial work is needed; pupils with family problem, peer influence, low motivation, early drop out and stress; developmental, self-esteem and interrelated problems, where group work is needed. The profiles of the pupils fit the nature of work in the school setting: remedial, preventive and development. The roles of the counsellors are to counsel and to facilitate group work rather than to discipline or to do remedial work.

Chapter 5 describes the common counselling approach that the counsellors in this study disclosed. Counsellors mainly use a combination of relational and strength based approach which stresses rapport building and empowerment of pupils to help them make decisions which deal with problems faced. The role with which the counsellors most closely identified was basically to counsel, meaning to build a therapeutic relationship so that they can affect change in pupils' lives.

Chapter 6 describes counsellors' experiences including both negative and positive. The over-arching theme of the dilemmas faced by counsellors will be discussed. The contextual and environmental factors that enable or inhibit the roles of counsellors are identified.

Chapter 4 Roles of the school counsellor (Part 1): Flexible role description

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 presents the role of the counsellors when working with pupils of different backgrounds. The pupil profiles are classified according to the problems faced by the pupils when referred for counselling. The data analysis adopted a bottom up method. The various classifications can be further classified under the several approaches counsellors used.

4.2 Role described by pupil profile

This category came out from the verbatim comments of counsellors 107 and 108

“Our role depends on the work we do with them, for example, when we need to conduct a sexuality workshop, then our role will be to deliver the message of abstinence and impart necessary knowledge to them’

Participant 101, when working with a disciplinary case she said,

“my role is when they come in, when the teacher refer is to get them to understand where they have gone wrong, and how to accept the punishment.” (101)

Participant 105, when using the Guidance Programme (GP), said her role was to help the pupils get out (meaning emerge successfully) of the programme so that they do not have to be mandated to come. When she did the “love and relationship” workshop, she said her role was “to enhance skills and insights”. When she conducted a workshop for parents, her role focused more on “life skills training”. So, her role changes from a counsellor to a group facilitator to a workshop trainer.

I did not start off by investigating profiles of the pupils but when counsellors shared their experience and described their role, they normally related their role to the work they do

and it was inseparable from the pupils they work with, and it varies according to different profiles of pupils. The common approach used by the counsellors, which emerged from the various ways that they described their role, was flexibly dependent on the types of pupils they worked with.

According to the above mentioned flexible role descriptions, participants did not see their role as fixed (bound). They saw their roles as dependent on the various situations they found working with different pupils, different programmes they ran, and different functions in the school setting. Due to this common approach derived from the data analysis, I put those several themes (different functions with different pupils/people) together under a broader theme of flexible role description: The role dependent upon the pupils' profiles.

In the following, I will display the roles/work as described by the school counsellors. Excerpts from the interviews will be quoted. The quotations are basically constitutive to the emergent themes as a result of comparison within and across the different interview participants. I have chosen to use the participants' own voice and own language (sometimes the language used was Singlish, which is a special local colloquial usage) so that the voice of the counsellors can be heard (Lichtman, 2006: 19).

4.2.1 Mandatory cases and those in need of immediate counselling

The table below shows the role, the challenges and approaches counsellors used when dealing with mandatory and cases that needed immediate counselling

| Student profiles | Situations faced | Approaches | Roles/work |
|------------------|---|---|---|
| GP | Pupils refuse change Some parents not supportive | Individual/group/ family/community approach | Group facilitator to conduct group guidance activities, take pupils to visit a rehabilitation centre, a |

| | | | |
|-------------------|--|---|--|
| | | | prison, conduct family counselling, parenting talks/workshops. |
| Smoking cessation | Pupils referred after punishment and are mainly involuntary cases | Group work, psycho-education Group, buddy system | Provide group facilitation, give affirmation and support changes. |
| Abuse cases | It takes a much longer time to help pupils cope with trauma. | Individual counselling, police will be involved. | Role as counsellor to help pupils cope with emotions. Give advice to help them deal with the future and not to accept abuse. |
| Self harm cases | Pupils feel in control when they cut. There are unhealed wounds Usually there will be other behavioural problems | Group work, plus individual approach | Run group work to build rapport and help pupils stop cutting, use group activities to facilitate change. Be strict and talk in private when there are behavioural problems. |

Table 4.2.1 The role of counsellors working with mandatory case and those in need of immediate counselling

4.2.1.1 Guidance programme

Counsellors' work with Guidance Programme (GP) pupils basically described their role as

counsellors and group work facilitators. GP is a mandatory counselling programme for pupils under the age of 18 caught by the police for petty crimes. The programme runs for six months and the counsellors need to work with the pupils, parents and the school collaboratively to help the pupils to get out of the programme (it means to emerge successfully from the programme). There are compulsory counselling sessions for both the pupils and the parents. The role of the counsellors is to help the pupils complete the six months mandatory guidance programme. Their work includes individual and family counselling, providing group guidance activities, taking pupils to visit rehabilitation centres, prisons and to organize camps for pupils. Counsellors need to conduct talks and workshops for parents. Counsellors also work closely with the school Disciplinary Master (DM), form teacher and principal to get the pupils report for assessment.

I was running the GP, Guidance Program. Ya, at the end of the 6 months of counselling them, I'm not expecting them to show me any results. (109)

Counsellors under GP normally get support from the police, school and parents. Besides normal counselling and group activities, they also need to do spot checks and make phone calls to see the pupils are abiding by the curfew set. It is very challenging, as the pupils are referred involuntarily. They may not open up with the counsellors.

We remind them, then after that send out letters. Last resort is to send an official letter. And they will be back in the hands of the law. Many of them rather stay in counselling than getting into troubles. (111)

4.2.1.2 *Smoking cessation*

It is against school rules for pupils to smoke in school. After the punishment from DM, the pupils are given the choice of attending the smoke cessation counselling outside school or in the school guidance centre. Most pupils will choose to attend the in-house counselling session within the school compound which is more convenient. The role of

the school counsellor is to help the pupils stop smoking.

Participant 101 shared her experience working with pupils under smoking cessation. She has successfully helped many pupils stop smoking. She uses a group work approach to address the issues of smoking. Basically counsellors use a psycho-educational model to help the pupils to stop smoking gradually.

When they gather together, they are very sincere and they are very comfortable with each other, they give affirmations and supports to each other as they know each other very well. This is their group dynamic. (111)

It is very interesting. They will come in to tell me who is smoking and who is not smoking. They will tell this student is still smoking they tells secret and they support each other. (111)

4.2.1.3 Abuse cases

Participant 104 shared her experience working with abuse cases. Her role of working with cases of abused is to counsel the pupils to cope with the intense emotions and educate the pupils not to accept abuse in the future.

Working with cases of abuse by family is challenging. For this type of cases, it will take a much longer time. I will firstly try to help the child to cope the emotions. Secondary, I will help the child to deal with the future, the child must not accept abuse in the future. (104)

4.2.1.4 Self harm cases

Participant 109 said counselling the self harm group was not easy. Firstly they were not self referred, and secondly they may not tell the counsellor what bothers them, and there are always other issues needing to be worked on. The role of the school counsellors is to

help the self harming pupils to stop cutting themselves.

The girls in my self harm group, they feel so painful they need to cut to feel the pain, to have a feeling that “I am still alive” They decide how many strokes to cut, how deep to cut and how often they cut until they were addicted to cutting. The more they cut the deeper they cut because the initial thrills could not satisfied them. I work with the issues by talking to them, talking with the family. (109)

I have this girl who used to self harm. She finally knew that I care and concern when we went to a camp. However, she threw tantrum, she threw the chair across the class. I have to be stern, but I didn’t shout... I had to explain how her action affected the emotions of others. (110)

4.2.2 Pupils with behavioural problems

The table below gives an overview of the role of counsellors working with pupils with behaviour problems

| Student Profiles | Situations faced | Approaches | Role/work |
|------------------|--|---|---|
| STEP-UP | Pupils, high risk, disengaged, disinterested, do not listen, defiant playing truant Teachers cannot handle. Pupils do not fit into the education system. Pupils not interested in the content of the STEP-UP programme. | 10 sessions group work (Counsellor functions as group facilitator) | Conduct group sessions, anger management workshop. Teach skills. Counsellors need to deliver the programme even if the pupils are not listening. |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| Disciplinary Problems | Post-disciplinary counselling: pupils reluctant to come | Individual counselling after caning/suspension | Counsel pupils for emotional or other issues |
| | Pre-disciplinary counselling: Pupils do not see the rationale for punishment | Individual counselling before canning/suspension | Counsel pupils to accept punishment |

Table 4.2.2 The role of counsellors working with pupils with behavioural problems

4.2.2.1 *Behavioural problems*

Counsellors need to conduct workshops and group work for this group of pupils. These pupils are considered to be at-risk. Their behavioural problems described by the counsellors include fighting, smoking, talking back, expressing anger, showing aggressive behaviours towards teachers and pupils, involvement in illegal activities or gang related activities in schools. Teachers referred the pupils for counselling because these pupils were difficult to manage. Participant 110 shared her experience of working with the STEP-UP Programme:

I initially didn't understand them, they are very noisy, they have behavioural problems, playing truant, hanging out, defiant and the teachers cannot control them. They are defiant and they call for attention. (109)

Now a days the pupils in school do not listen...They are not afraid to show their temper, they will just show their impatience and unhappiness in front of us when we go in to conduct group work and workshops. (109)

When a group of them from different classes were referred to attend the STEP-UP or other group work, counsellors said it was very challenging to manage them, not to mention to deliver the programme when the pupils were not interested in listening. The pupils are basically forced to attend the workshop in the first place.

4.2.2.2 STEP-UP Programme

Counsellors conduct many and different kinds of workshops and group work for pupils. STEP-UP is one of the popular programmes in Singapore secondary schools. Pupils with behaviour problems are considered at-risk pupils and are frequently referred to attend the STEP-UP programme.

STEP-UP (Social work to empower and utilize the potential of the pupils) is a programme for at-risk pupils such as the delinquent, defiant and ill-disciplined pupils. This group of pupils is identified from various levels and they are referred to attend the STEP-UP Programme. Schools normally engaged counsellors or social workers from the outside community family service centres or counselling centres to do this programme. The programme comprises approximately 10 sessions spread over a school term. Pupils will be divided into groups of 10 – 15 pupils and counsellors will take them through a series of group activities to address some of the issues they may face and the STEP-UP programme usually ends with a service learning programme.

Participant 107 shared the challenges she faced when working with pupils attending the STEP-UP Programme

Teachers refer the very quiet students who do not speak up in class. And the teacher feels that there is difficulty for him/her to relate to other students. (107)

The group that we work with is very challenging because most of the time every youth that is in the group is referred by the teacher for some issues. So when they all come together it is quite challenging. (108)

Participant 107 said it was hard to get the pupils to respond as they are mainly involuntary pupils identified by the school to stay back after school for the programme.

Participant 111 shared the same challenge. It was not easy to go in depth with them, it seems difficult to get their attention or cooperation. But the role of the counsellors doing

the STEP-UP Programme is to deliver and complete the programme even if the pupils are not listening. .

We have done communication skills. Some of these pupils find it hard to express themselves, they either communicate through violence, aggressive behaviour, or by withdrawal. A lot of emotions have to do with anger. (211)

It is hard to go in depth with the pupils. We use group work to start them off. Whether they open up to share is another case. It is especially hard for boys, difficult for them to admit there is problem, they laugh it off or continue to misbehave. They do not even think there is a problem... We can teach and teach but the teaching doesn't get into their heart or doesn't touch their lives..... you can tell because they will start talking, turning the pen, doing funny thing to each other, they are just being distracted. (211)

4.2.3 *Disciplinary problems*

4.2.3.1 *Post disciplinary counselling*

The pupils with behavioural problems are the most likely to become disciplinary cases. Normally counsellors are involved in post-disciplinary counselling. After the disciplinary action is carried out, and the disciplinary committee used their judgment to see if the pupils who infringe school rules needs further counselling. The pupils will be referred to the school counsellors to follow up if there are emotional or other issues needing to be addressed. The role of the counsellor is to consult with pupils if there are other issues and help them to realise what went wrong in their behaviour.

And I think that is quite a normal process in most of the schools. The students being sent for disciplinary action like caning or suspension. And after that getting sent for counselling. I don't think that that is conflicting. (205)

Let's say for example, they got into a fight. The school will tell them, because of this issue, there may be other things that you need to sort out. The school is quite clear in communicating with the youths. So when it comes to me, I will want to hear it from their point of view. What do they hear from the teachers, and what is their perspective.

That's when I start to work. and hopefully along the way we can set some goals together.
(205)

4.2.3.2 *Pre-disciplinary cases*

For upper secondary cases when pupils are involved in serious disciplinary cases, they are sent for counselling. The role of the school counsellor is to help the offender (pupil) know where he has gone wrong and to accept punishment. Normally caning is for boys and is not for girls. Girls committing a similar offence will get a different punishment from boys.

So my role is when they come in, when the teacher refers is to get them to understand where they have gone wrong, and how to accept the punishment. They have to accept the punishment and that's something quite difficult because sometime the kids don't see why they are punished in the first place. They may feel the teachers are forever punishing them or you know pick on by their teachers that kind of feeling. So you have to really explain to the kid what went wrong so they can really understand and they can cooperate by going for their punishment so to speak. (201)

4.2.4 *Family issues*

Most counsellors expressed the view that pupils' problems might not have arisen had the family been supportive. The family is supposed to be a place for nurturing young children but when the family is in trouble or has become unstable due to social change, there is no place to hide for the children. Worse still, some of the pupils' problems are created by the family. When working with pupils with family issues, the counsellors' role is to work closely with the family to help the pupils. But when families are not supportive, they will counsel the pupils alone. The school counsellors take on the role of the family to nurture and to help the pupils solve difficulties that they face.

Some of them didn't come to school because they need to take care of the sibling, they have to work to support the family, there are financial issues. Some of them the parents did not care if they were in school or not. (103)

Pupils with family issues, for example mothers hurling very insensitive remarks to children then they come to school crying they cannot concentrate on their lesson or they tell their children you know, no need to go to school so stupid anyway...parents caning their children, belting their children, banging their children's head against the window or wall.. you know this sort of thing.... Vulgarity against the children so they come in crying (201)

Parents are working, ya, more dual income. So they are left unattended, like latchkey...A lot of parents like to quarrel. Quarrel, or they work very late. They don't care. I mean, the students think that they don't care. (109)

Many of them are from not very well to do families-middle range income families. And there are many things that they cannot afford. Some of them can come in for just stealing a chocolate bar. (111)

Working with the dysfunctional family, family broken, parents separated, or parents living under same roof but divorced or under PPO (Personal Protection Order). Others like absent of father, parents coping with their own conflicts. (204)

4.2.5 Peer issues

Counsellors are aware of the peer influence on pupils. Therefore counsellors conduct workshops on peer influences and use a group approach when working with secondary school pupils.

Participant 105 compared the profiles between the Express and Normal Stream pupils, finding that the Express Stream are more concerned about school work and issues of counselling were more stress related; whereas the Normal Stream pupils are more susceptible to peer influence.

For example, a few of them, may be mischievous pupils come together, may be they do not have ill intention but because of this collective strength, they play truant and they are bold to do thing together miss school and play truancy. (105)

All the more, probably to peer influence, cause them to further loose interest. (105)

Especially when it comes to stealing behaviour. Sometimes they see what their friends have and they start comparing. (111)

Inhaling problems like smoking, usually boys are more caught but the girls are more discreet. The negative peer influence is very prevalence. (204)

4.2.6 *Pupils without motivation for study*

A few counsellors described their role as a motivator. They find it challenging to motivate the pupils who do not have the inner motivation for study.

They are motivated to play the game but not motivated in the studies the way teachers want them to. So normally I do not try to improve their studies but just address the emotional or whatever issues they come in with. (204)

So for these cases that refuse changes. It is very hard to motivate changes. (205)

(The contextual factors that contribute to the lack of motivation will be discussed in section 3)

4.2.7 *Pupils' potential for early drop out of school*

When pupils have financial issues, for example, when they need to stay at home to care for the siblings, or when pupils are not interested in their studies due to lack of success in their school experience, they fall prey to early school drop out.

Counsellors feel that many pupils in the Normal Stream never experience success in school and they end up leaving school earlier. Participant 103, as a full-time school counsellor, was routinely expected to make home visits. Her role was to find out what actually happened to discourage the pupil, so as to help prevent pupils from dropping out of school early. She felt that when pupils frequently fail in their studies, they will eventually lose interest in studying and become likely to drop out of the school system. When she shared this part of her role investigating the absentees, she did feel a bit apprehensive and unsure

if this was supposed to be the role of a school counsellor.

Normally the social worker from the STEP-UP Programme does most of the home visits, especially for those who are not coming to school. Many pupils are not coming to school sometimes there can be up to 100 (in number) (203)

She further explained the early drop out of pupils was probably due to lack of success in their studies.

those who are ready to drop out, those who are really very lost in their academic and have given up do not think very much about their future. They said I cannot cope now, I cannot follow, I'm gonna drop out from this system. ...(203)

The counsellor mentioned that her role among this group of pupils was to do home visits to investigate the cause of absence. She mentioned that sometimes the home visit reveals a story totally different from what the pupils told her and progress was rather limited if the school worked alone without the support from the family. She suggested to the school that they should establish a better tracking system for attendance of pupils.

(The feeling of lack of success for the Normal Stream pupils will be discussed in the portion of Dilemmas Faced by counsellors)

4.2.8 *Stress related*

Participants in this study mentioned that the pupils in the Singapore secondary system experience a lot of stress. The counsellors' role is to conduct stress release programmes to help pupils cope with the stress-related problems.

Pupils from the Express Stream share issues related to school work and competentness, have more stress related problems which are more performance based...because they really want to perform... there is a desire to want to perform, to want to better, they weigh the identity as important according to the marks they get. (105)

Even pupils in the Normal Stream were concerned about study and examinations.

Participant 103 worked with Normal Stream pupils and she was surprised to find that the pupils from the Normal Stream actually are worried about the school work.

We did a survey last year. Many of them cited studies were one of the worries. Generally the teachers' feedback and the impression got was that the pupils do not bother about studies. But it is one of the main stress for the pupil. They may show they do not care, they may give the impression that studies is last thing in their mind, but actually, the survey result shown a totally different picture. (103)

Some of the stress faced by pupils may not be academic related. They may have other emotional problem due to many other stresses or reasons but they are obviously angry teenagers. Participant 102 shared her experience of working with angry pupils

I teach them to tense up and to relax. Teenagers are always angry and the negative energy can cause them very rebellious. I feel that before we can make them think of the situation we need to help them to release the stress first. (202)

The table below gives a summary on the role of the counsellors working with the above mentioned pupils mentioned from 4.2.4 to 4.2.8.

| Pupils Profile | Situations faced | Approaches | Role/work |
|----------------|---|---|--|
| Family issues | Dual income family, Pupils not supervised at home, inappropriate parenting, broken family, divorce, family violence, dysfunctional family | Individual counselling when pupils are in trouble. Referred for STEP-up group approach (counsellor functions as counsellor and group facilitator) | Conduct STEP-up workshops. Work with parents to help the pupils. |
| Peer issues | Negative peer influence, collective | Individual counselling when pupils are in | Conduct STEP-UP group work, counsellor as |

| | | | |
|------------------------------|---|--|--|
| | strength committing crime in groups, lose interest in studies | trouble. Referred for STEP-UP (counsellor functions as counsellor and group facilitator) | workshop facilitator to help pupils cope with peer pressure. |
| Without motivation for study | Difficult to motivate, | Individual counselling. Referred for STEP-UP (Counsellor functions as counsellor and group facilitator) | Conduct STEP-UP or Exam skills workshop |
| Potential for early drop out | Parents do not care if they were in schools | Individual and family counselling (Counsellor functions as counsellor and consultant to family) | Home visits, develop tracking system. |
| Stress related | Pupils want to perform but couldn't manage stress | Stress management workshop (Counsellor functions as group facilitator) | Conduct workshop, help pupils develop skills |

Table 4.2.8 The role of counsellors working with pupils with preventive needs

4.2.9 Developmental issues

Older studies spoke about adolescence inevitably being a time of “storm and stress” (Hall, 1916 and Freud 1953 in Papalia et al, 2007). More recent studies have found that this

“storm and stress” is not typical and most of the adolescence go through this stage rather smoothly (Papalia et al, 2007: 453; Sigelman & Rider, 2006: 514; Santrock, 2006). Still, adolescence can be a tough time, especially when the searching for self identity and self-image are involved.

The developmental stage la. Suddenly they want to challenge a lot of things cos (because) they start to, you know, to develop a mind of their own. Then parents also headache, like hah why my children last time so guai (Meaning: submissive) forever, then now become so rebellious. (109)

a lot of them are still finding their ways as they become adults.. (105)

This has caused the counsellors to try to help the pupils to find a purpose in life, at least some short term goals.

4.2.9.1 Career Guidance Programmes

Career guidance programmes are one of the developmental programmes in ACE (Affective career education) which have been established in school since the year of 1998. Every school has one to two periods of ACE class each week ranging from 1 to 2 hours. The ACE course comprises the dimensions of self-awareness, opportunity awareness, transitional learning, decision-making skills and employability skills (Life-skills for effective living). Some schools engage outside counsellors to do career guidance workshops for the school to further enhance the career guidance programme.

Counsellor 106 who conducted such a programme shared her experience. She did interest profiling, conducted workshops on self-awareness; invited speakers from different walks of life to share work experience with the pupils; used activity based learning such as rock climbing, video clip viewing, visit to Shartec (Chef training school) to give career guidance to pupils.

We processing with them in term with their career, in a sense helping them to, explore their career repertoire...what are the great range of job they can do, probably they can be the best and excel in it. They are quite eager to experiment jobs like rock star, pop star and photographer, very skills based. May be like pet grooming, practical and hand-on kind of job. (106)

..we taught them about interview techniques and we actually interviewed them. ..Students themselves observe the fellows classmates and give feedback about how they performed during the interview session. (206)

Career education or career guidance is expected in the ACE lessons, the school that participant 106 worked with obviously doesn't have the programme. This is the reason why 106 was engaged to run the career guidance programme. The number of participants on the programme was rather small, originally 10; the number dropped as low as 4 for the last session.

4.2.10 Self esteem

Participant 111 explained that, from his observation, when pupils lack self esteem in school, they may compensate by boosting their self-esteem by other activities

Stealing without getting caught can be an achievement, a trophy that they can boast about to their friends. Because they know that they cannot boast about their studies. They know that they cannot do well. So they are looking for other ways to affirm... Little sources of achievements. (111)

He continued to describe the pupils he counselled as having very low self esteem.

Its either not very healthy, its low, or maybe they think very highly of themselves. That they are very well respected. Like bullies. So we have the bullies, as well as the bullied. (111)

I have one case, she is very critical, father in prison. So the father is not there to give her the father figure. All she could recall was ..father beating her...When talking with

friends, she was ashamed. There is something missing that the girl has her self acceptance or self-esteem. I have to ask her, when is your father coming out of the prison and what can you do. (204)

The table below gives a summary of the role of counsellors working with pupils with developmental issues

| Pupils Profile | Situations faced | Approaches | Role/work |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Career Guidance | Pupils need to take initiative to sign up or they will not be interested and the programme is not sustainable. | Individual approach Group approach (Counsellor functions as group facilitator) | Conduct career guidance workshop, administer interest profiling, teach resumé writing, interview skills and organize workplace visits and work experience. Help pupils to have a better understanding of what they can do in the future. |
| Self esteem, identity searching | Students lack of academic success, and may have disturbance in family. | Group workshop (Counsellor functions as group facilitator) | Conduct workshop to help build self-esteem, help pupils find purpose and set goals. |

Table 4.2.10 Role of counsellors working with pupils with developmental needs

4.2.11 Interrelated

Counsellors working with Normal Stream pupils think that the pupils' problems are interrelated. It wasn't easy for them to pinpoint the nature or source of the problems pupils encountered. They stated that the complexity of the problems could be interwoven within the family, school work and the personality of the pupils.

Pupils' Problems are inter-related and it is not simple

But usually I find that is not so simple. The student who is absent from school due to bullying has other personal issues. (102)

So for those ended up into the counseling room is because they seldom experience success in studies? I mean that could be one of the reasons.

It can be self-esteem, self confidence, or would like to do something? Maybe acting out also. (the problem was interrelated) (203)

Participant 104 observed that the Normal Stream students solve their problems more slowly.

Actually they are not slower, but their problems are normally multiple issues and bigger. And one problem lead to another. They are more subjected to negative influence, then they feel demoralized and lose their way. (104)

The problem for the students from Normal Stream will be much complicated and multi-faceted and it will take longer to solve, may be not to solve the problem but just to maintain. (204)

The table below gives descriptions of the role of the counsellor working with pupils with interrelated problems

| Pupils Profile | Situations faced | Approaches | Role/work |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|
| Interrelated problems | Not easy to pinpoint the nature or source of problems. Could be due to lack of success in studies, lack of confidence, self esteem, family | Group approach, Individual counselling (Counsellor functions as counsellor and group facilitator) | Help pupils to deal with the presenting problems (may not be able to deal with the root problem given the time constraint and the complexity of the problem). |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| | problems, negative peer influence, lack of problem solving skills etc. pupils may not see themselves as having problems | | |
|--|---|--|--|

Table 4.2.11 The role of counsellors working with pupils with interrelated problems

4.3 Chapter summary and discussion

4.3.1 Flexible Role Descriptions

Chapter 4 described the roles of the counsellors working in a school setting, according to their work done and how it varies with different pupils' profile. Participants see themselves functioning in a more pragmatic situation and see their roles changing according to the different profiles of pupils. It was as if they were describing their job scope or stating the purpose of a particular counselling situation. "My role is to help the pupils to accept punishment" (101), "My role is to deliver the workshop" (107, 108). On one hand it shows that the roles seem to be quite functional. It depends on the situation and varies according to the profiles of pupils. On the other hand, it also shows that the job scope of counsellors working in a school setting encompasses a lot of things (103), anything can go (101). Tension is found between this flexible role definition, useful to the counsellors, and the vaguely defined role, imposed subtly by the education and counselling system, which seems to encompass everything. Flexibility is pragmatic and accommodative that it is not role bound nor does it set limits to the service, however, stress is produced as a result of this poorly defined role. Flexible role descriptions are seen as likely to present major challenges to the existing British school counselling system (Jenkins & Polat, 2006). Though Singapore school counsellors seem to operate on a less restricted role-based regime, the findings of this study revealed that stress and struggles accompany this flexible role form of service (Details will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7).

As a whole, the participants see themselves functioning as a counsellor or as group/workshop facilitators. Besides the above two roles, participant 103 also saw herself as a programme coordinator.

4.3.2 Nature of counselling work in school: Remedial, preventive and developmental

From the above data display and according to the categories described, we can further summarize their role according to the nature of the counselling work in the school setting:

Remedial:

Of the first 3 categories mentioned in 4.2, namely the Guidance Programme and pupils who need immediate attention, the pupils who have behavioural and disciplinary problems belong to the remedial category. As the pupils are already in trouble or have been abused or need urgent care and advice, such as the self harm pupils, the function of counselling is remedial.

Preventive:

From 4.2.4 to 4.2.8, the pupils may be at-risk due to disadvantageous family backgrounds, some pupils may be more susceptible to peer influence, some due to social change, because of the dual income family situation and lack of supervision at home, lack of motivation or they may be in danger of early drop out owing to the existing education system. Hence the function or the nature of the counselling work is preventive.

Developmental:

From 4.2.9 to 4.2.10, the topics of self-esteem and career guidance are more

developmental.

This finding is consistent with the existing school counselling literature which suggests that school counselling should be focusing on work of a remedial, preventive and development nature (Hornby et al, 2003; Sink, 2005). However, there is a changing trend towards the adoption of a comprehensive whole-school approach to counselling, and it is suggested by many authors that the focus has been shifted from remediation to preventive and developmental programmes (Bemak, 2000; Burham & Jackson, 2000; Gysber & Henderson, 2001). Hornby et al (2003) observe that most counselling deals with specific problems which concern clients, but, they suggest that counselling in schools, needs to be focused on preventative and developmental issues. From the description of the participants in this study, the counsellors build very personal relationships with pupils and they wish they could be available when the pupils need them. The remedial component was very strong. The participants in this study showed a preference for remedial work. The counsellors see themselves doing personal counselling dealing with the pupils' personal, social and behavioural well-being. Participant 103 was involved in home visits for the absentees and she was not sure it was supposed to be her role, though she was involved in developing a preventive programme for pupils attendance.

The participants took on the role of the family to help pupils deal with some developmental issues such as their career development and the enhancement of their self-esteem. Again, this is in line with the global counselling movement in the changing world. Blocher (1987) wrote from the perspective of urban schools in a developed country like the US, advocating the role of professional school counsellors to address developmental issues to help pupils bridge the major discontinuities in their lives and overcome the barriers standing in the way of their positive growth and development. Counsellors can help pupils to develop necessary life skills such as self-control, anger management and conflict resolution. Some of the skills the pupils may not be able to develop earlier due to dysfunctional family or fragmental social changes.

From the statements of the counsellors who did the STEP-UP programme, one would wonder how the counsellors deal with such challenging situations, for example, when all the pupils participating in the workshops were from different levels; when they were forced to attend and when the counsellors who functioned as the workshop facilitators had to teach life-skills even if the pupils were not listening. Why the schools referred pupils whom they described as “very quiet, who do not speak up in class” for the STEP-UP programmes was beyond comprehension. The “very quiet” (107) pupils were being considered together with the “too noisy” ones as at risk pupils who were difficult to manage. The classification of pupils seems problematic. Pupils attending STEP-UP presented great challenges to our counsellors as they were neither disciplinary cases, nor were they in need of immediate attention like the mandatory cases, but were merely identified as potentially at risk pupils. According to the Comprehensive School Guidance Programme developed by Gysber (2001), preventive programmes are for all pupils, not for a small group of pupils, singled out as being potentially at risk. Even for reinforcement of potentially at risk pupils, the naming of some programmes may have negative connotations for the pupils. Invitation to participate seems to need careful handling in a school system. If it is not, then pupils’ defence mechanisms will be triggered off and the counsellors will experience greater challenges than necessary. It does seem that the effectiveness of such group work or preventive group programmes relies not solely on the counsellors but also on the perspectives and contributions of the teachers, and perhaps the other factors from the whole school environment.

It was found that some of the preventive and developmental issues were created by the school culture or a larger environment. Participants 105, 103 and 102 mentioned that the pupils in school felt the pressure and stress of wanting to perform well and some of them gave up trying as a result of constant failure. School has always been a place in which pupils fail especially in a system that stresses academic performance so much. This is in line with some literature that reports on the relentless pressure and stress of studying in the Singapore school system (Pan, 1997; The Straits Times, 2001).

4.3.3 Individual, group and family approach

From the above summary and analysis, it was found out that the role of counsellors sometimes functions as a counsellor in the traditional sense of the word and sometimes functions as a group facilitator depending on whether they use individual or group approaches.

Individual counselling is offered to pupils who need individual, face-to-face, counselling like the abuse cases (104), and pupils with personal issues such as gender issues and girl-girl relationships (101). These were very personal issues that need personal or individual counselling. Pupils who have problems in disciplinary issues need individual counselling before and after punishment is administered.

There were many occasions when counsellors working in a school system function as a group facilitator. Counsellors conduct workshops or group work to provide necessary information or to facilitate awareness and to develop skills to help with the developmental needs of the pupils. The table below shows both the role of counsellor and group facilitator in this study.

| | Job | Individual Counselling | Running GP Programme | Running STEP Up Programme | Running other workshop or group work |
|-----|-----------------------------|--|----------------------|---------------------------|--|
| 101 | Full time school counsellor | Trauma Family problems Socioeconomic issues Disciplinary issues Gang Involvement | NA | NA | Anger management Conflict resolution Smoke cessation |
| 102 | Part time | Relationship problem | NA | NA | NA |

| | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------------|--|---|
| | school counsellor | Problem interrelated Unmotivated students | | | |
| 103 | Full time school counsellor | Disciplinary issues Unmotivated students Students from disadvantaged family Academic spill over to behavioural problems Suicidal cases Family issues | NA | Coordination | Planning Programme & Processes, Home visit, Investigation, Preventive Programme |
| 104 | Part time school counsellor | Abuse cases, disciplinary cases, relationship problems | NA | NA | Anger management, stress management, self-esteem related workshop |
| 105 | Part time school counsellor | Express students' stress-related problems, Normal Stream students-behavioural and peers & family related problems. | Students committed petty crime. | Working with pupils disengaged, disinterested students, destructive behaviours | Love and Relationship workshop |
| 106 | Counsellor from FSC | Stress related, relationship and peers problems | NA | Pupils with behavioural problems | Career Guidance Programme |
| 107 | Counsellor from FSC | Family issues Psychological issues | Students committed petty crime | Rebellious & at-risk pupils | |
| 108 | Counsellor | Defiant students | Students | Students too | Love and Relationship |

| | | | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| | from FSC | | committed petty crime | rowdy or not speaking | workshop |
| 109 | Counsellor from Community Care | Students after workshop need further help, playing truancy, & loitering students | Students committed petty crime | Students difficult to handle, each has disciplinary issues | Motivation workshop, Workshop for students to pass exams, camp, outdoor activities, family bonding workshop |
| 110 | Counsellor from Community Care | Girls after self-harm group work who need further individual help; personal help for students with gang involvement | Students committed petty crime | Students throw tantrums, students do not listen, show anger | Motivation workshop, self-harm workshop, workshop for students to pass exams. |
| 111 | Counsellor from FSC | Counsel students who break the laws from GP | Students committed petty crime, may refuse change | Pupil ill-behaved, resistant students. | |

Table 4.3.2 The role of counsellor and group facilitator in this study

4.3.2 summarises the role of the counsellors working in a school system which focuses on three areas, namely, the remedial, preventive and developmental. 4.3.3 further summarizes the role of the counsellors in the school setting doing individual counselling or as a group facilitator. In the remedial area, the counsellors normally used an individual counselling approach and the role of the counsellors is primarily to counsel the pupils, the counsellors act as a therapist, to deal with the emotional aspect of the pupils. Whereas, in the areas of developmental and preventive programmes, they conduct group sessions, to provide knowledge and develop the skills of specified pupils. Besides the counselling and facilitating roles, participant 103 planned and coordinated programmes for pupils.

Therefore, coordinating is found to be one of the roles of school counsellors.

This finding is again in line with the literature.

A meta-analysis by Whiston & Sexton (in Davis 2005) found that the group format provides an effective intervention for a variety of pupil issues, including social skills development, behavioural issues, academic difficulties and stress management. (Davis, 2005: 74). The social skills and stress management belong to developmental and preventive issues.

Davis (2005) holds that when working with teenagers, a group approach is found to be effective, especially for at-risk adolescent girls (2005: 74). It is believed that pupils are more responsive to information from their peers than information from adults (Davis, 2005: 71; Zinck, 2000). Brigman et al (2005) and Lee (1995), hold that adolescents can be reached through consultation in small groups. Teenagers respond better to input and encouragement from peers. Hornby et al (2003) suggests using peer support, peer tutoring, and peer counselling and a peer advocacy approach in the same spirit of acknowledging the importance of peer influence on teens today. Therefore the role of school counsellors does not focus on the traditional one to one counselling, but will be able to incorporate group and peer influence to affect changes in pupils.

4.3.4 Working with parents, other school staff and the community

Apart from the individual and group approach, some of the participants in this study used the family approach to enlist help from the family. Participant 101 recognized that family and parents often are the root cause of the problem. Participant 105 holds that the family can truly mould the pupils and she emphasises that at this developmental age, the most impact is from the immediate family. Some counsellors organised talks and camp for the teens and parents (participant 109, 110), and invited parents for joint sessions (participants 105 and 111). Besides consulting parents, counsellors in this study worked closely with

the school teachers, disciplinary master (DM) the principal, other counsellors and police (in the case of the Guidance Programme).

There were, however, difficulties within this loosely collaborative model. To name a few, inviting parents in for meeting was difficult (111); teachers had negative views on counselling (101, 109, 110), working with community agencies faced funding constraints (107, 108). Participant 106 was an external counsellor engaged by schools to run career guidance. She lamented that despite the fact that much effort had been put in designing the programme, the pupils' involvement was low. It is evident that the engagement of external resources was not utilized effectively.

There are many authors (Keys & Lockhart, 1999; Dinkmeyer, Carlson & Dinkmeyer, 2000, Myrick 2003; Keys & Green, 2005) who advocate that school counsellors consult adults, because children and adolescents are often powerless to make changes. It is more effective to work with the significant adults in their lives, in many cases this means the parents. Though most counsellors in this study recognized the powerful influential role of parents on their children's development, only a few of them managed to get the parents engaged. The parents from Guidance Programmes were more cooperative as they were mandated to attend. Other than Guidance Programmes, most of the counsellors worked with the pupils in isolation due to lack of participation from parents and, sad to note, sometimes the parents were part of the source of the pupils' difficulties (101,103, 111). Only when the children were in trouble were then parents invited in, and yet some of the parents still refused to be involved.

The school counselling service in Singapore secondary schools seems to have adopted Gysber's school comprehensive guidance programme (Gysber, 2001), and has developed a community collaborative model in providing therapeutic group work and family life education for parents. However, the collaborative model used was only suggested and each school was left on their own to connect to various stakeholders and community resources when needed.

Singapore's school system seems to follow the basic pattern of the community-based integrated model (Foo & Lim, 2006), but is not systematically organized and is only loosely integrated. Traditionally parents are responsible for the overall well-being of their children's development but now the school has taken over the role of nurturing the overall emotional, behavioural and social well-being of their children. To effectively implement a guidance programme that benefits the development of pupils, a more strongly integrated programme is needed.

Chapter 5 Roles of the school counsellor (Part 2) described by counselling approach

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 showed the findings of the interviews about the roles of the counsellors working in the Singapore secondary school system in terms of working with different profiles of pupils. The areas of the pupils' profile include remedial, preventive and developmental. The counsellors used individual counselling, group work, consulted the family, and even enlisted help from the community to help the pupils.

The data analysed in this chapter consists of the answers the participants provided when asked what they normally did when pupils were referred to them. Ten out of eleven counsellors explicitly mentioned that rapport building was of paramount importance. The only counsellor (participant 102) who did not mention rapport building nevertheless stressed very much the importance of the "journey along with the pupils". The common terminology repeatedly used by the participants included "build rapport" or "having a relationship with pupils", or "making connection" with pupils. Counsellors frequently used the expressions such as "listening to" and "empowering" the pupils when describing their actions during counselling sessions. The common themes emerging from the data across the eleven participants were then analyzed and the relationships between each of the sub-themes were identified. These analyses showed that the approaches of the participants follow two counselling models: The first one is the relational model: counsellors start by building rapport with the pupils, and with this counselling relationship, counsellors affect change and build values with the pupils.

In the second model, counsellors empower the pupils by identifying their strengths and thus enable them to make decisions which will lead to a solution of their problems.

These two main approaches of counselling illustrate further aspects of the role of the counsellors.

5.2 Relational approach

As the various categories emerged from the data, rapport building, listening, relationship, trust and engaging pupils were components of the relational approach to counselling, therefore those categories were grouped under the theme of relational approach. The participants themselves mentioned directly the results of rapport building, thus the link of cause and effect as described by the counsellors was identified.

5.2.1 Rapport building

Almost all of the participants mentioned rapport building as very important in counselling the pupils. They listen to the pupils' problems, encouraging the pupils to speak openly. The counselling process is relational, instead of advice giving. The purpose of rapport building is to know and to understand the pupils. Once a relationship of trust has been established, the counsellors hope to draw the pupils out and help them to think, to make decisions for their own lives.

Rapport building is very important. I think you must have kind of a rapport with them. To let them know that we are not here to punish them or talk down to them. So that is something that I see my role as. (107)

The best part of it is the rapport building and connection with them and be rewarding and fulfilling. By building up relationship with them we are in a better position to influence them. (109)

Working with this group of pupils, building relationship is very important as it is the way to help them to share with you and help them get out of the problems. (109)

How do the counsellors build rapport with the pupils? The participants listen and try to provide emotional support.

5.2.1.1 Listening

Participant 104 used to be a teacher, she found that being a counsellor gave her more time than she had as a teacher to listen to the pupils. She thinks the role of a counsellor is as a listener, and pupils will then open to the counsellor.

As a counsellor, I have more time and I found that the more active listen we are, the pupils open to me more. (104)

For the pupils who need to deal with anger, what they need is someone to listen to them,.. then help them with coping strategies. I work on helping them to acquire coping skills. (104)

Participant 105, 106 and 111 follow the same view.

I will try to listen and understand, and I will spend a lot of time to understand. In term the psyche of the child. The whole wellbeing, the inner feelings. There may be a lot of bitterness, the child needs to forgive the parents. Those are the emotions I need to work through with the child. (105)

First of all, befriend them, listen to them. Just listen to them in a non judgmental way. (106)

We need to bear in mind when working with this group of pupils is to build relationship through whatever means. (211)

I will tell them 'I am there to get to know them for you to know me', hopefully they can get to talk more about themselves. (211)

5.2.2 Counselling relationship

Most of the participants endeavour to have a therapeutic relationship with the pupils:

Participant 105 said she 'really needs to start a pleasant conversation with them.' This relationship is a therapeutic alliance.

To form the therapeutic alliance. To make sure that this person really trust you and to let the pupils know that it is a safe environment to share. (105)

Because without rapport they won't bother to listen to you. They will think 'who are you? To tell me to do this do that. You don't know about me, what I like, my interest, about my life is or whatever' (209)

It takes time to build rapport. It is not the content but the friendship we give to these pupils. We can teach and teach but the teaching doesn't get into their heart or doesn't touch their lives. (211)

What is the characteristic of this counselling relationship? It is "Trust" that characterizes this therapeutic counselling relationship.

5.2.2.1 Trust

Participant 105 stated that the purpose of building rapport with pupils is to get to know and understand the pupils.

My purpose of the rapport is really get to know that person. (105)

She continued to describe some of the attempts she made to build a rapport with the pupils.

Rapport building. Talking to them. Non judgmental stance. Understanding where they are coming from. Then slowly using probing, challenging. And then if lets say they are willing, if they show signs of willingness we give them tasks and observe how it goes, then we continue from there. (105)

Even in group work, participants would use the first two sessions to build a rapport before discussion of any other topics or themes.

Normally why we have eight sessions for group work is because then the first 2 is to build rapport, build trust, and then after that zoom in to the real issues. (209)

5.2.3 Engaging pupils in activities

Most counsellors described the ways in which they build a relationship with pupils. They told me that using small group activities could engage the pupils as the pupils were more willing to be involved in a non-formal way. When the counsellors and pupils do things together counsellors are then in a non-threatening position and they will be able to engage pupils, hence building a relationship is easier.

Working with them, I used activity based approaches, I try to draw them out. I want them to find a purpose. I want them to believe that they can be successful in life. It is not about academic success, academic success and failure doesn't reflect their failure or success in life. (106)

We just need to give them time. If you make it too formal, not all of them will be so easily share their concerns or issues. Some of them are really withdrawn. (106)

Some time youths just want us to sit down to warm up with them. If it is very formal, they may not want to tell you what they think. They need time to build rapport before they can tell you anything. (206)

109 and 110 used group activities to engage the pupils

I find that working in smaller group during mentoring programme, they are more willing to talk. (109)

During structured activities, we do stuff together, we go to Sentosa Island, we have fun and games and we end the activities by having lunch together. (109)

Participant 106 ran a career guidance programme with a group of secondary pupils, and used experiential learning activities to build rapport with the pupils.

Since it is more activity based, there are no right or wrong answers. This is something I always emphasize. It is for them to learn and process. We went for a rock climbing experience. We brought them for rock climbing, the whole group of pupils, 14 of them. They try different rock walls. You can see some of them of are so determined. They couldn't mount up the first time, they try for second time. Some of them tried the more difficult one. Some of them proceed and try different thing. We tried to process with them the learning journey, to bring up the strengths rather than the goals. ..Some of them may have the affinity for climbing in term of rock climbing, they probably get up there very fast. But next time when they encounter bigger stumbling blocks, then how? ...We encouraged them change different routes... (106)

So it is via the informal activities that the pupils build relationships with the counsellors and get to learn some values (in 106's case, she imparted the values of making an effort, trying different routes, learning to be flexible regarding change) in a more relaxing and fun way.

5.2.4 Result of rapport building

Participants mentioned that as a result of rapport building, pupils are more willing to open up and discuss their problems. Pupils will know that the counsellors are caring and they are there to provide help and support. Pupils who are not afraid that they might be judged or punished, are at ease, and more ready to explore alternatives, more willing to discuss with the counsellors what they really want in life. Counsellors also get a chance to help the pupils to better understand themselves.

5.2.4.1 Pupils talk about themselves

Most of the counselors shared that they help pupils talk about themselves

But frankly speaking, counselling is not advice giving. It is about building rapport, getting them to talk about the issues, (204)

Talk about what their interest is, about their passions, what drives them etc. When

you are interested in what they like, then they will be more willing to talk about other things. There is a time, when the opportunity comes, we may be able to get them to talk about ‘what do you want to do with your life’. (211)

I need to go down to the level to be their friends.

Motivate the pupils to think, the ultimate goal is for them to better understand about their life. (211)

5.2.4.2 Pupils talk about their dreams

With rapport building, the pupils will be willing to talk about themselves. Counsellors get to understand them. The pupils even feel able to tell the counsellors what they really want to achieve in life.

“What do they really want to do in life?” I think to share this with a stranger a person you are not close to, it is a very vulnerable feeling because you don’t know what the person really think of you. (105)

Recently I was talking to a group of youth in a camp , in second day, I asked them what do they want to achieve in life? One pupil said she wanted to be a hairstylist to have her own salon, The other one wants to be a pilot engineer. Those are beautiful dreams. They are the normal streams.... If you tell anyone about the dreams, they may be put down. Normally if they do not have any dreams, I won’t push them I will give them time. (105)

One of my boys told me he wanted to be a doctor. He is a student from Normal Stream, sure, it is very unrealistic, but we do not put them down. We need to show HOPE and Faith and Confidence. So I asked “so what are you doing now to get you nearer to that goal”. (211)

5.2.4.3 Counsellors can affect change, build values with the pupils.

Most counsellors believe that they are in a position to affect change in pupils’ lives.

When they start to talk about themselves, I will try to get them to think about themselves, why do they always think that the world is picking on them, why does

the school think there is a problem, I will get them to reflect. For boys 13 14 15 they are not mature yet, they laugh things off. I need to go down to the level to be their friends.

Motivate the pupils to think, the ultimate goal is to for them to better understand about their life. (211)

Participant 109 mentioned that counsellors need to 'zoom in' at the right teachable moment.

We try to zoom in at the right moment so that what we tell them will be more receptive to them. So we normally look out for the teachable moment when we can talk about the trouble with the laws and talk about the consequences.

This is when they begin to listen and begin to open up. When they trust you, their defence is down. But before that, they have to know how to trust us. (109)

5.2.4.4 *Counsellors share feelings*

Participant 111 told the pupils his expectations of them. He was able to do that without intimidating the pupils because he had a relationship with the pupils.

Tell them how we feel about working with them and about their behaviours have on us, make it personal. (111)

Let them know that we expect better things from them. But not to look down and say that you're useless. Because with this one mistake, you're condemned. No. we give them chances to think that actually they can do better (111)

Human interaction is a complex process which cannot be reduced to a set of procedures, let alone the complicated counselling process. However, from the verbatim analysis of the data, we can summarize this chapter with the following diagram. The purpose of the diagram is not a one-way traffic work flow but can be two-way traffic flow, for instance the more trust in the relationship, the more pupils want to talk about their lives and in turn more trust is built.



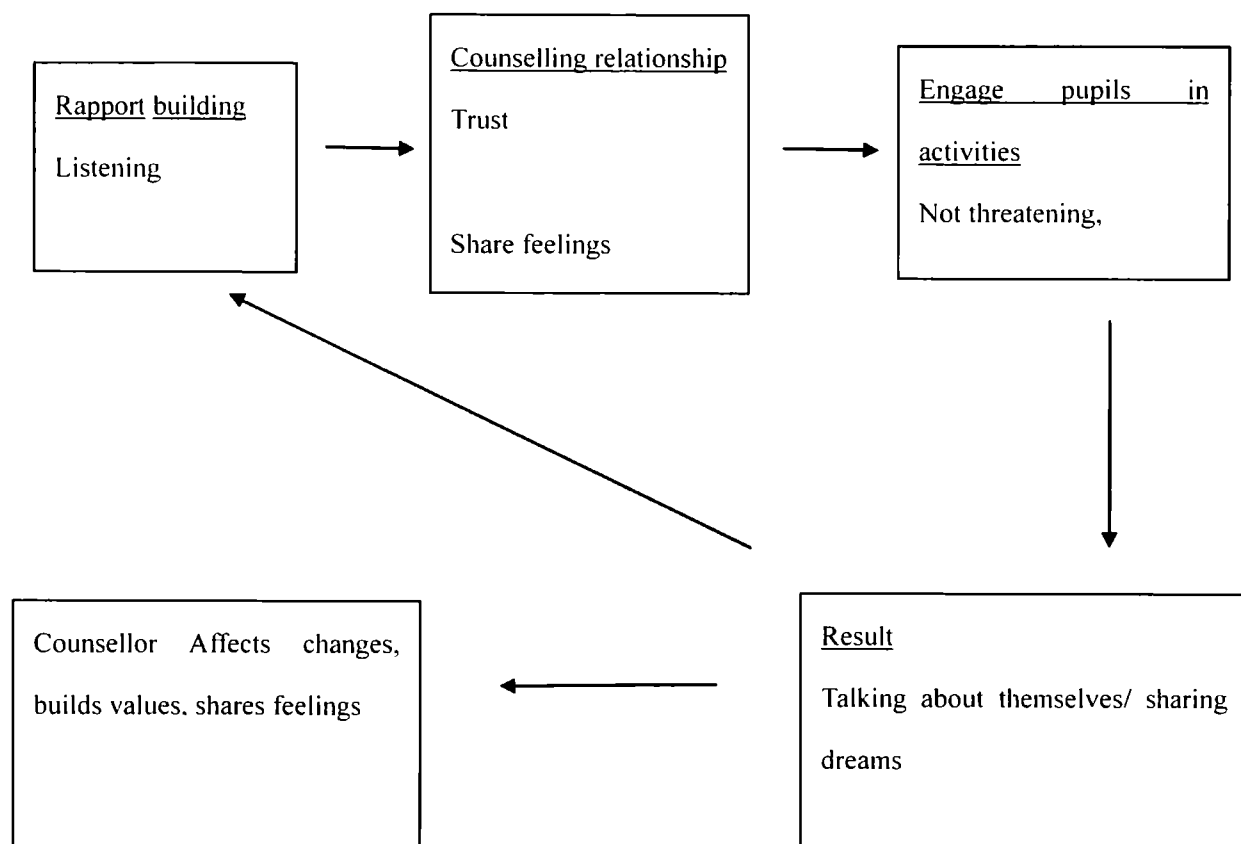


Figure 5.2 Relational counselling model

5.3 *Strength based approach*

Besides the common factors of relationships/rapport building with pupils, there is another common factor that emerged from the data across most of the participants. Nine out of eleven participants explicitly spoke of positive belief in pupils and they described their role as drawing the best out of the pupils

5.3.1 *Belief in pupils*

Counsellors hold a positive belief in pupils

I believe the positive, the strengths in the students and there are potential in them. I don't want to believe that they want to be bad and they are lazy. It is more about finding the motivation. (106)

We believe that even for youths that are young. Maybe 13, 12. year old but they have resources. They have basic values of right and wrong. We can expect that from them.

(111)

The only one counsellor who mainly used a cognitive behavioural approach spoke of empowering pupils as she journeys along with them.

Counsellor as to be empowering, that means you equip the counsellees, make them realize that the power is all within themselves. (102)

5.3.2 Affirmation of pupils

Participant 104 talked about the importance of affirmation.

Affirmation in counselling help to boost the self-esteem. When the self-esteem is higher, students will be motivated to change. Affirmation and rapport build and self-esteem are very important in counselling. When there is rapport there is relationship, when there is affirmation, the self-esteem is raised and the level of awareness is raised, child will be more open to other solution for the problems they faced. (204)

Participant 108 noticed that the more she praised pupils' punctuality, the more punctual the pupils became.

When we start to change the way we relate to them and to hear them, and begin to affirm them for the other things, and treat them in a way that is different from how the teachers will treat them, ...through the praises and affirmation, they seem to respond well to it. And they become more like that. Like when you say, for example like, you affirm them of being very punctual, then after that you see that they become more like that. (207)

Participant 108 was very amazed as she experienced the power of positive language on the pupils. The more she affirmed the pupils' good behaviour, the more the pupils will behave in accordance with the counsellor's description. When this participant visited one of her pupils from GP, she found that pupil kept a photo album and in the photo album, the counsellor saw a piece of paper from the affirmation exercise. The pupil then told the counsellor that nobody had ever said such good things about her, therefore the pupils treasured that piece of paper a lot.

You can just imagine what she has been through her whole life. Scolded by teachers...actually it is true. Because in the report that we receive in the case, she was the most notorious student in the school (107)

This student responded well to affirmation and her attitudes totally changed after the GP counselling programme.

5.3.3 *Helping pupils make choices*

Many participants mentioned the word 'empowerment' when they spoke about motivating pupils to change

To empower them to make them aware that they really have a choice in life and to let them know that they can make changes in their own lives. (105)

I like the concept that the counsellor has to be empowering, that means you equip the counsellee, make them realize that the power is all within themselves. I think that is the goal for me in counselling. (102)

Participants 109 and 110 did group work with the self-harm pupils. They found that pupils in the self-harm group used cutting to show that they are in control, in control of how many strokes to cut, how often to cut and how deep to cut. They work on empowering this group of pupils to realize that they are in control of their lives and they can make choices and decisions for their lives.

I work with them by empower them that there are always choices in life and the pain they are going through at the moment is just a phase they are going through. It is just temporary and it is not going to be forever. (109)

5.3.3.1 *Exploring what they want*

Participant 105 worked with pupils by focusing on rapport building and when she got to know the pupils better, she would ask the question of "what do you really want to do in

life?”

Participant 111 helps his pupils to explore what they want and then he tries to get them near their goals.

One of my boys told me he wanted to be a doctor. He is a student from Normal Stream, sure, it is very unrealistic, but we do not put them down.... So I asked ‘so what are you doing now to get you nearer to that goal. (211)

5.3.3.2 *Helping pupils weigh their options*

Most of the participants involved in helping pupils to weigh their options.

Solution should come from the pupils not from the counsellor. I ask them what are the benefit and the negative effect. I get them to weigh the pros and cons. (202)

I will slowly bring in the portion, like you can control your action. Whether you carry out the instructions or carry out the...weighing between the consequence of being punished and to have a peaceful life.
whether you want to carry out the instruction or continue to be rebellious....(105)

The school part is something we cannot control but we can control our actions. It is daily choice at the end of the day. (105)

5.3.3.3 *Raising self awareness*

Participant 104 used to conduct anger management workshops and sometimes she helped individual pupils who had problems dealing with anger.

I will let them know “you are very angry, everyone has emotions. As you are human being, you will have emotions include all the negative emotions such as anger”.
I will help them to have self awareness to understand how their body feels (104)

Counsellor can create the awareness to let the student aware that certain choice of behaviour may not be accepted (204)

Participant 102 remembered a girl she counselled. She helped the girl to be more aware of her own action and that girl managed to change her behaviour.

This girl always complaint having problems with boys. I asked her to think ‘what did you do that caused the boy’s action take place, remember one second before somebody does something to you what did you do’. This girl not feminine, she is rough, raise her legs when she sits,... she always said the boys always rude to her. I told her can you be more conscious. Boy may not like girls open their legs and expose panty. She said she threw the bags and the boy did something to her. I remind her seconds before the boys did something what did she do. She also tried to think when the boys did not do bad thing on her and what was the actions that do not provoke the boy. She said she was sitting quietly. (202)

The counsellor actually makes the pupil think and to be more aware of her own action that may have provoked the boys’ reaction to her. If the pupil is not aware of herself, she may not be able to make changes. The counsellor used solution focus approach by asking a miracle question.

5.3.3.4 Explaining consequences

Participant 111 emphasized that ‘We are not dealing with machine. Each one of them is so different and unique’. Therefore, he normally tries to go down to the pupils’ level to build a relationship with them. He will try to empower them to make choices for their lives. He will explain the consequences of their behaviour in order to help them to find their way.

To get them back on track and realize they need to do something about their life. If I continue doing this or going down this road, I will end up in a bad state. Today it might be cigarettes. Tomorrow it may be drugs. (111)

He did the same during prison visits with the pupils, pointing out the consequences of the inmates’ bad behaviour.

5.3.3.5 Showing pupils that the power of change is within themselves

Participant 104 said that she felt her role was to help the pupils to be aware of their choices and to feel supported in making choices.

we are there to make choices available for the child. We guide them along the choices. (104)

To help the pupils to see the road ahead and open up the choices to them. Help them to feel emotionally support and build up their confidence to make choice for themselves. (104)

Participant 111 shared the same view.

We empower them to make their own decisions.

But in the first place it is to help them recognize that there is problem. If they do not even want to admit that there is a problem then we do not have anything to talk about. So it really not about giving advice. But it is about helping people to find their way. Sometimes they laugh it off. But many of them do not realize the price they have to pay until it is too late. We try to stop them before anything bad happens. Because once they are addicted it is too late. (111)

5.3.3.6 Challenging pupils to change

Most participants in this study believe that the pupils have the power to change. They care enough for the pupils that they would challenge the pupils to change (Ausberger, 1980).

To empower them to make them aware that they really have a choice in life. I strongly believe that they have a choice to change to impact on their own life. (105)

I normally tell them you decide how you want your life turn out to be. If you continues to be rebellous, confrontational, then you have to accept the consequences that come with it. Counsellor open up that option and choice to them. Letting them know that they have the power in their hand to decide. You decide how your life in school is like. It gives me a lot of satisfaction. (105)

With this positive belief in pupils, counsellors work on challenging pupils to change their

behaviour and thoughts.

I also challenge them whether if they can change the action of the person. (105)

They also want to prove I am not a very bad student. I can be obedient and respectful when they have this heart want to prove and want to change...During this growing process, I think letting them know that they can make changes in their own life. (105)

I think I can always challenge the youths, what profits does it reap when you keep going against the school. (205)

5.4 Other approaches

The relational and the empowerment based approaches are the two main models that the participants used in counselling pupils. However, a few participants incorporate other approaches into these models.

5.4.1 Cognitive Behavioural Approach

Both 102 and 104 used the cognitive behavioural method by encouraging cognitive learning and providing perspectives for the pupils. They gave homework such as reading articles from 'Reader's Digest' or a newspaper for discussion with the pupils in the following sessions. They made the pupils keep a diary and make observations about their own behaviour. It is noted that 104 strongly emphasised the value of listening to the pupils, therefore, she included cognitive learning and behaviour changing in her relational approach.

I make them do homework by entering log, but sometimes they will forget the piece of paper...I get them to read some articles and get their opinions and we talk about values. For instance we read about the articles of BGR in the news paper, whether they agree with what the person in the article says. (104)

Reader digest is just one of the reading repertoire. In reader digest has articles, how people struggle with suffering. The pupils seldom read and seldom enrich. One can always enhance one exp through reading. We have only one life, but we can read

about many lives about other. (202)

I give homework: make observation, monitor own emotions and behaviour, practice particular strategies. For instance, if it is a strategy to help them sleep, she keep tossing around but still cannot sleep. Then we discuss, what can you do if you cannot sleep. She say she try to read the text book. I asked her to record how long if you read before you get to sleep. For this girl, it worked for her. Immediately she read her text book, she slept. (202)

Both 102 and 104 are formerly teaching staff and their approaches to counselling seem to favour a cognitive learning by making the pupils think and engaging pupils in doing homework. They do not believe counselling is giving advice, but they emphasise the educational component.

The education part has to come in. It seldom as emotional issue as one thing. (202)

5.4.2 *Psycho-education*

Participant 105 mentioned that she used workshops to impart values and during the workshop there would be some teaching components. Workshops are often bigger than group sessions and frequently a whole class will attend a workshop with two counsellors as facilitators. Psycho-education workshops include anger-management, sexuality education ... etc. The psycho-education sessions are more interactive.

I told the pupils coping strategies...I teach them how to the cope with the stressful and boring environment. (101)

I teach them skill to stand up for bully. (102)

It is teaching in an indirect way. Still teaching the values, indirect ways, teaching through character building, moulding their right value. Teaching the right values for them to understand where they have gone wrong. To do reflection like things like this. (201)

We use workshop to educate the pupils to share with them some life skills, such as topics as time management, anger managements, communication with parents,

handling peer pressure (205)

The participant continued to explain that the purpose of using the workshop approach is to impart knowledge and to teach skills.

5.4.3 Religious approach

Participant 102 does not have a specific religion, but she finds that spirituality is an important aspect in life and she will try to help the pupils to go back to their source of religion or spirituality. Working in a multi-race and multi-cultural society like Singapore, Malays may turn to their Imam (religious teacher) and the Chinese from Buddhist families may have their own explanation of human suffering, to help the pupils develop an acceptance of difficulties and suffering.

I try to remind the pupils if they have a religion and what the religion teach them about the life experience they are facing. I remind them by asking: what does your religion teach you about this situation or what have said about this in your religion? Or if you talk to Imam (Religious leader in Muslim) what would he probably say to you on how to resolve this issues? Would you like to find out from your Guru (religious teachers)? Like one pupil very frighten of darkness and thought there was ghost. I reminded her to go to Imam to see what the Imam said. They realize that this is one of the alternative they can try. (202)

5.4.4 Drawing

Participant 103 explained that she used drawing and other expressive therapy to draw the pupils out. Participant 104 used drawing to help pupils cope with the trauma and work through their anger.

I previously used drawing, symbols work a lot. But now I do not have the luxury to use lot of toys, expressing, creating stories and symbols. (103)

To help pupils to cope with the trauma, for weaker pupils, drawing is particularly helpful... I actually do a lot of scratching. I draw out the picture, then they can see it. It is the action that has caused the problems. (104)

5.5 Chapter Summary and discussion

5.5.1 Counselling models and Roles

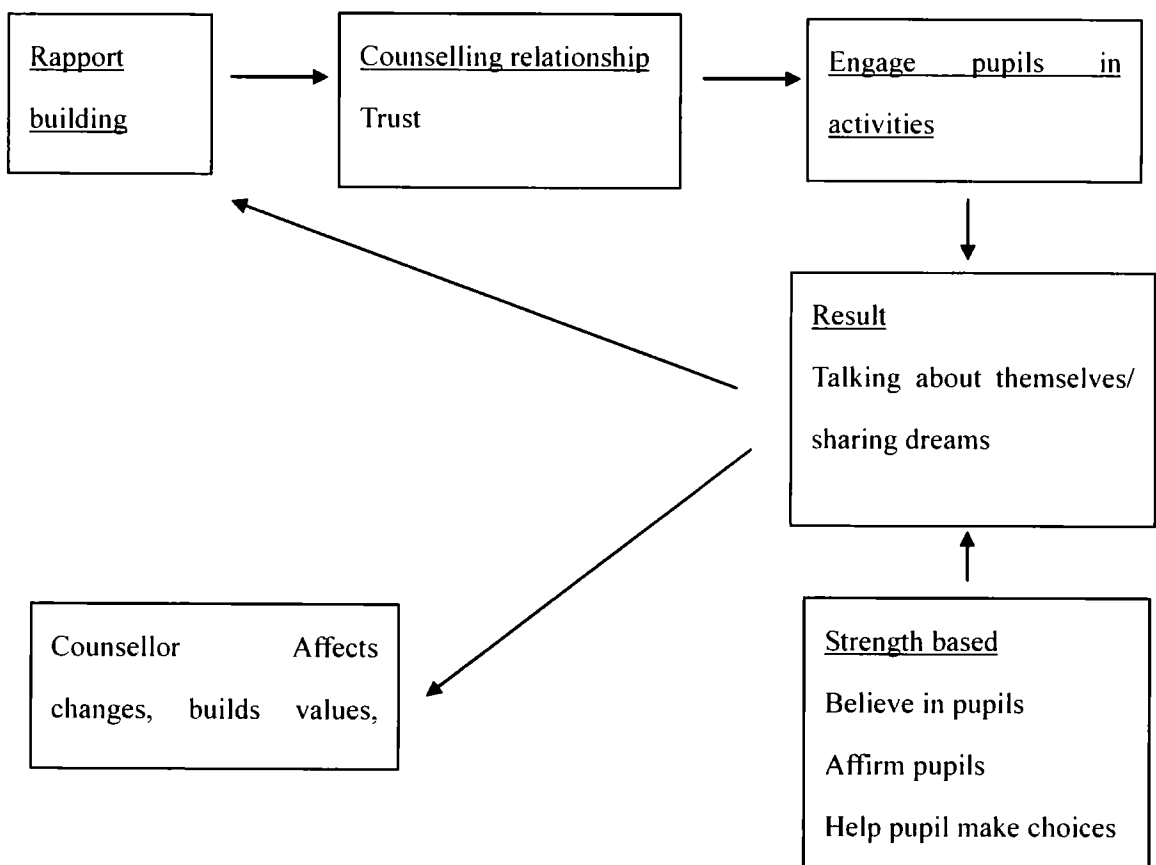


Figure 5.2 Relational plus strength based approach model

With this Strength based approach, we can add to the model of the counselling approach discussed in 5.2.

Both the relational and strength based approaches show that the participants see their role as therapists w enhance ho decision making and promote changes. Counsellors emphasized on therapeutic relationship (in the relational approach) and positive belief on

the pupils' side (in the strength based approach), counsellors believed that they could affect change in pupils' lives. In the relational approach, pupils are motivated to explore ways of change or alternatives in a non-threatening way. And in the strength based approach, it is hoped that pupils are empowered to make changes in their lives. It is evident that counsellors took on the role as affecting changes, and hoped to build values with the pupils.

The relational approach is recursive, the counselling process may not be a linear procedure. The initial part of counselling, according to the counsellors' experiences, is focused on rapport building. With this trust-based therapeutic relationship, participants described that there would be more disclosure from the pupils and it gave insights to the counsellors to better understand the pupils. It thus enhances more rapport building and trust in the counselling relationship or it makes possible for the counsellors to affect changes.

Furthermore, the two models of approach seem to be used concurrently, for example, participant 105 stressed the importance of rapport building. She pointed out that to share with a stranger, who is not close to you, what you really want to do in life makes people feel very vulnerable (105). Normally, after she had won the trust of the pupils and got to a position of talking about such intimate and delicate topics as their dreams for the future, she will use the strength based approach to affirm, help make decisions, weigh situations and affect changes in pupils' lives.

Another example shows how well the participant integrated the two approaches: Participant 104 who was formerly a teacher, while heavily stressing the teaching components in counselling, also practised giving lots of affirmation to pupils to boost their self-esteem (204).

From the counselling approach used, and the descriptive accounts given, by the participants, it is apparent that the therapeutic component of the role of the counsellors is of paramount importance. Participant 101 had to conduct various workshops and

coordinate several guidance programmes, but she wished that she could have more time to work with pupils on their personal needs. Participant 103 had to participate in coordinating programmes which were mainly pastoral care related like tracking of unauthorized absence or STEP-UP programmes and investigation of pupils, and she was confused about her role doing those ‘non-counselling related’ jobs.

Both participants 102 and 104, using the cognitive behavioural approach, seemed to emphasise their educational role in counselling pupils. Both of them reported fewer dilemmas. They are both retired teachers and school administrators. They may be familiar with the school system and know how to work within the system. However, another possible reason for them reporting lower stress and dilemma levels could be due to the approach they used in counselling pupils. The cognitive behavioural approach emphasizes changing thoughts and belief in order to bring about the changes in emotions and behaviour (Beck, 1976). Schools have always been concerned about changing pupils’ behaviour, but behaviour cannot be isolated from cognition and emotions. Those three dimensions are interrelated. The cognitive behavioural approach is the dominant approach in Britain at the moment for clinical psychologists and some counsellors, and it sprang from dissatisfaction with the lack of efficacy of traditional talking approaches. Perhaps school counsellors need to consider other approaches if the relational approach doesn’t seem to work.

When counsellors use the relational and strength based approach, at the same time incorporating some other methods, they described their role as follows:

| Participants | Role |
|---------------------|---|
| 101 | Support the school, a mediator between the DM/ teachers and the pupils. |
| 102 | My role is to get them see things in another perspective, to lighten the journey, to get them to accept that life has difficulties, making them see some beauties even in the suffering they are going through. |
| 103 | To support.... to be someone pupils can connect with |

| | |
|-----|---|
| 104 | A listener, to help students to see the road ahead and open choices to them |
| 105 | I am a change agent to facilitate growth. My role is not to tell the students what not to do (The school system, the teachers, the DM, they have the authority to do that) My role is a middle person (between the school and the pupils) I shed light and give guidance to pupils Counselling, a para support in school, my role is to understand why they want to do this. (find out the reasons for their behaviour and understand the pupils) |
| 106 | To help pupils to explore and develop skills. My role is to help them find a purpose in life. |
| 107 | My role is an older sibling, a friend, by understanding them, help them to make better decisions. |
| 108 | To have a relationship to present them with choices and consequences and to make them to think while they journey through life seeking identity. |
| 109 | A coach, we do not tell them what to do but try to discuss decisions with them |
| 110 | A facilitator and mentor, we guide them to make wise and right decisions. |
| 111 | Guiding lights, lamp post, sign board to show the way. I show Hope, Faith and Confidence, I do not kill dreams, I let them hang on the dream, let them strive... |

Table 5.5.1 Role described by participants

5.5.2 Roles of the counsellors

5.5.2.1 The roles perceived and described by participants

Chapter 5 details what the counsellors do when the pupils are referred to them. It describes the two main approaches used by the counsellors when counselling pupils. The theoretical framework is rather obvious. There is a counselling philosophy underpinning their approaches. The participants emphasise that building a therapeutic relationship and giving affirmation to pupils is consistent with the counselling theories. From describing their counselling approach, the participants went on to describe their therapeutic role.

When sharing their counselling approach, the counsellors also described their roles: They used relational descriptions: “a listener”, “friend”, “coach”, “elder sibling” to emphasise the relational part. Some counsellors used rather directional words like “lamppost”, “sign board”, “guiding light” to describe their guiding role. On a more functional side: counsellors function as agents of change, mediators, para support to schools, to help with the journey of the pupils, to explore alternatives, help make decisions. As a whole Chapter 5 reveals that the participants see themselves functioning as a therapist or a counsellor.

5.5.2.2 Comparison to the literature

The role as consultant

Counsellors described their role as counsellors and group facilitators in chapter 4 and they see themselves working as a counsellor/therapist in the framework of relational and strength based approaches.

Although the participants mentioned working closely with parents, and school staff and sometimes, they even introducing resources from the community (109), it was not common for them to describe their role as one of consultant. Participant 101 mentioned that she

always had conferences with parents, the rest of the participants use the words “meeting” with parents, “getting report or feedback” from the school and “meeting up” with teachers.

Participant 101 works closely with teachers “I feedback and surface to the head of pupil welfare”, “try to get the teacher to see, get the teacher to understand”(101). Through the meetings with teachers, constantly talking to them about the pupils’ situation, counsellors try to get them to understand the pupils. This is the role of consultant. However, it is rather interesting that the participants never used the word “consultant”, and meeting with other people was probably seen as indirect counselling work.

Davis (2005) states that consultation is the role school counsellors perform the most without realising or documenting it (Ibid: 81). The finding of this study is consistent with Davis’s view in that the counsellors working in Singapore secondary schools actually spend a lot of time interacting with all players with a stake in the educational process, including the school principals, teachers, parents and other counsellors with regards to pupil matters. Davis suggests that the consulting role of the counsellors has a direct effect on the efficacy of the school counselling programme as it connects information, provides input and is proven to be a holistic approach that benefits the pupils.

The role as programme coordinator

Coordination is one of the counsellors’ roles according to the American School Counsellor Association (ASCA). In this study, participant 101 mentioned that she would need to coordinate enrichment programmes for pupils

Participant 103 said “STEP-UP, I’m involved, some schools the pupil welfare takes on the role”. The participant sounded a bit confused about this part of her job as if it was non-counselling related and she wondered if STEP-UP should be taken care of by the pupil welfare department as it is in some other schools. The two full-time counsellors 101 and 103 were involved in a coordination role. However, during interview, they did not include coordinating as their counselling role. Participant 107, 108, 109 and 110 were

agency counsellors and they work closely with the full-time counsellors who also were also involved in a coordinating role.

The participants in this study, heavily emphasised individual counselling and group facilitation. They described their role more as counsellors and group facilitators (or using a group approach to do counselling and guidance programmes for pupils, therefore the role is still mainly of counselling)

The role of large group classroom guidance

Doing large group classroom guidance is one of the roles of the school counsellor according to ASCA.

The group work or workshops conducted by the counsellors mentioned in this study are not for the large classroom pupils. They were for a small group of pupils identified as at-risk. Counsellors doing STEP-UP, found the pupils to be challenging as they were selected from different classes and most of them had behavioural problems.

Sink (2005) suggests that having counsellors conduct large group classroom guidance provides the opportunity for the counsellors to be seen and approached by a larger audience of pupils and thus he believes that “guidance presentations can augment the educational process” (Sink, 2005: 21). Perhaps doing large group classroom guidance helps the counsellors reach out to a wider audience and a large number of pupils will benefit.

Whiston and Sexton (1998) cited a broad range of topics for large group guidance developmental programmes to explore. They include self-esteem, study skills, interpersonal skills, appreciation of multi-culture, career guidance etc. Some of these topics were mentioned by the participants in this study. However, the developmental programmes mentioned by the school counsellors in this study were mainly for a small

group of identified pupils. The large group classroom guidance is mainly conducted by form teachers in the Singapore secondary system as teachers traditionally, according to the Chinese culture, are also entrusted with the role of giving instruction to provide guidance to pupils.

Perhaps there is a need to highlight the fact that group work in the study was mainly for specific pupils who were identified by teachers as being at-risk pupils. On one hand the group work was rather focused, but, on the other hand the pupils may well feel that they had been being singled out and therefore that they were being stigmatized (Discussion in 4.3.2). Participants 109 and 110 suggested that when the pupils were identified to attend a certain workshop, the teachers may ask

“So what trouble are you in now? Why did you see a counsellor?”

Participants 109 and 110 lamented that they ran workshops with teachers, telling them not to label the students who go for counselling, workshops or group-work, but some teachers are just “tough nuts (holding negative counselling perspective)”. Participant 109 signalled that the teachers’ perception was difficult to change. When pupils are singled out to attend a certain kinds of workshops such as anger management or stress management, they felt that they were being stigmatised as having problems. Some of the content in STEP-UP such as the anger management, stress management, and coping with peer pressure, are suitable for large group classroom guidance and should not be limited to at-risk pupils only.

In the Singapore Secondary school system the developmental and preventive programmes are mainly taken care of by PCCG (Pastoral Care and Career Guidance) or Affective Career Education (ACE) departments and the weekly pastoral lessons are conducted by the form teachers. Therefore, by right all the pupils are under the large group developmental programmes

Career Guidance belongs to the developmental programme. Participant 106 worked with a small group of pupils on career guidance. She has designed an interesting programme to include interest profiling, career excursions. She also arranged work experience attachment at cake shops, confectionaries, doing studio recording, going rock climbing, watching movies, talks by a pet groomer etc. She mentioned (in script 206) that initially there were 14 pupils signed-up, while the regular attendance was 10 pupils. During the last session, the attendance dropped to 4 only. She was disappointed and lamented that the programme was not sustainable. It is rather evident that the so-called developmental programme was not administered to all the pupils of the school.

Therefore, although the MOE can issue guidelines to all schools to have a career guidance programme, whether all the school follows it through with equal enthusiasm is another matter. As the pastoral lessons (large size classroom guidance in ASCA's term) are not graded, whether all schools follow the curriculum or place an equal amount of importance on it is really uncertain.

Chapter 6: Dilemmas or no dilemmas

6.1 Introduction

This chapter records the positive and negative experience of the school counsellors.

Positive experiences give job satisfactions, while negative experiences highlight the dilemmas faced by the school counsellors.

6.2 Dilemmas faced

The participants mentioned the difficult situations they faced, described by them as “challenges”. Some of the challenges come from the pupils such as the “hardcore cases” (105), and “plateau cases” (104). However, there were many uncontrollable systemic issues that caused the participant to feel, “stuck”; “back to square one”; “many heartaches”; “conflicts” (101) and “frustrated moments” (107, 108), “role confusion”, “fire fight all the time” (103), “feel the constraints of the wider context” (110, 111), “programmes not sustainable” (106), “tough nut” (109, 110). As the various repeated themes emerged from the data, it was apparent that many focused on the difficult and challenging situations faced by the participants. The common characteristic of the difficulties relates to the external environment. It seemed that the counsellors were trapped in those situations. The counsellors seem to have little influence on the situations that produced the problems which shaped and defined their role as a school counsellor. Therefore, those challenges and difficult situations were identified and compared across different participants. They were put into various categories according to the similar characteristics, and were later grouped under a broader theme of “Dilemmas”.

In the following, the factors that contribute to the dilemmas faced are identified and analyzed.

6.2.1 Poorly defined roles

A few participants in this study expressed confusion about their poorly defined roles. Participant 103 said that she needs to do home visits and investigations. As she talked about this part of her job, she sounded very confused and unsure if this was really her job as a full time school counsellor.

I think very specifically they gave us various roles like setting up the counselling system, that's very clear. What is vague would be things like working with the people welfare head... Then they'll always have this clause that says up to the decision of the principle, so at the end a lot of things are not very clear and end up anything can go. (103)

Of course if I'm involved in more planning, more developmental work, then I'll have to make sure I balance it with extra cases I see. I think MOE is also very confused over this role. At one time when we have supervision they tell us that 'oh you'll need to spend most of the time counselling, but then another briefing they tell you - you shouldn't just concentrate on counselling work, you should also involved in preventive work. (103)

So participant 103 thought of creating a system to keep track of the pupils who truant, and she does home visits to find out the reasons why the pupils are absent. She has learnt to be flexible and ends up doing a lot of things, fire fighting sort of work.

When asked what did she mean by fire fighting sort of work, she explained.

Fire fighting will be discipline cases that walk in, when it happens you'll have to investigate, you'll have to find out. Ya I mean like this girl, it's another case, there is this 2 girls going through a GGR (Girl-girl relationship) problem, so one person says this, the other person says that, I ended up being involved in finding out what actually happened, taking statement. I don't know....It's like police investigation... I don't know! (she laughed) (203)

Poorly defined roles lead to poor job definition.

6.2.1.1 *Poor job definition*

The data analysis shows that poorly defined roles lead to poor job scope definition. Participant 101 told me that her job is very demanding.

But we cannot just focusing on counselling alone. No, this is a very challenging job. MOE has a lot of demands. The job scope is very wide and broad based, it is a very extensive job. (101)

Everything and anything can go in. It is up to the school to decide what job the counsellors are expected to do. Based of the job scope, many schools have very different interpretations. .. I end up doing lots of job. It is very emotionally draining
The job of the counsellor is not very clear now, there isn't a clear delineation of role. I have to fit my role with them. (101)

The unhappiness and exhaustion this participant described arising from the non-counselling part of her job, implies that she would like to do more direct counselling work with pupils instead of other non-counselling related jobs, such as the coordination or meeting with teachers, DM, parents, Head of year, pupils welfare... 'I may not be able to be there for the pupils when they need me most'. This is the dilemma she faced. Can she communicate or clarify with the school what her roles are? Can she develop her own counselling programme? Why do the roles of school counsellors have to be determined by others and why is the line of clarity is difficult to draw? This is a complicated issue.

6.2.2 *Working with disciplinary cases*

6.2.2.1 *Involuntary clients*

In this study, most of the counsellors reported that they had to work with disciplinary cases, meaning the pupils sent for counselling were basically involuntary cases, and they were full of resistance.

Participant 101 shared her experience working with disciplinary cases

some student referred by the DM for counseling but at the end quite resistance to come in for counseling because they have already been punished ... This kids who can be quite recalcitrant who have committed serious disciplinary offences can actually view counseling as something negative as a negative experience. (201)

She has to work round the problem

But normally when they come in I will explain to them the rationale that we are not punishing them but it is to process with them to help them reflect to see where they have actually gone wrong and to help them see the difference clearly the counseling and disciplinary aspect . They actually are quiet accepting of it so they are able to accept it and they are able to cooperate. We actually have to work around the problem. (201)

6.2.2.2 *Disagreement with the punishment*

There were times when the counsellor did not agree with the punishment set by the school

I don't quite agreed with that myself personally. But it's not in my position to go how to agree with how the teacher is punishing the student so I have to reframe it for the child and explain where went wrong... I feel that they are other alternative way of dealing with the children. So this is my main conflict because sometime I don't see the punishment as necessary or suitable. So it quite difficult in this case here because I wouldn't want to have conflicts with my colleagues by telling them this. And sometime it is a bit difficult to explain to the children why they are punished in that way... (201)

6.2.2.3 *Balancing the discipline and counselling*

It was found in the literature that the two components of discipline and counselling are not easily integrated (section 1.4.3.2). It is particularly challenging for counsellors who adopt a relational and therapeutic approach.

Participant 108 was working with Guidance Programme pupils and she found the conflicts in having to balance discipline and counselling. Counsellors need to spot check and send warning letters if the youths do not follow the rules set. This is a dilemma in which the

counsellors need to have a good balance between the two components of discipline and counselling. Even if the counsellors try to balance the two, they lose the trust of the pupils, who tend to close up and not open to the counsellors.

We keep the disciplining part in one session. Then the next session will be therapeutic. In a sense it's quite hard to build up the rapport. Some of the youths may not dare to talk much. They are afraid that they may say something wrong.
(107)

6.2.3 Wider School Environment

Most of the dilemmas faced by the participants relate to the wider school environment. The three categories under this theme were: School perspective on counselling, school culture, and uncontrollable factors outside the counselling room.

6.2.3.1 School perspective on counselling

The three repeated themes emerging from the data across the participants that depicted the conflicting perspectives by the school counsellors and the some of the school staff were identified. There are: counsellors should side with the school, counselling equates to discipline, and the counsellors' job is to 'wave a magic wand' and simply put everything right.

6.2.3.1.1 Counsellor should be on the school's side (Who is my Client?)

Participant 101 felt confused as to who her client was. Initially she was very clear that her clients were her pupils. But working in a school setting, the Disciplinary Master and the teachers would like her to be on their side to explain to the pupils what went wrong and to help the pupils to accept punishment. She has to work round this conflict and many times she has to reframe the situation for the child. On one hand she felt she should deal with the core issues of the child, but on the other hand, she felt that she could not fight for the child as she has to answer to the teacher and disciplinary master. She sounded torn

apart.

It is a mixed feeling, I have to ask myself, who is my client? Is the client my teacher or is my client the student? I felt that you know working with student is most important helping them with their core problem. In another word the client is the students. But I find that if I need to fit into the system I need to be accepted by my colleagues you know as part of them then I have to treat the teachers as also my client....

So sometime I ask them what is the role of the counsellor. Am I not here to listen? you see. Don't listen too much to the kid, they tell me. ... (201)

So participant 101 had to satisfy the teachers to solve referral problems such as inattention in class or not handling in homework, though she thinks those are superficial problems and not the root problems of the pupils. But she has to fit in the system to treat the teachers as her client instead of the pupils.

As a counsellor, she also sees herself a mediator, and she negotiates with the disciplinary master on behalf of the pupils.

I do negotiate with the ...disciplinary committee...for example they get 20 detention 30 ...the kid tell me they have to serve 30, 40, or even 50 detention and one detention is about four hours. I am not going to serve (pupils told me). I am going to let them cane me...you know this kind of thing...so I have to get back to the teacher and say, "Look I think this is a bit ridiculous 50 detention...double detention...and they skip and then double again...one and so forth. That's how the kid in this school the naughty one end up many detentions. (201)

Participant 105 encountered a similar situation. She found that, because the school referred pupils to her, and the school is the paying party, certain expectations from the school are inevitable. Normally, she will work with the pupils to help them change their behaviour. She will look into the issue to find out what the pupil really wants; for instance, respect. She will then challenge the pupil over what profits he or she expects to

reap by going against the school. She helps the pupil to make changes in his or her own life. This is how participant 105 works out the situation as she also thinks that the client is actually the school.

Torn between the pupils and the DM or teachers, participant 101 has to 'work around' and 'reframe' the problems; participant 105 said she had to 'work the situation out intelligently' as those are very delicate situations.

6.2.3.1.2 *Counselling equal to discipline*

This study reported that there is a prevalent negative perspective about counselling. It is found that counselling was labelled as taboo, and sometimes, counselling is seen as equal to discipline.

Participant 105 spoke from her experience that she found some schools label counselling as a taboo and some schools treat counselling service as a dumping ground, sending those late to school for counselling for example.

Participant 104 feels that pupils will be resistant to counselling if seeing a counsellor means having done something wrong.

The information given to the child is very important, it will affect how the students perceive counseling. "You have done this, better go for counseling" this sort of statement will make the student a resistant client, he or she will think, "why do I need to go for counseling?" "I am not in the wrong". (104)

Participants 109 and 110 also experienced schools treating counselling service as a form of correction or for reformation of behaviour.

The common conception is that if the student has discipline issues. Send him or her to the counsellor. Which may not be the most effective. Makes people think that

counselling is to correct behavioural/ discipline problem. Which is not always true. (109, 110)

Participants 109 and 110 conducted self-harm group work for pupils. They used to spend the first two sessions correcting misconceptions given to the pupils by teachers who did not convey the right message to the pupils. They need to reframe the workshop of self-harm to 'life skills development' and assure the pupils that they were not singled out to be stigmatised.

Pupils' perception of the counsellor is very important. Participant 103 feels that if the pupils see the counsellor as the school staff or part of the disciplinary system, they may not tell the counsellor everything.

6.2.3.1.3 Counsellors wave a magic wand: Unrealistic expectations from school

Most of the participants in this study reported that they were seen as magical workers and the school staff expected them to produce miracle results.

Teachers see us like wave a magic wand, panacea to the ailment.

That's mean all the difficult kids they cannot handle they would pass to me, you know...Some think that counselling is a very easy process. They think that I am just talking to the kids, you see. (201)

They are quick to judge when they do not see the improvement in the areas they want. When I passed by teacher room I heard very negative and insensitive remarks "under counseling still like that. Still speak vulgar language, counseling for what?" (201)

She continued to express her feelings of not being understood by the teachers

They expect us to work wonders. I might get a referral form: late coming, rude to teacher, sleep in class, not doing homework. ...20 in the list and you are expected to work on all the problems and at the end of the referral form: totally totally incorrigible.

Gone case! Or they write Very wicked child. (201)

Yet, with this kind of referral, the teachers expect the school counsellor to wave a magic wand and change the pupils. The areas that the teachers expect the pupils to change may not be in tandem with the counsellor's expectation (101), the teachers wanted the pupils to pass the examination but the counsellors' would like the pupils to get self awareness and be able to grow and be in charge of their lives (109, 110). The teachers referred the pupils for inattention or other classroom problems but that might not be the root problem of the pupils.

Other counsellors also mentioned that it is impossible to have changes over a short period of time. Participant 107 and 108 conducted a STEP-UP group work for at-risk pupils. She finds it difficult to affect change within 10 sessions of one hour of group work given that a total of 15 pupils is in the group.

So if the school expects that in that one hour that we spend with them, the student gets transformed. They have such high expectations that the youth will transform totally. So when they don't see that kind of results then they will question why the pupil remains the same. So I think that their expectations are too high. We feel frustrated too because the teachers can not see that. (107, 108)

To see changes happen in youths' lives within such a short period of time is nearly quite impossible. (207, 208)

In order to have a long lasting effect, more resources and funding are needed.

I think we really face, really a lack of funding and resources to go in ...now we are doing in a group, so we don't really have any time to go in to meet with the youths individually. (207, 208)

Participant 104 said her dilemma occurred when she proposed to close a case after seeing the pupil for 4 or 5 sessions but the school suggested that she carry on. She feels that for plateau cases, there was not much she could do. When the pupils have deep-seated family problems, she could only minimize or prevent the situation from getting worse or protect

the pupils from further hurt or damage. There seems to be many other factors that are beyond the capability of what the counselling can do, when the difficulties of the pupils lie deep-seated in the family or elsewhere (culture or environment)

6.2.3.2 *School culture*

6.2.3.2.1 *Labelling culture*

The overall learning culture of schools described by the participants was very much at odds with the values of counselling. Counselling stresses nurturing, but schools normally emphasise academic performance. Counselling gives time for the individuals to grow but the educational system is concerned about producing pupils who conform and effective, measurable, instant, behavioural improvements. Participants stated that in a system in which streaming is a prominent feature, pupils in the lower stream are perceived as being negatively labelled by the system.

After working for many years with the pupils from the NS (Normal Stream) pupils, participant 111 feels that the pupils from the NS have been labelled by the school as trouble makers.

Once the pupils done something wrong, the teachers see the pupils through tinted lens. Once the pupils feel that you are contemning them, high chance is that they will continue to misbehave,.. youths respond well to encouragement, positive feedback, affirmation and praises. We adult too. Youths become more conscious about themselves. The more negative feedback they get, the more they will continue to react negatively. (211)

Participant 107 shared the similar scenario:

Like I have one case, was being labelled as a trouble-maker. So what happened was that, even though there are fights in school, but he, I mean it wasn't his, he didn't take part in anything, there wasn't, he didn't start a fight or whatever, but the school just went up to him and suspend him. (207, 208)

Participant 108 has the similar feelings

When something gone missing, then they look at the pupils who was in trouble before, did you steal it, that kind of thing. You know, like, 'I didn't do anything and you're asking me, of all the people, whether I steal it or not'. So it's like labelled a thief. (207, 208)

Participant 109 said

So from the school, labelling and negative perception are not helpful. (109, 110)

Participant 111 worked with pupils under the Guidance Programme and he conducted STEP-UP and many other workshops for pupils. He said:

The school labels them misbehave, the pupils start to behave in order to fit the role of the label perfectly. I am bad so I misbehave..once you are labelled you tend to stick to the label. Unless something happen, trigger off that you behave differently. The label normally pupils get from school: bad, naughty, problematic, uncooperative, destructive. Teachers think of you this way. You are classified in a particular way. Pupil think you are a bully or a bullied, you feel quite ok or rather well, or even quite nice, the tendency is you will repeat the action more. (211)

6.2.3.2.2 *Schools overemphasize on academic standards*

Three counsellors mentioned that programmes they ran for the schools were often not effective because on several occasions programmes were cancelled by the schools. Teachers would sometimes hold pupils back for lessons after school, and even recess was denied to the pupils in order to give them remedial lessons. Teachers were sometimes reluctant to allow time for pupils to attend guidance programmes.

106 conducted a career guidance programme and she found that it was rather difficult to find time slots for it. Pupils are frequently held for remedial classes after schools. When it is exam time, pupils will not be available for the career guidance programme.

She lamented that her career programme was not given priority.

As a school, academic work will always have the priority. So much pressure put on the students for them to perform. School is doing a good job to take on this career guidance programme, I feel a bit of pinch of string. (206)

6.2.3.2.3 *Schools have too many programmes*

Participant 109 felt grateful that her guidance workshop was given an hour slot in school time, which means that pupils will have to attend the workshop, not like the after school hour where retaining the pupils for workshops is not welcomed. But she also expressed her frustration that the pupils were often held by the teachers for other academic stuff.

Like pastoral care period, the teachers hold them back. I don't know for what. If their perception is changed that this is something very important, it shouldn't be missed, then they are more likely to emphasize to the students 'this is important, please go'. (109)

Schools are getting more and more programmes. They have service learning, step up, don't know what class activities. I'm just wondering whether if all these conflicting interest. Whether it will affect one or a few of them. (110)

6.2.3.3 *Uncontrollable factors outside the counselling room*

There were two factors found in this study: the classroom and the system factors.

6.2.3.3.1 *Uncontrollable classroom factors*

Participant 101 shared the following

The teacher said the child was very wicked. But I did not see the child wicked. I always see the good sides of the child. Those students who stepped into my room, I do not see the wicked sides, I see the students are good students. Very amiable to reason, receptive and they can be reformed. It could be due to the dynamic of the classroom, the home situation and dynamic of interpersonal relations, the societal

force that have gone wrong. I do not know what went wrong. (101)

They told me the counselling room, this whole place is so angelic with light, but when they go out of the room, they met with the devils and temptations. Once they are out, the kind of peers they mix with and the parents and the home environment, the society force that I was so sad it was totally out of control. problems. Here you try so hard, I hate to say, it will undo everything. Go back to square one. (101)

She could not help but asked

What is that in the classroom? What have you done how has the child be provoked? How have you been doing in the classroom? What have you said to the child? Back to the bigger classroom the bigger context, they cannot cope again.. My heartache is the fire fighting syndrome. (101)

Participants 107 and 108 echoed the same view. They faced the feedback from the teachers who said that after attending STEP-UP the pupils remain unchanged. They are still disruptive and do not respect the teachers.

The students are still behaving this way because the style of the teacher is still the same..when we praise them they feel good so we see less of the problematic behaviour, but we're not sure that when they are back in the system again, people will start labeling them, scolding them again... (107)

6.2.3.3.2 *Uncontrollable systemic issues*

101 expressed frustration about fighting against the system. The system she mentioned referred to the wider school and family environment.

It's the systemic thing. I work with the pupils to cope with the bigger environment. I really empathize the pupils...Fighting with the system is very difficult. The kid's problems are not isolated. (101)

When I say systemic it means that usually it a time of vicious cycle in term of he lives with the family the root cause lies with the family or the problem is you know, because of the family...the family dynamic...the teacher student relationship dynamic

plus classroom dynamic in this case here or even policy of certain disciplinary rule you know...ya...so it's systemic. So very often we cannot work alone with the child because the issue is systemic. This is my heartache. If I really want to help the students, I have to do more but I am not in the position to do that. (201)

Pupils are expected to conform in school

No matter how much the educational system has changed or improved, school is still a place to conform, take for example wearing school uniforms, pupils are always expected to conform to rules and regulations. For pupils who are creative, and those who think out of the box, they do not want to wear the uniform properly, however, the school sees it as rebellious behaviour. The pupils we see are not bad pupils. They just do not fit in the system (111)

Participant 103 knows that the pupils, including the Normal Stream pupils, are experiencing a lot of stress from school work. Normal stream pupils act cool and pretend that they do not care but actually participant 103 feels that academic issues have spilled over into the disciplinary and counselling issue. However, when the pupils walked into her counselling room, she would not touch any academic issue for fear it would turn them off. Deep inside, she knows that most of the Normal Stream pupils cannot follow the curriculum and they are failing all the time. Their behaviour is a mask to cover their shame, lack of self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy, and it is hard to motivate them. Due to time constraints, the counsellors just deal with whatever issues the pupils are sent in for and don't address the academic aspect. The educational system is a wider systemic issue beyond the capacity of the counsellor to deal with.

Another example, the school wanted participants 109 and 110 to help the pupils to pass the examination as they were identified as at-risk pupils but actually the purpose of running such a programme conflicts with their value system.

Like this motivation group for students who might fail. It conflicts with our stand. Because they want us to make the students pass exams. But that's not what we want. If we bring across that message, the students won't listen. We are just another bunch of teachers to make them pass, instead of being interested in their lives, being

interested in what their dreams and goals of life are. So we're trying to juggle also.
(209, 210)

Counsellors in Ryan's study (2007) expressed the same conflict because schools seemed to be driven by the demands of measurable achievement, while counsellors were more concerned about valuing the individual as a whole.

6.2.4 Summary and discussion on Dilemmas faced by the participants

The dilemmas faced by the counsellors working in a Singapore secondary school can be summarized into three categories:

First, the ill-defined job scope has created confusions. In some schools the counsellors were expected to do investigations and home visits, whereas at other school home visits might be the responsibility of school social workers.

Second, most counsellors identified their role as counselling and group facilitating, they are especially would like to do more counselling work rather than coordinating and other non-counselling related jobs. Their approach to counselling is more a relational based one. As such, the disciplinary counselling caused a conflict within the counselling role especially among pupils, who are mostly involuntary, and associating the counsellor with discipline, are unable to speak openly to them. Behavioural and disciplinary cases are expected to have their behaviour changed. The school and the referring parties, the DM or teachers normally expect the counsellors to be on their side to reform the pupils.

Lastly, the dilemmas faced by the counsellors are beyond their control. They related to the wider environment, the prevalent misconception about counselling, the general school culture and the uncontrollable factors that go beyond the counselling room, to the classroom interaction, school learning environment, family system and the whole community.

6.3 Positive Experiences

Participant 101 is a full time counsellor, and she sees herself playing a supportive role for the pupils. She derives great satisfaction from her job and she finds her job very fulfilling and rewarding.

I have got immense satisfaction from the job as I am a very caring and maternal sort of person. (personality)

I have learnt a lot from my pupils. They will tell me about how these brotherhoods evolves into gangs and what their gang activities.. (101)

Participant 102 is a retired vice principal, who believes her role as a school counsellor is to lighten the journey of the pupils.

I enjoy most when the cases move. There is a closure. (102)

Participant 103 sees her role as a supportive staff member in school

There was this boy who got entry into Poly and came back to school to give a presentation and he attributed the changes and the help he got to the counselling sessions he got when he was in the secondary school. It was a real heart warming moment. (103)

Participant 104 is a retired teacher and, as a part-time counsellor, she most enjoys being able to help students to see the road ahead and to open up choices to them.

Participant 105 is a part time school counselor who says she enjoys working with the young as they can think out of the box and they are very creative. .

Working with them helps me to see thing from different perspectives at times. (105)

Participant 105 can see good in pupils

One thing I find out that they are very good youth with very tender heart, very kind heart, especially when hear them talk about their love ones, their tone of voice soften. A lot of them have a desire to make their parents proud. These are the thing I enjoy most. ..It gives me a lot satisfaction to see them at their full potential. I somehow

believe that even though we do see visible changes, changes may be taking place in them. But it is not expressed out. (105)

Participant 106 enjoys working with her group of career guidance pupils. She enjoys helping pupils to find a purpose in life.

I am working with one group of very motivated students. This is why it is very pleasant. (106)

Participant 107 conducts workshops for school youths.

Its very satisfying how the youths and the parents at the end. Some words like 'thank you' also make me feel very happy. Words like these help me to feel satisfied.

I think that was a very touching and encouraging moment for me. To hear such a remark.. (107, 108)

Participant 108 conducts sexuality workshop with pupils, she enjoys being a friend and an 'older sibling' for the pupils.

My definition of a counsellor for youths is kind of an older sibling to them...more like a friend.

Participant 109 feels the job of a counsellor helps him grow and learn.

I find that working with this group of pupils help me to develop some skills which are very relevant to my own daily life. Such as communication skills and stress management. (109,110)

Participant 110 was about to leave her job but it was the pupils that held her back.

Ya I was very touched, I feel like "eh, you know, oh, my, the group work has paid off", most of them had stopped cutting, ya, so, and they are more open to express that, I mean, they actually tell us, you know, they are grateful for the effort we put in in their lives, they had benefited a lot, so, I think that is, that was so far the greatest reward la.

Actually I keep thinking about leaving the school, but after that, I think they are the ones who kept me, kept me going la. I don't know, I'm having second thoughts. No la,

ya. I think it's the relationship that has been built there already. And they are always very happy to see us. Ya, and they still want to meet up, and ya, so that was very rewarding la. (109, 110)

She thinks that counselling is a long term effort.

I need to be very focused, that everything that we do has something. Even, no matter how small it is, because we always talk about, let's say if we, for him if he in school conduct workshop for one whole class, there are so many students like 30, 40 plus, then sometimes we do wonder like what kind of impact can we have, you know. But we always try to encourage ourselves and each other that even if 1 out of the 40 has, you know, take back something, then it's worth it. (109, 110)

Participant 111 shared his happiest moment

Getting to know this boy and what he likes or dislikes. He really shared a lot about himself. And what he wants to be in the future. His aspirations and interests. I really felt that I was part of his world. Then when he finished his case he actually called me and left a message thanking me for everything, being his counsellor and asking me how I was doing. I rarely have youths call me and ask how I am doing. Usually I ask them what they are doing. And they usually answer "okay lor". But this boy here. He was secondary two. Asking you how you are doing. And thanking you for being his worker. I feel that someone actually appreciates what you are doing. (111)

6.4 Enabling Factors from the wider context

The counsellors in this study expressed their wishes for, and identified some of the enabling factors from, the wider context that would help them to better fulfil their roles.

| | Enabling Factors |
|--------|--|
| School | <p>The profile of the counsellors would need to be raised. School can create a caring and holistic culture like the Northlight School where the teachers really look out for the pupils and stresses more on EQ, has more value and pastoral education (201).</p> <p>The school has a counselling culture and believe the counselling can help (102)</p> |

| | |
|----------|---|
| | <p>The school makes an effort to protect the service, to ensure that those that walk through the counselling door do not come in with a defeated feeling.(105)</p> <p>The enabling factors school can do is not to be judgmental and to provide a more nurturing environment with more affirming for the pupils. (205)</p> <p>Maybe school can change the climate. Equal treatment to be given to the Express and Normal Stream students. Maybe engaging some of the best students to coach the Normal Stream students.</p> <p>The school can put less emphasis on the academic, we put too much emphasis on academic success, we do not have time for exploring or trying ways of solving problems (106)</p> <p>School to arrange smaller groups for us to work on, then we can get to know them, work on their goals... to make their own choices instead of authority just telling them....so if we are fortunate enough to have a principal who plays more emphasis on these areas (209)</p> <p>School can emphasizes that this (the counselling and group guidance) is important. School believes in this programme and they (the school staff) think that this programme will really be able to help them achieve better grades..(209)</p> <p>Schools have a better understanding of what counselling is all about (211).</p> |
| Teachers | <p>I enjoyed working with the teacher, she always informed the students, and she would inform me who was doing what, she would keep herself aware of the programme and she even attend together with the students. She played an important role in coordination between me as a trainer from a service provider and the school (206)</p> <p>Teachers always there, and she sat in and she tried to get feedback from us after the group work sessions. She knew the youth was having family problem and she let us know about the</p> |

| | |
|---------|--|
| | <p>background of that pupils. This give more holistic picture, hopefully, we can do more therapeutic work with him (211)</p> <p>Teachers need to come to give feedback, not just say ‘this is a bunch of troubled pupils, problems makers’ and let us to do wonder to them..</p> <p>Teacher-student relationship is very important. They can have family problem, but because he or she has a relationship with the teachers, he or she may behave well in school (211).</p> |
| Parents | <p>More collaboration with parents</p> <p>It is beneficial to engage parents (207)</p> <p>Parents attending workshop changed parenting style and that was beneficial for the youth. (208)</p> |

Table 6.4 Enabling factors identified by counsellors

The counsellors in this study revealed a mixture of feelings: there were barriers and challenges to be faced, but in general, and in contradiction to their anxieties, the counsellors were quite positive about their role. The barriers identified were the misconception about counselling, the labelling culture that emphasises on academic standards, schools having too many programmes, unrealistic expectations from school, and uncontrollable classroom factors and systemic issues. The factors which contributed to their positive experience were: the job matched their caring personality, they were able to see improvements in pupils. The counsellors also pointed out the enabling factors from the wider context: positive caring school climax and good working relationship with teachers and parents. (The issues of dilemmas will be further discussed in Ch 7)

Section 3 Summary and conclusion

This Section divides into two chapters: Chapter 7 and Chapter 8. Chapter 7 discusses and summarises the research findings of the study. The dilemmas faced by the participants as revealed in Chapter 6, the ill-defined role, working with involuntary disciplinary cases and the constraints faced due to the wider environment will be analysed and discussed.

Chapter 8 reflects upon the study, and makes recommendations for policy makers and research studies in the future.

As discussed earlier, the dilemmas faced by the school counsellors in this study can be summarized under three main headings. First, an ill-defined role and variable job scope. Second, using a model designed for working with voluntary subjects when working with involuntary cases. Third, the inhibiting factors from the wider environment.

Chapter 7 Summary and discussion

7.1 Introduction

It is appropriate to revise the research questions with which I started the research process. My research was: A critical evaluation/ inquiry into the ways in which school counsellors describe and experience their role. There were 4 main questions I asked my participants:

1. Can you describe your role and the work of a counsellor working in Singapore secondary schools?
2. Can you describe what you do when pupils are referred to you?
3. How would you describe your experience as a school counsellor?
4. Are there any contextual factors that enable or inhibit you in carrying out your role as a counsellor in the local school system?

The purpose of question one was to allow the participants to describe their role and, questions 2 and 3 are basically subsidiaries of question one; questions 4 will allow participants to describe the wider environment and identify factors that enable or inhibit them carrying out their role as counsellor in the local school system.

My research question No 1 was answered in Chapter 4, and the research question No 2 was answered in Chapter 5. Both the roles described and defined by the counsellors are found. The role of the school counsellors described by the participants is less role bound, basically dependent upon the needs of pupils. Most of them defined their role as counselling and group facilitating. Although they are also involved in consulting with parents and other school staff, they seldom referred to their role as consulting.

Research question No 3 was answered by the overarching theme of dilemmas that the counsellors faced and the factors that caused the dilemmas were identified. For Research question No 4, the factors coming from the contextual environment were displayed and discussed in Chapter 6. Counsellors' positive experiences were also noted.

Therefore this research has answered the research questions I intended to study. In the

following, I will focus on the analysis and discussion of the research findings: the dilemmas faced by the school counsellors identified by the ill defined role description, mis-match of expectations held by the counsellors and within the overall educational climate, and uncontrollable factors from the wider environment. A school counselling model will be proposed as a result of this research.

7.2 Role and job scope ill-defined

In this study a major dilemma that emerged from counsellors' accounts was their perception and experience of their role. From the data analysis in Chapter 4, counsellors working in the Singapore secondary school system define their roles depending upon the work they do with different profiles of pupils. This role conceptualization is flexible and in a fluid state. From a positive point of view, the attitude of the school counsellors was flexible and accepting of a vaguely, and not precisely defined, role description. We are not able, however, to assume that school counsellors will happily accept whatever job scope comes their way. It was not the case shown from this study. There is tension found between the flexible role definition and the vaguely or poorly defined role that seems to encompass everything (as discussed in 4.3.1). Perhaps the counsellors in this study put the needs of pupils before themselves and they wanted so much to be integrated into the school system (as shared by participant 101 and 103 in particular) that they have accustomed themselves to a vaguely defined role. Literature shows that role ambiguity and identity crises come from poorly defined roles (Brown, 1989; Johnson, 2000). In order to serve the pupils effectively, school counsellors need to have clearly defined roles. Role descriptions set professional boundaries and shape professional identity. School counselors will then be aware of what is expected of them.

7.2.1 Preferred counselling related job

It is rather evident that the participants in this study would like to have more time to spend on direct counselling work with pupils and that they establish personal relationship with

pupils they counsel. However, working in a school system, the role of the counsellor includes remedial, preventive and developmental aspects (Bemak, 2000; Burnham, 2000; Gysber & Henderson, 2001; Hornby et al, 2003; Schmidz 1993; Sink, 2005). Most of the counsellors in this study, working full-time and part-time, were required to do guidance programmes, such as anger management, stress management, smoking cessation, and workshops on love and relationships, career guidance, self-harm etc. This is in line with the whole curriculum approach to guidance and counselling in the Singapore school system. Most of the programmes are for life skills development through a series of group guidance activities. Counsellors are required to do the job of teaching skills and other social work, which is more preventive and education oriented. Their job is not confined to clinical counselling work.

The development of Guidance and Counselling in Singapore secondary schools as discussed in Chapter 2 has been evolved from Pastoral Care and Affective Career Education, and has been adopting an infusion approach integrating guidance and counselling into the curriculum. Before the job title of full-time or part-time counsellor was created, secondary schools in Singapore engaged teacher counsellors, or counsellors from external agencies to deal with pupils in need (Lim, 2004). Actually this is not a unique scenario in the Singapore school system. Guidance and counselling in schools traditionally involves giving advice and guidance to pupils in all areas of their development. It is preventive, developmental, and psycho-educational in nature. (Tan, 2004; Hornby, 2003; Bor et al, 2002; Thompson & Rudolph, 2000).

As discussed in Chapter one, counselling development in the US and UK has gradually moved away from a personal/individual approach to a more community focussed one, and the trend is moving away from remedial to more developmental and preventive strategies. However, the findings of this study show that the therapeutic component was still very strong in the role description as experienced by school counsellors in the Singapore secondary schools. Some participants in this study did not see tracking of pupils' records, coordinating programmes or meetings with parents as part of the job of a school counsellor. They indicated a preference for working directly with pupils focusing on therapeutic

relationships. Perhaps, there is a mis-match of expectation as to what exactly the role of a school counsellor is.

Although the preventive and developmental approach should take precedence according to the counselling movement, from the fact that the number of pupils exhibiting emotional and behavioural difficulties is on the rise (Thompson and Rudolph, 2000), I would argue that the remedial approach is still very much needed. The multi-agency approach as proposed by the UK government suggests that pupils with mental health needs should be referred to community professionals. In reality, pupils may want to speak to someone they know, like a school counsellor, rather than a stranger from a community organisation. The reported strong therapeutic component in this study indicates that counsellors have imposed on themselves this therapeutic identity in their role description.

Usually, the role of professional school counsellor is determined by others (Erford, 2003). The school counselling service in Singapore is still in its expanding stage. Therefore, counsellors are in the process of establishing their identity. One of the issues that perhaps needs to be raised is, when using a more multi-agency approach, the roles of school counsellors will be broadened to encompass coordinating, consulting, running various programmes etc, and there is a risk of de-emphasizing the role of the school counsellors. Counsellors may perceive themselves as not doing counselling related jobs. The role of school counselling needs to be re-defined. Erford (2003) identifies the two ideological shifts: First, the role in the schools shift from the role or position itself to its impact on the counselling programme on student achievement and the schools' success. Second, the benefits of such programmes should be extended to all pupils rather than only some (Erford, 2003: 66). Different countries have their own development and contextual needs, to what extent Erford's postulation is relevant to the Singapore context is yet to be confirmed.

7.2.2 Preferred well defined job

The findings of this study showed that counsellors expressed more satisfaction when the

job scope was well defined. From those counsellors who mentioned “everything and anything can go in, it is up to the school to decide what job the counsellors are expected to do” (101), “I end up doing a lot of things, fire fighting sort of work” (103), it is apparent that when the job scope is not clearly defined, role confusion and dilemmas arise.

Apart from participants 101 and 103, the rest of the participants in this study seemed fine and able to swap to meet the demands and expectation of different roles accordingly. However, the inner struggles may persist. The literature shows that unclear role descriptions will create stress and high levels of emotional exhaustion (Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). In the long run, it will affect job satisfaction. One of the participants in this study resigned, and the reason given was that to “continue to do the school counselling job will shorten the span of the counsellor’s life”. What this person meant was a counsellor’s life could be shortened by both the emotional exhaustion and the stress of low job satisfaction. This counsellor eventually chose to resign as a school counsellor, rather than risking an early death due to stress and exhaustion.

The flexible role description of school counsellors found in this study is in line with the emergent role profile of school counsellors in the schools in England and Wales (Jenkins & Polat, 2006) as a result of the implication of Every Child Matters and the Children Act for schools (Reid, 2006). Changing a role-based description to a flexible role description for school counsellors has been anticipated as having “enormous challenges” (Reid, 2006; Jenkins & Polat, 2006) to the school system and counsellors.

Since the confusion the counsellors faced about their job scope was due to an unclear description of it, the Ministry of Education (MOE) needs to give a clearer description of the job and its roles so that the stress caused by its loose definition, and the present confusion of roles, will be reduced.

7.3 Working with involuntary cases

From the data analysis of Chapter 5, most counsellors defined their roles as counsellors (therapists) or as group facilitators. The counsellors identified their role mostly as counsellors dealing with therapeutic, one-on-one counselling. The therapeutic component as described by the participants was paramount. This distinct attention to the emotional and psychological needs of pupils, is rather similar to that of the school counsellors from the UK (Polat & Jenkins 2005), rather than the ASCA' 3 Cs Plus (counselling role, consulting role, coordinating role and the large size classroom guidance role) (Davis, 2005).

With this therapeutic orientation, it is very stressful working with discipline cases where the pupils are referred on an involuntary basis.

7.3.1 Counsellors' dual role function: discipline and counselling

Most counsellors in this study reported that they were involved in discipline. The increased demand for escalating the behavioural management role of counsellors (in the Guidance Programme, or STEP-UP Programme, Pre- and Post-disciplinary counselling) makes their role increasingly stressful. The schools' expectation of improvements in pupils' behaviour greatly increases the stress experienced by counsellors.

Behavioural management is stressful for counsellors especially those who believe in developing a strong relationship, as it conflicts with the values the counsellors hold. Most of the counsellors used a relational approach, and they believe in having a therapeutic relationship with their pupils (Chapter 5 discusses the counselling approach). The literature identifies the problem that the two components of behavioural management and the counselling relationship do not sit comfortably with each other (McLeod, 2008: 127). McLeod holds that counselling is a collaborative, one-to-one, relationship, in which the client can talk about his or her problems.

From the data analysis, using a more relational approach, the counsellors explicitly acknowledged the importance of relationship building or rapport building with pupils. They mentioned that young people need to feel that the counsellors care and can be trusted

before they are able to share what troubles them. They believed that good rapport building in personal counselling and group work is necessary for effective counselling. It is in line with the literature (Norcross, 2002) that positive counselling relationships lead to positive counselling outcomes

The counsellors in this study normally listen to, empower, and affirm the pupils to help them to come to terms with the challenges they face, help to release emotions and assist with decision making.

However, when disciplinary issues were involved, the behavioural dimension is involved. Instead of focusing on relationship building, counsellors need to address the behavioural components. On the pupil's part, when the efforts of the counsellor were perceived as part of the school disciplinary system, intended to change the students' behaviour, resistance and defensive mechanisms will be triggered. Participant 107 separated the opposing roles by giving reprimands at one session and therapy at the following session, but she felt that the pupils were afraid to speak openly in case they said anything "wrong". So in the Guidance Programme, participant 107 faced the dilemma of role confusion between a law or regulation enforcer and a counsellor. It is rather a relief that most school counsellors do not deal with the Guidance Programme. But schools engage counsellors from external agencies to do STEP-UP, where the so called "problematic" pupils will be gathered together. To deal with the therapeutic relationship and behavioural dimensions concurrently in a group of 10 pupils, is a dilemma imposed on counselors. The counsellors are expected to deliver the programme, manage the behaviour and affect changes in the pupils within a very short given time-frame (10 sessions in total and one hour a session), which is rather difficult.

Counsellors find themselves having to divorce theory and practice. They have to use their counselling approach eclectically, by using rapport building to create a trusting relationship, then swapping to other, behavioral modification techniques, to address the disciplinary issues.

Whatever strategy they adopt, strains are created in the counselling relationship. Some critics argue that there is not a specific, isolated counselling model to be used in the school context. Counsellors need to change their conception or model of counselling, such as the solution-focused, or the cognitive behavioural approach, in order to be effective in the school setting (Hornby, 2003).

7.3.2 *The boundaries of discipline and counselling*

Hue (2007) researched the relationships between school guidance and discipline. (Guidance and counselling are interchangeable as used in the Hong Kong school system). Hue finds that discipline is concerned about conformity, obedience and collectivism, whereas guidance or counselling emphasizes care and support for the pupils' whole personal growth. Due to these distinctions between counselling and discipline, some teacher counsellors experienced difficulties in playing both their caring and disciplinary roles. Though Hue sought to integrate the two components of counselling and discipline as both are important aspects of pastoral care (Hue, 2007), tensions continue to exist. Hue thus recommends the creation of a communal culture which is positive and caring. It is hoped that by doing so, a positive learning environment will be enhanced. In short, Hue's paper sought to build a connectedness between the two contrasting components, the counselling or guidance, and the discipline together. There are always two teams of staff managing the two components, namely the guidance or counselling team, and the discipline team. Hue's study showed that it is very challenging to integrate two different teams managed by different staff. The counsellors in the Singapore system, having to manage the dual role function, would find it to be even more difficult.

Due to the distinct difference in the values of education and pastoral care in the school system, I would argue that the school should implement guidelines which respect those differences. The literature supports the need to establish firm boundaries between education and treatment (Gilbert & Sheiman, 1995 in Davis 2005). By doing so, pupils will not feel confused and the stress of the school counsellors will be relieved. ASCA

(2001, in Davis, 2005) clearly indicated that school counselor should not be placed in the role of designating or implementing punishment. In practice, the counsellors can be involved in the development of disciplinary plans but should not be involved in executing the discipline (Davis, 2005: 159).

It is important that the public image of counselling is one of a safe, non judgmental service. Those who seek help from the counselling service should know that they will not be judged or punished. Presenting the right image to pupils will make them willing to approach school counsellors for help when the need arises.

7.3.3 Counsellors as an agent of change

Most counsellors identified themselves as affecting positive change in students' lives and the schools expect to see changes in pupils. However, the schools and the counsellors themselves may have shared the same disappointment in that they both expect better results than the school circumstances and external, uncontrollable, influences will allow. Teachers expect the counsellors to "be on their side" as if arbitrating a dispute, while the goals set may be unattainable, if the various different stages of changes and the process of change, and other environmental factors were not acknowledged in the school counselling settings.

Prochaska in Kiracote & LaSonde (2007) points out the six stages of a change process ranging from no precontemplation of change (absence of the precontemplation of change) to taking positive action to change. He emphasizes the process of the continuum whereby the school authority and counsellors can ascertain which stage of change that the clients are in and if they are ready to change and what kind of treatment is appropriate for them. As not all the clients, especially the involuntary clients, are ready to change then no matter how hard the counsellor works, counselling is not going to work for them. (Script 105: hardcore case).

7.3.4 Components of change

Prochaska and his associates have identified the common components of change among the major systems of psychotherapy (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001 and Prochaska et al., 1994 in Sink, 2005). These components include preparation before any action taken. It is supported by the counselling literature that changes take place in the mind before it affects the emotions or behaviour, according to cognitive therapy (Beck, 1976), and changes in the internal frame of reference and perspective always precede the external action (Roger, 1961). However, this important aspect has always been neglected when faced with time constraints and the needs of conformity in a school setting.

Most of the involuntary pupils sent for counselling belong to the initial stage in that they do not see they have a problem (script 111, 211). They may think that it is the teachers or the school system that has the problem (script 101, 201). According to the constructs of change developed by Prochaska, those pupils have not moved into the contemplation stage, and this implies that they are not willing to examine their lives or at least consider themselves more critically to see if their behaviour is having some effect on others that has caused them to be sent for counselling. Unless pupils move from contemplation stage to preparation stage, they are not prepared for any change and may not be ready to take action. When pupils move from the preparation stage to the action stage, this is where the disruptive behaviour gets modified. Eventually, a pupils attempts change and if it is successful, the pupil experiences positive effects from that change. He may continue to maintain his new, changed, behaviour. Prochaska mentioned that this change process is not a linear one. Pupils may move back and forth between the contemplation to termination stages.

Sink (2005) acknowledges the constraints of working in the school system, and he holds that counsellors are not required to help the pupils go through the entire journey of change. Some pupils may need some help to move from one stage to another. Counsellors can help pupils to move from one stage to another, such as from the contemplation to the preparation stage, or from the preparation to the action stage. The processes of change

take time. So when the pupils are not prepared to take the necessary action, counsellors are not in a position to hasten the change process. In my opinion, school is a place for education, nurturing and transformation. All in all, school makes changes to pupils' lives. I would question the assumption that the school counsellors are responsible for the results of transformation of pupils' behaviour or emotional well being. The dilemmas faced by the counsellors are inevitable if the processes or stages of change are not being taken into consideration.

Furthermore, the core construct of counselling is based on people being willing to change. Can counsellors change people who do not want to be changed? If counsellors tell pupils, "This is required of you, if you do not change, the following punishments will be administered". The above statement would be considered "instruction giving" or "laws enforcing". This type of instruction would be appropriate if carried out by the disciplinary master or teaching staff who try to enforce classroom management. Participants in this study faced dilemmas because they used a voluntary counselling model to counsel involuntary cases. Actually, most counselling models are voluntary models which means the counsellees at least take the initial step to seek help and try to find out what happened to their lives. Counsellors cannot change people who do not want to be changed. Research by Norcross (2002) states that the counselling relationship accounts for approximately 30 percent of the successful outcome of counselling, and the motivation of the client accounts for approximately 40 percent, the remaining 30 percent is from theories or techniques and expectancy. This motivation that the counsellees bring into the counselling session includes their own personal resources and a desire to solve their problems. Involuntary cases do not have the motivation to change. What makes the matter worse is that pupils may see counsellors as part of the disciplinary procedure. This would threaten the working alliance between counsellor and pupils which has been found to be the key component of psychotherapy and counselling (Wampold, 2001:158). Counsellors need to work very hard and the effort may be futile if the clients have set up a defensive attitude to them.

Combining Prochaska's stages of change and the above research study with regards to the motivation of change, we can safely conclude that there are other change agents outside the counselling room or counselling sessions. For instance, disciplinary teams can re-enforce school regulations, teachers can plant the seed of wanting to change by facilitating a positive learning atmosphere, schools can implement positive reinforcement strategies. Thus the environmental factors can serve as change agents. Counsellors are not the only party to be blamed when there is no obvious change in pupils' behaviour.

Besides the above mentioned consideration of the whole school environments when dealing with disciplinary cases, this study found that when working with involuntary clients, a combination of some other approaches might be useful. As analyzed in chapter 6, participants 102 and 104 incorporated a teaching component. Using a more cognitive approach was found to be effective in saving them from the dilemma mentioned above. Perhaps when the involuntary clients start to contemplate change and prepare for change, then the psycho-education approach is helpful and effective. For those pupils in the pre-contemplation stage, who are not ready for counselling, counsellors should lower their expectations of the pupils and other school staff can be involved. High expectations should not be imposed on the school counsellors.

7.4 Wider inhibiting environment

In Singapore secondary schools, the streaming system puts the less academically inclined pupils into the Normal Stream (as discussed in the background of the education system in Section one). Almost one third of the pupils are put into the Normal Stream after the PSLE. They are the main source of referrals to the counsellors.

The participants think that the labelling set by the educational system is not helpful to pupils' development. Counsellors conducting the STEP-UP Programme feel especially so (107, 108, 109, 110, 111). Labelling pupils problematic, notorious, wicked...etc, will only encourage the pupils to "start to behave in order fit the role of the label perfectly" (211). The Normal Stream is designed for those less capable or less academically

inclined pupils, the label may not do so intentionally, but it seems that it contributes to the negative feelings and negative behaviour of the pupils. .

As discussed earlier, various streaming systems are ability-based to ensure cohorts with the same ability are taught together and stretched to their strength. The competition among the same ability pupils is fierce but it was believed that the streaming system would “allow a child every opportunity to go as far as he can” (Yip and Sim, 1990). Thus, for a child who is not meant for academic endeavours, streaming would help to ensure that he acquires basic literacy and numeracy, as well as being prepared for training in a skill (Gopinathan & Ho, 1997). Gopinathan and Ho also write that “In Singapore, the assumptions that drive the education system are clearly instrumental in nature” (p.166). Education policies in Singapore emphasise manpower-oriented curriculum policies, to “ensure that school learners have the skills to meet labour market needs” (ibid). These policies are basically ability driven and result in academic pacing and allocation of pupils. It seems efficient and pragmatic from a functionalist perspective. It effectively allocates pupils into various streams so that relevant education can be provided to them according to their ability. It is through education that the economy is driven. More able and motivated students are fully developed and are allocated to the more difficult and important social roles (Moor, 2000). This is to ensure no wastage of resource, in Esther Tan’s term ‘reduce educational wastage (Tan, 2004). The strong link between education and economic benefits also contributes to economic growth. This strong functionalist approach to education has its roots in the ideology or philosophy of a combination of paternalism and Confucian tradition (Chan, 1976). There are western researchers who would argue that streaming will result in social exclusion and produce detrimental effects on children’s achievement (Goldthorpe, 2003; Halsey, 2003). Even in Singapore there have been studies (Hassan et al, 1968; Tan, 2004; Zhang, 1993) which show that the educational system may have contributed to the current social stratification. Continually being failed by the school system may cause the pupils to lose their desire to learn and may have a life long effect on individuals (Ng, 2006; Pan, 1997).

Streaming is normally based on examination results. Traditional examinations celebrate only one kind of intelligence rather than multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993). However, different pupils are not born with the same intellectual endowment. Different pupils have different learning styles and perhaps experience different learning processes. In a school system that encourages good performance where good memory and analytical skills are highly emphasized rather than creative or practical thinking skills, many pupils will be excluded, will be deprived of the chance of success and some of those might drop out of the school system (Papalia et al, 2007: 417).

As this study is not about the meritocratic educational system and it is not the purpose of this chapter to discuss whether or not it is a successful or effective system, the following will focus on the effect of such a system which serves as the wider educational environment which causes some of the dilemmas our counsellors faced.

To summarize, the wider contributing factors include: the labelling culture which subtly gives the connotation that the NS pupils have been labelled by the system as being less able and less competent. This merits attention. In my opinion, and it is supported by many educationists (Sink, 2005) school is supposed to be a place to nurture and to facilitate growth. The dilemmas faced by the counsellors reveal a lot about the educational system. The other uncontrollable factors are the interactions outside the counselling room and the misconceptions about counselling among the teachers.

In the following, discussion will be focused on these three factors: the labelling culture, the misconception about counselling, and the interaction outside the counselling room.

7.4.1 Labelling culture

The majority of the pupils referred for counselling were Normal Stream pupils. Counsellors find it hard to motivate them (participant 102) and the way they solved their problems was seen to be much slower than the Express pupils (participant 104), probably

due to the complexity of the problems. Sometimes counsellors felt stuck, they experienced plateau cases (participant 104) and the pupils were not motivated to change (participant 105). Counsellors working with this group of pupils do not expect to see changes within a short time. (participants 109 and 110). Participant 111 stated that no matter what the counsellors did or said, many of the pupils are just not motivated and they remain the same.

Participant 105 said that teenagers do want to perform well at school, “especially when hear them talk about their love ones, their tone of voice soften” (script 105) and even pupils in the less academic streams have a desire to make their parents proud. Participant 105 further elaborated that “they weigh the identity as important according to the marks they get” (105). Participant 103 first described the behaviour of the Normal Stream pupils as a kind of “pain” they want to run away from.

David Elkind (2001) presents a view of adolescence in which the harsh realities of the school environment would place increased pressures on adolescents. The school environment in Singapore is especially so. Pupils who do not do well in school may have low self-esteem (211) and self-esteem is a critical self evaluation of a person’s own ability and capacity. It is also a value judgment about their self-worth (Papalia et al, 2007).

The streaming and elite-emphasis system reinforces the differences in the reality of the school system where the pupils in the better stream will do well and the pupils in the Normal Stream will expect to experience failure. Perhaps labelling by the teachers, school staff, the community and society further confirms their low expectations. The experience of participants 103, 104 and 111 mentioned that the pupils who seldom experienced success are probably a good illustration of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975; Craske, 1988) and self-worth protection (Covington, 1998, 1992). Participants in these studies noted that the behavioural problems were probably the result of internal frustration as a consequence of failure (111, 211).

The dilemma our counsellors experienced was that, though they were aware that behavioural problems could stem from a lack of success in academic work, they were not in a position to do anything, except help the pupils to “adjust’ to the system”. The so called “adjustment” was usually to “accept punishment”, “continue to experience failure”, “try to change your behaviour” (because this behaviour will get you nowhere) (101, 105).

The experience of the participants working with these pupils shows that they understood that the academic needs of the pupils had led to their disciplinary issues (103), because the pupils were not able to follow the curriculum, and had little sense of achievement (111). But the counsellors dared not bring themselves to talk about school work for fear that the pupils would not open up (103, 211). Counsellors chose to talk about whatever topics that would interest the pupils and help them with their goals, mostly not academic goals. They dared not make any attempt to change their attitude towards their studies as they knew that the pupils would “turn off” (103, 109, 110, 111). They just stayed with whatever issues for which they had been referred for counselling, and they did not have the luxury of time to counsel the pupils more fully. They needed to close each case and move on to many other similar cases (103, 203). But deep inside their hearts, they believed there are many ways to success, they believed the best of people (106), and the most important goal at hand was to help the pupils to “adjust” to the existing educational system.

The counsellors in this study built a very close and personal relationship with pupils, and the pupils’ troubles and problems were close to their hearts. Due to the limitation of their roles (as discussed earlier, they perceived themselves as counsellors and facilitators of changes, but the change was limited to help the pupils change to adapt to the system), they were not in a position to “champion” (101, 201) the pupils, and this indirectly, caused further dilemmas for the counsellors.

Counsellors wish that the school climate could be changed (205); that the school culture could be more caring and nurturing (201); that schools should focus on more than merely academic achievement (206), and that there should be no labelling or differentiation

between pupils (207, 208). Finally, in the absence of negative labelling the pupils would be able to focus on learning, rather than “reacting to the environment” (205), by developing behavioural attitudes designed to disguise their shame and/ or lack of academic success.

These were the wishes that the participants expressed during interview sessions. They will forever remain nothing more than good wishes unless their views are listened to and taken into consideration.

7.4.2 Misconceptions about counselling

Global literature on counsellor-teacher relationships reveals that the difficulties between them are not uncommon. Cooper et al (2005) studied the secondary school teachers' attitudes and conceptualisations of counselling, and they found that there were two groups of teachers and two very different views towards counselling. One view was positive but a small group of teachers was found to hold very negative attitudes towards counselling. The misconceptions held by the teachers may be related to lack of understanding about the nature of counselling. They might view counselling as an emergency service (Cooper et al, 2005). Giving a problematic and aggressive pupil time to sit comfortably and talk about his aggressive problem is not seen as acceptable by teachers in an educational setting (Montgomery, 2003). Ellis (2002 in Cooper, 2005) suggests that teachers do not appreciate the counsellors' intervention because they want to see the child 'cured' after a few sessions. Obviously the teachers are unlikely to see such a miracle and so they blame the counsellors. Furthermore, teachers might want feedback from the counsellors because of concerns about 'what the pupils might be saying about them'. Hue (2007) found that the counselling values endorsed by teacher-counsellors might be in conflict with the values held by the disciplinary approach because the discipline team is concerned only with the management of problematic behaviour. One of the distorted conceptualisations of school counselling has been identified by Watkins (2001), “the pastoral system can become distorted into discipline and non-compliant pupils are shovelled off to counsellors to have their personhood processed”. Jenkins and Polat (2006) also identified the different

perspectives held by the managerial professionals and school counsellors on the mis-fit between counselling and the core educational activity in schools.

From the analysis of the dilemmas the participants faced, it is evident that the school culture in Singapore secondary schools seems to have some misconceptions about what counselling is about (at least for the participants in this study). They include:

- the unrealistic expectations of the outcome of counselling: hoping the counsellors can wave a magic wand (101), similar to Ellis' description of "quick cure" (in Cooper 2005); participant 109 and 110 expressed the dilemma of quick fix expectations held by teachers (109, 110).

- equating counselling with discipline and expecting the counsellors to be on the staff side to correct pupils' problems.

These show that there is scope for the counselling service to be better integrated into the school system. They are potential difficulties in the counsellor – teacher relationship.

Freely (2002 cited in Cooper et al, 2005) suggests that counselling works best when the basic attitudes and principles of counselling inform the whole school. Participant 101 pointed out that her counselling effort would be in vain if she did not get the support and understanding of the classroom teachers. Participants 104 and 111 also commented that the effort of counselling would be more lasting and more beneficial to pupils if the teachers were supportive, constantly giving feedbacks and working together along side the pupils.

According to the studies by Fox and Butler (2007) based on a Northern Ireland Schools Counselling Evaluation Report, poor communication between counsellors and teachers was identified as a potential problem by five percent of the teachers. As participant 101 lamented, there was constant misunderstanding between teachers and pupils, and counsellors are put in a very stressful position if they have to mediate between them. Teachers are the integral part of the school system and most teachers do their very best to educate their pupils. The participants in this study suggested that counsellors and school teachers should work hand in hand (scrip 101, 105, 107, 111) for the same vision and

mission. Lack of communication will only deepen the misconceptions and suspicions of what the other party is doing with the pupils.

7.4.3 Interaction outside counselling room

Uncontrollable interactions outside the counselling room included interactions between the teachers and pupils in the classroom, the parent-child interaction at home and the environmental influence, including the school learning environment and the community as a whole.

Participant 101 observed her efforts to counsel individuals had been ineffective when she helped the individual change but the classroom interaction remained unchanged. “It will undo everything, go back to square one” (101). She lamented that it was the wider context that the pupils could not cope with. Participant 108 noticed that when the parents changed the ways they communicate with their child the whole interaction and outcome changed (207). Many counsellors in this study commented that the pupils’ problems were not isolated and normally there were systemic issues, the school, the teacher, the parents, family, community, all involved.

Recent research emphasizes parents’ contribution in the development of children especially in both the cognitive and the emotional realms (Papalia et al, 2007: 410).

Parenting styles can influence the interactions with children (Ibid: 441). Different family socio-economic conditions can post different problems to the pupils. Besides the pupils’ families, the community in which the pupils live, its cultural values, and the community at large also influence the development of the pupils. For instance, Singaporean Chinese culture emphasizes the value of academic achievement as the best route to upward mobility. We cannot understand the pupils without understanding the significant people in the pupils’ lives. Kuriloff (1975) holds that any attempt to understand deviant behaviour such as addiction, delinquency, mental illness etc. without taking into account “reactive processes of society” will be incomplete. Kuriloff further argued that the intrapersonal explanations of the clients’ problem “leave out significant aspects of the problem and their very

formulation often contribute to it, and sometimes actually create it.” (Kuriloff, 1975 : 35).

Traditionally, school counsellors used an intrapersonal model approach to counsel pupils on a one-to-one basis. Many scholars have questioned the applicability of this model in the school setting. The main reason is that this model is not able to provide an explanation of the counselees’ problems without locating the individuals in the environment (Kuriloff, 1975) and the unrealistic student-to-counsellor ratios (Erford, 2003). Jackson (1968) suggested that it might not be desirable to adjust children to the school environment. What if the school environment itself has caused problems to the children?

When the pupils were regarded as “disturbed” or “problematic”, the counselling dealt with the pupils alone. They hoped that the “disturbed” person would work through his/her problems and would be able to adjust to the “normal” environment after the counselling service. It was perceived that the environment had nothing to do with the counselee’s problems.

It was as early as 1960 that Dewey proposed the complex bargaining processes and relationship between the individual and the environment (Dewey 1960, cited in Kuriloff, 1975: 34).

A counsellor working in a school system thus has to work from a wider perspective to take into consideration its ecology, the contextual environment and to know the system with which he or she is working very intimately to enable him or her to act to alter its equilibrium. The word ‘equilibrium’ is used as it is believed that any change in one part will, to a greater or lesser extent, influence the others, as all parts are interrelated in a system.

In the following, I would like to propose an ecosystemic school counselling model to take into consideration the interactions between individuals and their environment.

7.5 A proposal for a more ecosystemic counselling model

7.5.1 Ecological approach

Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed a developmental model, and he holds that the development of children needs to take into account the extent to which the ecology of human development may have an effect on the resolution of developmental tasks. Family is regarded as the main ecological perspective of a child. Besides family, school culture, learning environment, neighbourhood, and the societal culture and values also assert influence on the pupils.

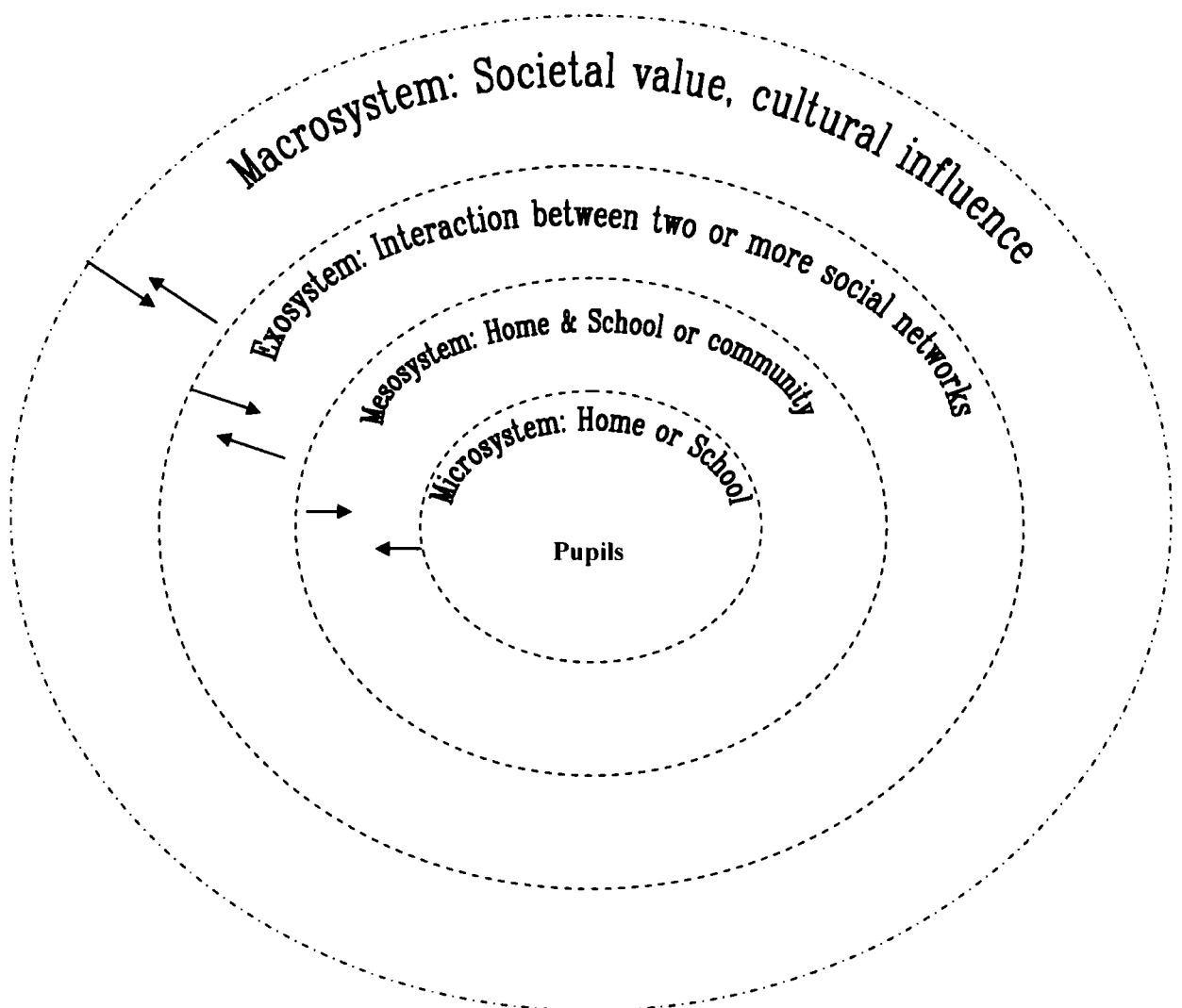


Figure 7.1 An ecological and systemic developmental approach

In Bronfenbrenner's developmental framework (1977 & 1979), family exists as the

microsystem level, while teachers, peer and extended family members serve as the mesosystem level. The interactions between two societal systems serve as the exosystem, and the whole educational system and the cultural and social influences serve as the macrosystem level. The various systems exist in a fluid state and are interconnected.

7.5.2 An Ecosystemic approach

To apply this development framework to a counselling model, we need to understand the different systems that are asserting influence on the pupils, including the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. Normally the immediate influence of the family and peers on the pupils can be identified easily. However, at the macrosystem level, even though it is not apparent to the pupils, the affect is still in force.

Secondary school is a critical growing up stage for pupils, they spend more time with peers than with their parents. Hence the peers may assert stronger influence during adolescence. Furthermore, pupils nowadays spend most of the time in school. With the advancement of technology and computer games that go beyond the boundaries of countries, the ecology of the teenagers has been extended to an even wider context, and probably beyond what Bronfenbrenner initially suggested. Teenagers go on line and play internet games across the borders of their immediate society or native culture.

Each pupil receives influences from his or her family; the primary care giver, the significant others are normally the family members. The school together with the community in which the pupils are situated contributes to their development. Counselling will be rather limited if the environmental issues are ignored. First, the family, school, and the whole community environment are acting on the pupils, and as a result, various remedial, preventive and developmental needs arise. Environment should serve as a basis from which to understand pupils' behaviour (Keys & Bemak, 1997). Second, the effect of working alone will be limited. It would be more effective for counsellors to join hands and elicit help from the various related parties.

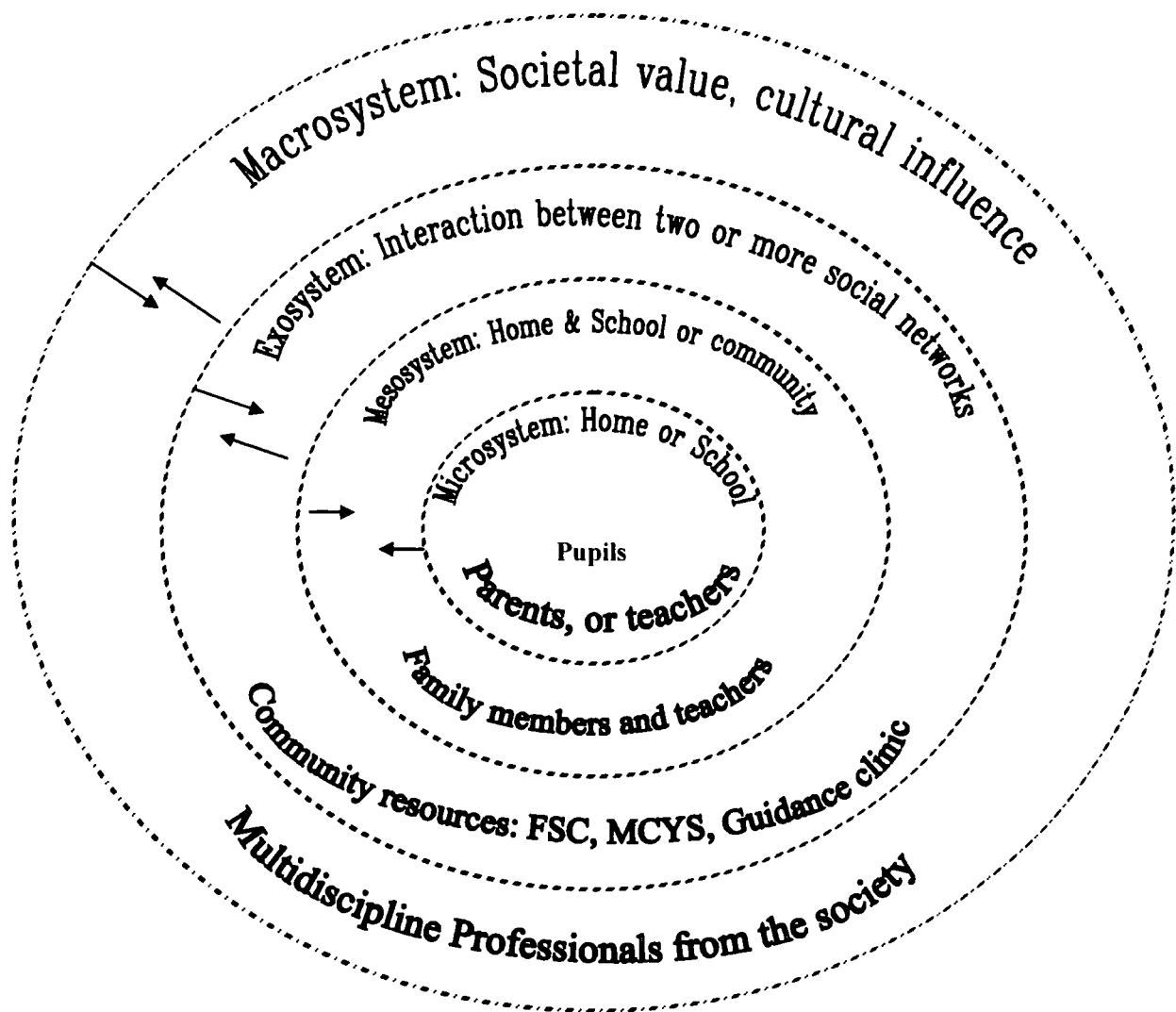


Figure 7.2 An ecological and systemic counselling approach

Besides Bronfenbrenner, Bor et al (2003) also remind us to be mindful of both the social context of the child and the context in which counselling is provided. The social context of the pupils is the school system as they spend more than 10 or 12 of their waking hours in schools everyday. Their micro-social system is their immediate family and the macro-social system is the cultural and value system in which they live. People digest and absorb experience from the culture, especially young children (Zaporozhets 2002). Many problems are actually created and sustained by the system and the school is no exception. Therefore in order to help the pupils we need to understand the school system from the local context. Counsellors working from the systemic approach always work from within the system to include the pupils' parents or immediate care givers.

7.5.3 Bidirectional influence

I have modified the initial developmental model suggested by Bronfenbrenner (1979) by focusing on the importance of the bidirectional influences, indicated on the diagram above by the two-way arrows. The bidirectional influences of this model can be understood in two ways:

First, the bidirectional interactions shed light on our understanding of human behaviour when counsellors deal with pupils.

According to the ecological developmental model, pupils grow up and develop in different family settings which are located in a wider society with its unique culture, which are all outside of the counselling room. Furthermore, pupils will go back to the environments that contain them, the family and the school including the classroom settings after the counselling sessions. Therefore it follows that the problems the pupils encountered can be better understood using this ecosystemic model.

The arrows moving inward show the various influential forces that act on the individuals and the arrows moving outward shows the interactions the individuals have with their environment. For instance, the unique school culture in Singapore secondary schools is competency based and the allocation of pupils, at a young age, according to their ability, may have contributed to the struggles of the vast majority of pupils faced by the participants in this study. However, not all the individuals respond in the same ways to the same stimulus. There is a wide acceptance that the influence of environment on individuals is bidirectional. “Children change their world even as it changes them” (Papalia et al, 2007: 29). Papalia et al studied human development and they discovered that how a person turns out is the product of the bidirectional interactions of the individual and his or her environment. Therefore, not all the pupils in the Normal Stream will turn out the same. However, it shows some significant relationship when many pupils express

the same patterns of behaviour. In order to have a better understanding of the interaction of the pupils and teachers or the interaction between two systems such as the community and the school staff, when a child is referred for counselling, the counsellor needs to observe the classroom interactions. In that way, counsellors can give feedback to both the teachers and pupils for the purposes of improving communication and enhancing mutual understanding.

Second, mutual feedback and communication are necessary because this ecosystemic model exists in a bidirectional and fluid state. It sheds light not only on our understanding of the contributing factors from the environment to the pupils' schooling or growing up experiences, but also produces valuable insights and promotes collaborative relationships in dealing with the pupils' problems. This can be done by encouraging communication between different systems. By obtaining and giving feedback to the parents, teachers, school staff or other professionals in the community, the pupils will benefit.

Therefore, counsellors are not working alone.

To translate this postulation in a school setting, counsellors will need to sit in a classroom to observe the interaction between the teacher and the pupils. From the observation of the classroom context, counsellors will then help both the teacher and pupils to deal with the issues of the interaction or transaction within the context. The teacher could be under stress to perform and the pupils could be trying to get what they couldn't get in legitimate ways that results in them adopting disruptive behaviour.

The same situation can be applied to the family system. Counsellors can observe family interactions and give feedback to the parents and the pupils to work out some changes among the family systemic interaction and relationship. The family and community serve as resources for the counsellors to utilize to help solve the pupils' problems. Mutual collaboration, mutual working together towards the common goals, is necessary if counsellors seek to enlist help and utilize the resources around the pupils.

When using an ecosystemic approach, counsellors may have to be sensitive to multicultural issues because Singapore is a multicultural society. Some of the traditional Chinese families may have concerns about honour and shame in the family, and some of the Malay families may not want to expose family problems in order to maintain harmonious relationships in the family. The interaction with family and community needs to take into consideration differences in various cultures.

Thus the integration of various theories in counselling needs to take into account cultural differences. (McLeod, 2003: 148)

7.5.4 Lee's Ecological multimodal approach

I have mentioned the ecological multimodal counselling approach in Section 1, Chapter 2. Lee and Wong (2004) wrote an ecological multimodal approach to counselling. They used an eclectic approach to combine the Bronfenbrenner's ecology concept with the intra-individual dimensions (such as behaviour, affect, imagery and cognition). They emphasized that the intricacy of human issues can be understood from an ecological dimension.

Figure 7.2 above shows my proposal for an ecosystemic approach similar to Lee's (Lee and Wong, 2004) ecological multimodal approach in the use of ecological concepts initiated by Bronfenbrenner (1979). My definition of ecosystemic is similar to that of the ecological multimodal approach in that both emphasize the wider environmental influence in our understanding of the pupils and providing the resources to deal with them. The two approaches differ from each other in that the multimodal focuses on an eclectic of multimodal aspects, and mine focuses on the whole system in which the pupils are confined. This model is beyond the scope of the family systemic approach which includes solely the family system. Besides the family values, pupils assimilate and internalize cultural and societal influences, including the messages and meanings created

by the school climate and culture, whether intentionally or unintentionally developed. Therefore counsellors should involve the resources of the family, the school and the community to address pupils' problems. The dual direction arrows show the complexity of the mutual interaction and relationship.

7.5.5 Comparison of two approaches

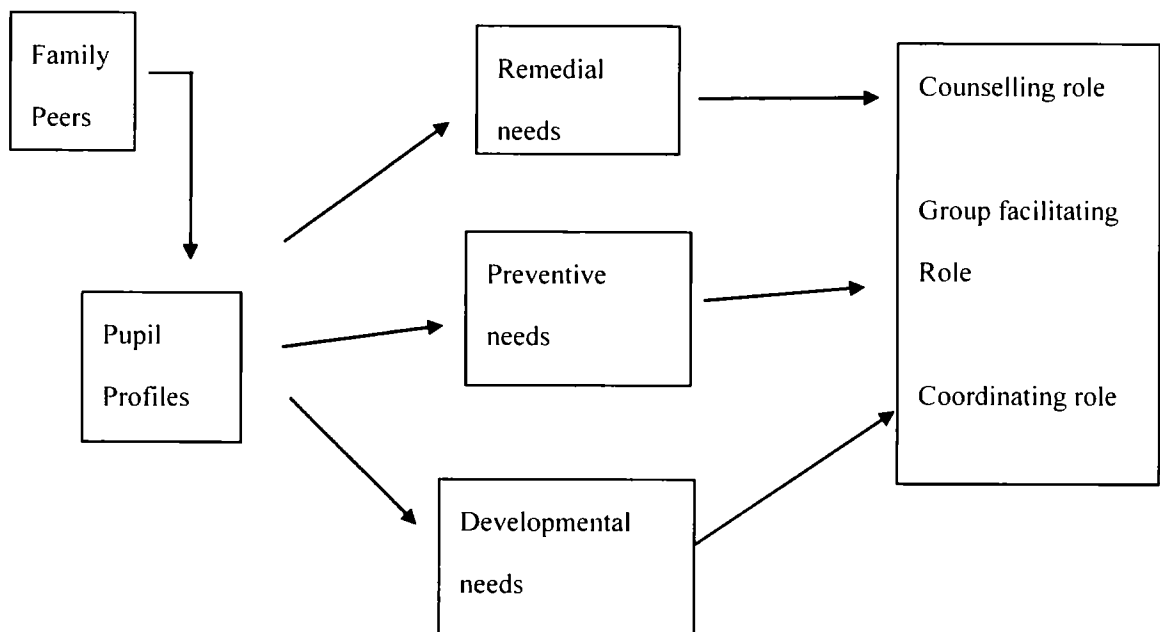


Figure 7.3 *The current counselling approach and the roles of a school counsellor*

The counsellors in this study were acting as the receiving end of the pupils, who were the results of interactions between the families, peers and the surrounding environment. The counsellors attended to the pupils' problems. The needs of the pupils were classified as remedial, preventive and developmental.

However, the environmental influences on the pupils are not systemically identified. Participants 101,103, 104, 105, 107, 108, 109, 110, and 111 did mention that the problems of the pupils were most probably created by the family. And participants 101, 102 and 106 also talked about peer influence. The findings in this study show that the participants

were loosely using an ecosystem model. Counsellors were aware of the environmental influence on pupils but did not constantly and systemically refer to an ecosystemic model. And in the course of their work, counsellors tried to get feedback from the teachers about the pupils' behaviour, and involve parents in counselling. Sometimes, community resources were utilized by engaging social workers or counsellors from agencies to conduct talks and camps for the parents.

The counsellors identified themselves as having counselling and group facilitating roles. Though there were meetings with teachers and parents and some coordinating role, these were not systemically identified as being part of the role of the school counsellors. The parents are excluded unintentionally most of the time, unless for serious cases, and in the Guidance Programme in which parents are required to attend the joint sessions. From a systemic point of view, there is a lack of consistency in the conceptualized framework of school counselling practice.

The relational and strength based model used by most of the participants was considered helpful by them in building therapeutic relationships. However, when the problems faced by pupils are related to the other systemic issues, the relational and strength based model remains limited. The counsellors either passively helped the pupils to adapt, or counsellors were trapped between the teachers and the pupils having to work round the problems.

After drawing insight from the ecosystemic model mentioned above, I would suggest the following approach to school counselling:

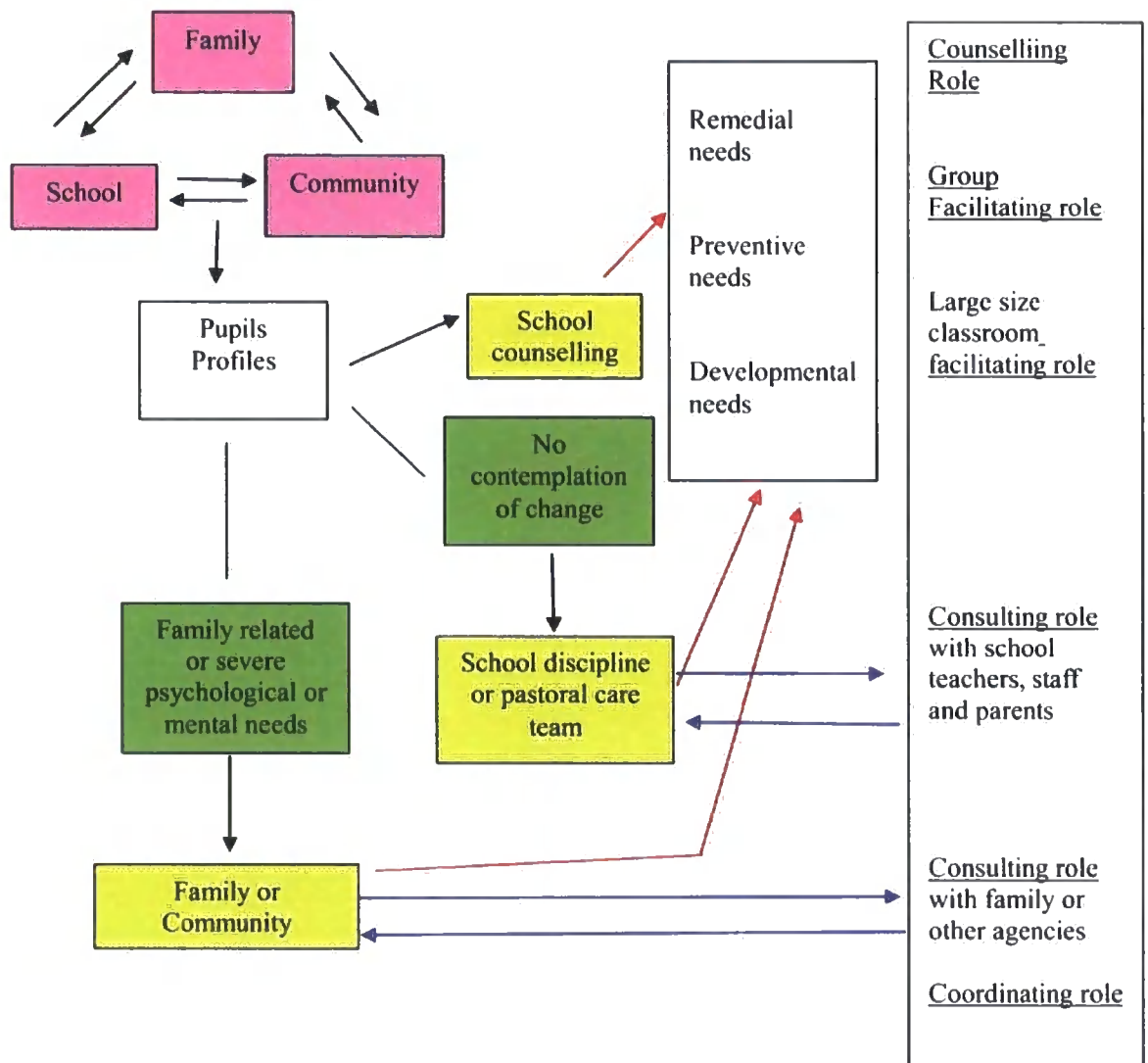


Figure 7.4 A proposed Ecosystemic school counselling approach

The above diagram shows that the school, the family and the whole community are asserting some sort of influence on the development of pupils. This model takes note of the ecological effects as initialled by Bronfenbrenner (1979). As a result of the interaction between the pupils and the environment, problems were created or encountered, and, at the receiving end, the counsellors attended to their needs. The needs of the pupils can be classified as remedial, preventive and developmental.

Pupils with various needs will not be channelled to the counsellors only. Schools need to establish some sort of guidelines or referral work flows as to which groups of pupils would need to be sent to the school pastoral/discipline team, and which groups of pupils should be referred to external agencies. And the role of school counsellors would include

consulting and coordinating, besides the usual counselling and small group or large size classroom facilitating role.

The red arrows show the provision of services for the pupils with different profiles. We can see from this model that the school counsellor is not the only provider of service to the pupils. The pupils with various developmental and preventative needs and the pupils in contemplation of change are referred directly to the school counsellors, and the roles of the school counsellor will be counselling, group facilitating and large size class room guidance. Pupils with behavioural difficulties will be referred to the school pastoral or discipline team. When pupils are contemplating of change, then small group psycho-education will be suggested. Pupils with mental problems or long term psychological needs will be referred to outside agencies.

The bidirectional blue arrows represent discussions and feedback between the counsellors and the school staff, family or community agencies dealing with the different needs of pupils, while the counsellors work as consultants. In applying this model, even for the normally developing pupil, bidirectional feedback and consultancy are important. Counsellors can inform parents what developmental courses or topics have been discussed in the classroom (topics such as self-esteem, racial harmony, drug prevention etc). In this way parents can follow-up the discussion at home and reinforce the learning. Counsellors can also inform parents about the programme or talks that counsellors coordinate with the outside agencies for the pupils or make such information available to the parents.

7.5.6 An illustration: A career developmental model

Using this model, counsellors will be able to take the role of a consultant to give feedback or call for a meeting for all involved parties to resolve the issues. Resources will be able to pull together and work effectively for the development of the pupils. To take career guidance and counselling as an example, the diagram below is a good illustration of the ecosystemic approach.

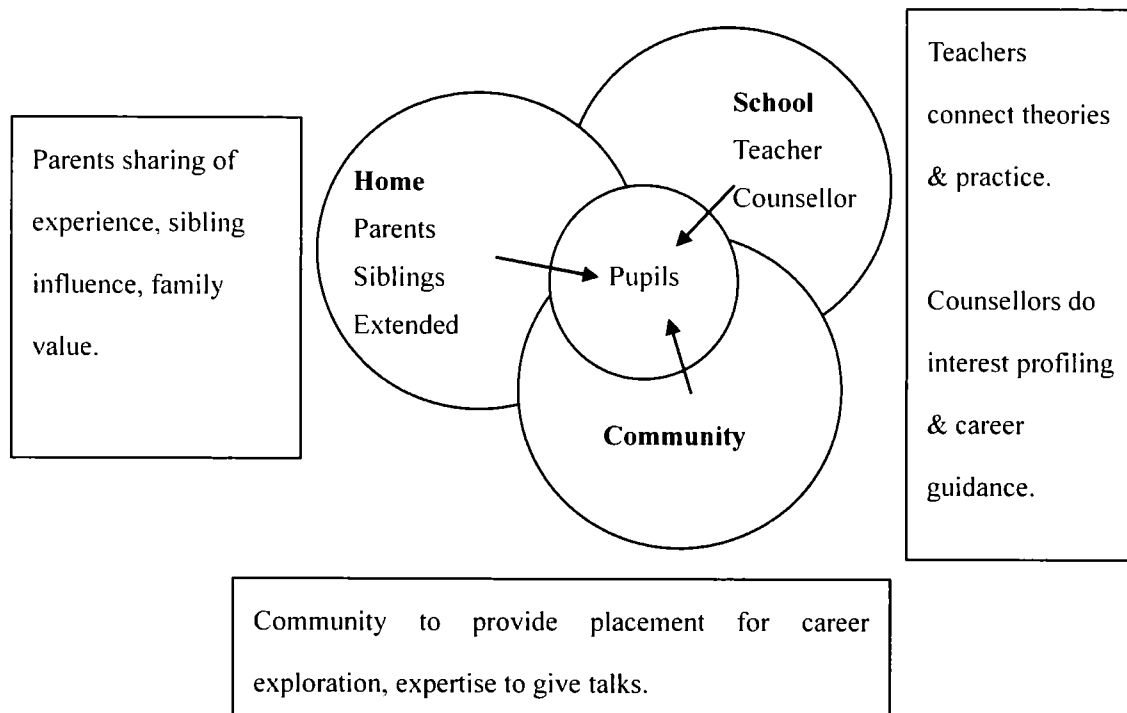


Figure 7.5 An illustration of an Ecosystemic career guidance approach

Career guidance programmes have long been emphasized in the Singapore secondary schools system, however, it is evident from the findings of this study that the programme was far from being successful. To apply an ecosystemic approach to a career guidance approach, collaboration between the three parties, the school, the family and community is necessary. Figure 7.5 illustrates how the three parties can work hand in hand to strengthen career education: the school teachers to connect theories to practice; the school counsellor to help explore interest profiling for the purpose of increasing self awareness and making pupils aware of their career opportunities; the organizations from the community to offer work placements for the pupils to have some hands-on experiences. There will need to have feedback from the various parties to help to enhance the pupils' learning. The rational of this model is supported by the literature (Tan, 2004; Young 1994)

7.5.7 Summary of the ecosystemic approach to school counselling

As the ecosystemic model emphasises the fluid state of interaction, any changes in one part will certainly bring about changes in the other parts. Counsellors can choose to be an honest middleman. On one hand they can help pupils to see the discrepancies between their behaviour and the expectations of their school or parents, and on the other hand to give feedback to the school. Without feedback, a school setting can be a “closed system”, “hierarchical, rule-bound and hampered by traditional inflexible professional role boundaries” (Jenkins & Polat, 2006: 11). According to this model, giving feedback and gaining mutual understanding is of paramount importance. By working with the family, the child’s problems will be addressed by a coordinated working alliance. Community resources can help to deal with the pupils’ problems in a similar way. Resources from the community will be identified and different groups of professionals such as psychologists, counsellors, social workers from the family service centre, child protection officers, probation officers, nurses and child psychiatrists from the child guidance clinic will need to work together for the needs of the youngsters. Schools, as overseers of the pupils’ welfare, will need to familiarise themselves with the resources available and refer pupils appropriately.

Jenkins and Polat (2006) wrote about the effects and the implications of the Children Act 2004 for counselling in schools in England and Wales. They saw that the potential pattern of counselling services in the schools in England and Wales would be more systemic and community focussed. This model proposes higher levels of integration with the community services. There are many similarities between my proposal and Jenkins and Polat’s description. Working closely with the pupils’ microsystem (family), mesosystem (teachers, peer group, school staff, community), exosystem (the interaction of two societal systems) and the macrosystem (school culture and climate, society and cultural values etc) does not operate solely on a practical level, (such as mutual collaboration and giving feedback), it also includes the mutual informing, conforming and reflecting of the various systems. Therefore, if counselling services are to be effective and beneficial to the pupils, the awareness of how each system works among and

influences the others is equally important. Counsellors can work as consultants to various professionally involved parties. Counsellors also can work as advocates for the pupils when they see and experience negative forces impinging on their clients, the still developing and growing pupils.

7.5.8 *Issues arising using an ecosystemic approach*

7.5.8.1 The place of the traditional counselling approach

If a more systemic and ecological approach is preferred, does traditional counselling have a place in school counselling? Lee (2004) states that using an ecological approach does not overlook the importance of the therapeutic relationship. Davis (2005) mentions that the use of traditional individual skills is still relevant, for pupils who are really struggling with a situation at home or at school might still need more extensive support and he emphasises that it is important that “the school counsellor’s role as an individual counsellor need to be clearly defined and even given priority” (Davis, 2005: 60). Jenkins and Polat (2006) did a large scale survey on the provision of counselling in England and Wales and they found that individual counselling was beneficial to both the pupils and the educational community.

One could argue that the school counsellors might be more productive working within a larger context, and this is central to the debate in the US counselling movement as discussed in Chapter one. However, a community-focused and individual approach may not be seen as mutually exclusive. They can both serve the different needs of the pupil population. One approach does not fit all. There are times when pupils are faced with critical conflicts or serious difficulties and may be in need of traditional individual counselling. The personal issues faced by the pupils of the participants in this study such as gender problems and family difficulties need to be addressed by individual help rather than large size classroom preventative lessons. The large group approach is more educational and informative and pupils will not confide their personal difficulties in a big group.

Of course working with pupils one to one will take up quite a lot of resources and the result

may not immediately show. However, it is arguable that effectiveness or productivity should be measured by limited observable behavioural change. Moreover, giving a disadvantaged pupil an opportunity to be helped to break through his or her vicious cycle of problems is the basic value of pastoral care. It helps to prevent problems from escalating or deteriorating, and may save him/her from causing harm to many other pupils. In a way, this is also a preventive approach, for the benefit of the larger community. Therefore, I would argue that the two approaches are not mutually exclusive alternatives.

The traditional counselling methods such as the relational, the person-centred, the cognitive approach, solution focused etc, are still relevant to get access to the inner world of the pupils and to facilitate change. A synthesis of different theories is found useful and beneficial in the ecological multimodal approach (Lazarus, 1989; Lee & Wong 2004).

Theories give depth to the counselling programme. They help counsellors to reflect on their personal theoretical orientation and apply skills relevant to their approach. Erford (2003) contends that counselling theories give scope and depth to the implementation of a comprehensive counselling programme and he particularly states that solution-focused theories and strategies are more appropriate for the time-limited framework of the school setting. However, as the need of the pupils is the focus, counsellors need to be flexible to incorporate various theories into programme components as needed, rather than rigidly stick to a particular school of approach. For instance, listening skills are necessary for rapport building during the initial stage of counselling as evident in the research (Norcross, 2002). Listening skills training is applicable for peer support leader training; positive thinking skills or time/stress management skills can be utilized from a cognitive-behavioural framework (Bond, 2005); problem solving workshops more appropriately draw on the solution focused approach; career guidance and developmental theories will be useful. When dealing with family issues, a consultation approach using a systemic framework will be necessary. Schmidz (1996) contends that other expanded approaches such as group experience, peer support systems, and other processes (Schmidz, 1996: 72) need to be incorporated.

Given the complexity of the wide ranging issues confronting our pupils today, individual counselling is still relevant as a response to individual needs. However, when faced with unrealistic pupil-to-counsellor ratios, individual counselling is not able to address the needs of a wider pupil population. The direct individual counselling model needs to incorporate other, indirect, services such as connecting with the community resources in the School Comprehensive Counselling Programme Approach developed by Gysber (2001) and the Multi-agency teams approach initiated by the government in the UK.

Using an ecological model, the role of the counsellor working in a school system will have to include a consultant role besides the traditional counselling and group facilitating role. Acting in the role of a consultant, counsellors involve parents and teachers to seek better understanding of the background of the pupils and to bridge the gaps between the teacher – pupil and the parent – child relationship.

7.5.8.2 Confidentiality

When an ecosystemic model is used, confidentiality is a challenge that may face school counsellors. The issue of confidentiality has been identified by a number of researchers (Reid, 2005; Jenkins and Polat 2006) as problematic when school counselling moves towards a community focus approach. It is expected to have major implications in the school counselling situation.

There has been no debate about the confidentiality of school pupils thus far in Singapore, probably because the children's right to confidentiality is not established. Younger children may not be concerned about confidentiality, but teenagers in secondary schools would certainly care about the counsellors keeping confidentiality. It would be a dilemma for the secondary school pupils as the practice of sharing information among various professionals may deter them from seeking counselling. Pupils might feel that sharing information among counsellors and teachers or parents is threatening. The literature establishes that sharing of clients' information is going to pose great challenges to

individual-focussed therapeutic work (Jenkins & Polat, 2006).

Most of the counsellors in this study observed confidentiality in a school system and they normally sought consent from the pupils whenever there was a need to share information with the parents and school. Among the participants in this study, 101 kept confidentiality of such sensitive and personal issues as the gender identity issue. Participant 105 also kept confidentiality by reporting to the school in broad or general terms without giving out personal details. Most of the counsellors in this study are sensitive and humane; they normally seek consent from the pupils when there is a need to disclose information to parents or teachers. Participant 103 mentioned situations when she could not keep confidentiality, for example when pupils tried to hurt others or to self-harm. However, she also lamented that keeping confidentiality in a school system was impossible (203) and after many years of working in schools, she had given up promising complete confidentiality.

To avoid dilemmas, guidelines on confidentiality are needed for counsellors in schools.

Corey (2007) acknowledges that managing confidentiality is one of the most challenging issues facing school counsellors. On one hand, school counsellors are ethically obliged to respect the privacy of their clients even though they are minors. On the other hand, school counsellors need to balance their ethical and legal responsibilities with those of the other two groups of people: the parents or guardians, and the school system (Corey, 2007: 213 – 214). It is a requirement by ASCA (2004) that counsellors inform parents about the progress of treatment of their children. However, Corey holds that information shared with the parents or teachers should be in the best interest of the children. It should be done in a manner to minimize intrusion into the child's or teenager's privacy in order to demonstrate respect for the pupils.

Sink (2005) holds that there is no ethical violation if the pupil seeking counselling is informed at the outset of the sharing information policy. Therefore, the exceptions to

confidentiality, as to when, and to what extent the information needs to be shared, needs to be communicated clearly to the pupils from the beginning of the initial contact. This practice can be a challenge to the school in the Singapore system. As the counselling service is part of the school system, counsellors are expected to report their cases to the relevant parties, either to the form teachers, DM or the principals. Though school counselling is expanding in Singapore, there is still a long way to go towards the path of professional counselling. Perhaps MOE, Singapore Association for Counselling (SAC) and the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) can work something out to formulate guidelines for the development of Professional counselling in Singapore. Legislation on professional guidelines of how confidentiality should be kept by accredited or registered counsellors would be helpful to raise the professional standard of practice. The counselling practice in Singapore may need a professional body to govern the counselling service, including the school counselling service. It is hoped that with a more neutral professional governing body, firmly established professional guidelines will be produced. Otherwise, counselling in school will continue to be subordinate to, and under the umbrella of, the educational system, playing a supportive role in education and as a tool for education purposes. At the moment, school counselling in Singapore lacks widely accepted guidelines of practice as to how confidentiality should be treated.

7.5.8.3 Collaboration with multi-agencies

When a systemic approach is used in school settings, there are times when counsellors need to connect with multi-agencies from the community, rather than providing direct counselling services to pupils. A consultant role will be a new paradigm of this counselling service. Counsellors will be providing advice to the party who initiates the consultation. The co-operation between consultant (the counsellor) and initiator (it can be the teachers or parents) for the benefit of the clients (pupils) is a collaborative problem solving process. Parsons (2005) notes that embracing this new role of the school counselling service is neither easy nor painless. This role requires counsellors to be flexible and responsive to both the demands and opportunities of the situation.

Depending on the needs of the situation, the consultant needs to be effective, able to determine what modes, whether provisional, prescriptive, collaborative or mediating services, are needed (Parson. 1996: 40 – 41). As such, the role of a consultant is a professional role, rather than merely coordinating or meeting with people. Superficially, as a consultant, the counselling role seems to be de-emphasized, but in fact it is a highly skilled, problem solving process. The consultant is actually in a position to provide professional advice to the initiators (either for teachers, parents, or professionals from the community) for the ultimate benefits of the pupils.

Furthermore, accountability can become a difficulty when a multi-agency referral system is used. A successful collaboration among the multi-agency approach relies on the consultant and consultee sharing ownership and responsibility for the consultation interaction and outcome (Parsons, 1996). Unless there is a clearly stated workflow and follow-up procedure, the fine line of accountability is rather difficult to draw.

The Singapore education system is not implementing a major reorganization/re-evaluation of counselling services as is happening in the UK or US, however, collaboration between multi-agencies has been a usual practice among many schools within the community resource. Participants 109 and 110 are counsellors from community services engaged by schools to do counselling programmes. They said that they experienced good collaboration with the local school counsellors. Participant 111 on the other hand expressed regrets that some of the parents did not come for meetings and some teachers were too busy to give feedback (script 111, 211). Because each school was left on its own to connect to various community resources different schools had very different experiences, and schools whose resources are scarce, or with poor access to community resources, face great difficulties.

When counsellors need to refer pupils to community resources, sensitivity towards the pupils is extremely important. Pupils might feel that they are being dealt with impersonally and might not speak openly to people from external agencies as they are less

likely to trust people they have never seen before. School counsellors need to seek consent from pupils before sharing information and following up cases. These are areas of challenge in the development of multi-agency collaboration.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This last chapter conceptualizes the findings, and reflects on the unique contributions and limitations of this study. Future research studies will be suggested and implications of the findings are discussed.

8.1 The unique contribution of this study

There is a changing trend to adopting a comprehensive whole school approach to counselling, the focus has been shifted from remedial to preventive and developmental programmes (in the case of the US especially). School counselling services have gradually moved away from individual centred to systemic and community focused therapy (as in the case of England and Wales). This study confirmed the need for a community and systemic approach to counselling in the school system.

The findings of the study built on Bronfenbrenner's ecology developmental model to explain the counsellors' experience of dilemmas due to the contribution of the wider environment. Bidirectional interactions were added onto this ecology developmental model to help explain the phenomenon of the contextualized factors. Using this model, which emphasizes the bidirectional interaction, has helped to explain the complexity of human relationships and interactions. This model encourages more collaboration between the counsellors and school staff, including teachers, DM, principal, other administrative staff in school and with health care professionals. The ecosystemic framework also encourages more interaction and feedback from family members, parents, and the community that contains the pupils.

Applying this ecosystemic counselling model, the role of the counsellors will not be confined solely to counselling or group facilitating roles. It will certainly, consciously and systematically, include the large class room facilitating, consulting and coordinating role. The consulting role will need to be effectively and professionally applied as the

consultant roles will connect the needs of pupils to other resources outside the schools.

The unique contribution of this study is the discovery of the internal landscape of the counsellors working in the Singapore secondary school system. It revealed the counsellors: self-description, their struggles, dilemmas and difficulties faced, their joy, job motivation, their most satisfying moments. Most importantly, it showed how they perceive their role. The resultant findings are consistent with most of the literature. It illuminates our understanding of the complexity of the job and the role working with the secondary school age teenagers in Singapore. While the school counselling system in England and Wales is in hot debate over anticipated challenges as the provision of school counselling trend moves away from child-centred and school based towards a greater systemic and community focus; school counselling in the US is advocating a more comprehensive, more preventive and developmental approach, rather than a professional clinical approach. This research yields an illuminative understanding of the role of the school counsellors, described by the counsellors themselves.

Having explained the significance of this study, I will address its limitations.

8.2 *Limitations of the study*

8.2.1 *Things I would change*

What are the things I would change if I were to do similar research again?

I have thought of using a participant observer approach to involve myself in some of the guidance activities such as the STEP-UP and Guidance Programme camps. To be purely an observer is rather difficult in most of the sensitive situations such as counselling, or interview sessions with pupils and parents. Confidentiality is involved so an observer is unwelcome in these sessions. It is impossible to get permission to sit in for counselling sessions. However, it is possible to become a research participant by offering voluntary service to co-facilitate a guidance programme or small group workshop sessions for the

duration of a three-month programme. The advantage of this approach will be in giving an opportunity to the researcher to become involved in a real life situation to experience and observe the interactions between the counsellors and pupils, and among the pupils. The researcher can then get a chance to interact with the pupils and such experience is precious and valuable to elicit and discover the emergent themes in the area under study.

I would involve other participants for interview if I were to do the research again. Interviewing teachers would enable me to find out their perspectives on the counsellors. Some of the counsellors spoke unfavourably about teachers and there may exist some sort of misunderstanding between teachers and counsellors. Research on school teachers' attitudes towards counsellors and their overall conceptualization of counselling is important. This is because both the teachers and school counsellors work for the benefit of the pupils. Many researchers found that misconceptions and negative attitudes exist among teachers towards the counselling service (Cooper & Loynd, 2005). The conflicts between discipline and counselling persist (Hue, 2007). The ethos of counselling seems different from the general approach in the educational setting which is to teach and to make pupils conform. But the ultimate goal for both teachers and counsellors is the same as discussed earlier.

Also valuable would be interviewing parents and the school administrators, the principal, managers and teacher counsellors and discipline masters to collect their views on school counselling.

If time permitted, a focus group which involved the different parties in the school counselling service would be beneficial to get their different views on a particular topic, such as how multi-disciplines or professionals can work collaboratively to improve the school counselling service.

8.2.2 *Limitation of this research*

This research interviewed only eleven counsellors, which is a rather small number. Therefore making generalisations could be limited. A larger sample size is needed to allow greater generalisation. The findings may not be applied to all of the counsellors working in Singapore secondary schools. Due to time constraint, only counsellors were interviewed and perhaps the scope of participants could be extended to teachers, the principal and other school staff, and even parents or other community pastoral services that work closely with the school counsellors. This would widen and deepen our understanding of the school counselling services in Singapore.

Dilemmas or no dilemmas? This is a complex of human feelings and experience. The issues are inter-related and may feature differently in different contexts and cultures. The enabling factors discovered from this study could be limited by the small size sample, more factors or conditions could be discovered to show how school counselling services can be enhanced from a micro to macro level.

8.3 *Recommendations for future research*

The different aspects of the dilemmas faced may serve as a base, and a larger size sample, probably a combination of quality and quantity research, could follow up to ascertain some of the positive and negative factors that have contributed to the experience of a school counsellor. Research questions such as:

- Under what conditions the various factors mentioned in this research enable or inhibit the way counsellors carry out their role in the current Singapore secondary school system
- To what extent these factors contribute to the dilemmas in the counsellors' experience and have hindered the effectiveness of the provision of school counselling services.
- Under what conditions the two elements of discipline and counselling can go hand in hand together.

- Under what conditions they will cause role conflict to counsellors will be worth following up.
- What is the experience like when an ecosystemic approach to counselling is used and what would be the possible difficulties faced when this model is used in an Asian culture in which saving face for the family, and protection of an organization's reputation, are of such importance?

Areas highlighted in the discussion of this thesis, such as the misconception of counselling, labelling culture, negative wider environment factors, can yield findings that are unique to the culture in Singapore school settings.

Other related areas in the school counselling service will be:

- Coping strategies employed by counsellors when faced with job challenges
- The variation in the role perceptions between the participants and to what extent their personality influences their perceptions (whether more introverted counsellors experience more stress)
- Different training backgrounds or different values held by counsellors and their experiences of counselling.
- The dimensions of meaning: How do counsellors find meaning in their work?
- Confidentiality in the school setting, especially when information sharing is expected when an ecosystemic model is used
- A comparative study of the provision of counselling services in the Singapore secondary school and an International school in Singapore. The selection of different samples can help to make clear the difference, whether different findings are due to different sampling of participants or caused by different educational settings or culture.
- Evaluation of a comprehensive counselling service in the Singapore school system... etc.

Similar qualitative research could be done complimented by other research techniques such

as triangulation. Research could also be extended to a year in the field of study, combining participant observations and interviews with teachers and pupils, rather than a three-month intensive in-depth interview data collection duration as in my case.

Application to a large number of samples would be helpful to ascertain or to confirm some of the themes which emerged from this study.

8.4 Implication of the study:

In the following, I will discuss some of the implications as a result of this study for the school counsellors, the school and for MOE, the policy makers.

8.4.1 Implication for counsellors:

- My findings suggest that the traditional counselling approach still has a place to help to build therapeutic counselling relationships. The counsellors, however, need to take account of the ecosystemic model suggested above to get insights into understanding the pupils and to enlist help and resources from the school, family and community to deal with the pupils' problems. This ecosystemic model will help counsellors not to have to shoulder all the responsibilities and burden alone or become too personally involved when counselling pupils.
- Counsellors need to value their roles as consultants and coordinators, besides the traditional roles of counselling and facilitating because meetings with parents and teachers will be needed to get feedback and to deepen the understanding of the issues the pupils face.
- In order to have better collaboration with teachers, more communication is needed.
- As high levels of information sharing are needed for working together, to what extent information is shared and how to go about keeping confidentiality within a

team of professionals will need to be agreed by common consensus among the various parties. For instance, is the information about the pupils to be kept among the pastoral team and not be shared with other non-related teachers? When the pupil's situation requires help from professionals in the community outside the school pastoral team such as the mental health professional, a single unique identifying number can be used and it will be more appropriate than using the real name of the pupil (Jenkins & Polat, 2006). Counselling is a sensitive issue, therefore information related to counselling needs to be protected, otherwise adverse effects might result in deterring pupils from seeking counselling services.

8.4.2 *Implication for schools*

Abundant evidence in my data indicates that when the pupils are not ready to change, they remain involuntary clients. The school, especially the teachers, impose high expectations on counsellors to produce good results very quickly, this indeed has contributed to the dilemmas the counsellors faced. Realistic expectations need to be established. Most importantly, the school could have a system for differentiating those who are at the stage of contemplating change and those who are not. Pupils contemplating change will be referred for remedial counselling, preventive or developmental programmes. For those pupils with behavioural issues, the school discipline team is probably more appropriate.

The findings from this study challenge the prevailing assumptions in Singapore (Tan, 2004; Lee 1999) that counselling and discipline can go hand in hand. Probably, the question of whether these two components can work hand in hand should be modified to “under what conditions the two seemingly incompatible components can go hand in hand, and under what conditions can they not work together?”

As there are perceived conflicting dimensions and factors between discipline and

counselling, it will be good for the counsellors to be involved in the development of discipline procedure but not in the process of implementing discipline. The pre and post counselling procedure would probably make pupils think that the counsellor is part of the discipline team. Unless there are obvious and clearly identified emotional or social issues, it is not appropriate for disciplinary cases to be referred for counseling?

Besides the confusing discipline and counselling aspects, there are still some misunderstandings or misconceptions about counselling in the school environment. It is hoped that the situation would improve if an ecosystemic approach were systematically applied. The counselling services will not be stigmatized as dealing with problems, or doing remedial work only, when the counsellors will be seen more often giving large size classroom guidance and dealing with normal developmental topics. Schools can help to give a positive counselling image to pupils by challenging the negative concepts. Schools could have a drop-in room manned by volunteer parents or peer support leaders. Some of the secondary schools already have this facility besides the guidance or counselling room so that pupils can drop in anytime. The room should also provide guidance material and games to nurture the emotional needs of pupils.

The emerging themes from my study suggest that more communication is needed between the school counsellors and the teachers. Pupils will benefit from this endeavour:

1. Teachers need to better understand the nature of counselling and the counselling process. When teachers are familiar with the counselling process, some of the misconceptions will be overcome.
2. Mutual feedback will benefit the pupils. Many counsellors have expressed the limitations of the counselling service without working together with the class teachers. Counsellors see only one side of the story presented in the counselling room. The teachers will be able to give inputs to give a fuller picture of the incident happening in

class. Whatever the case, self awareness or skill acquired during the counselling session needs further practice and reinforcement in the classroom setting. It will be helpful to the pupils if the teachers are aware of what is happening to the child and how to follow-up or further help the child in the classroom.

3. The counsellors can share some of their counselling experience about how the pupils respond well to praises so that the school can establish a more positive discipline system, rather than for the school to overdevelop the discipline system emphasizing law-enforcing and conforming behaviour. Counsellors can point out some of their observations or some of the practices in school that are not helpful to the development of pupils in terms of emotional wellbeing or self-esteem. Thus the counsellors and the teachers can work together for the benefit of the pupils. Counsellors can also get information from the teachers as to what exactly happened in the class room rather than rely on the narration of the pupils. When there is a need, the ecosystemic approach to school counselling would advise a sit-in session for the counsellor to observe and give feedback to the teachers and pupils after the observation.
4. Counsellors can enlist help from the teachers to prevent pupils referred for counselling being stigmatized and labelled as having problems.
5. Counsellors can help teachers to develop empowerment skills via the use of positive language. Teachers can help counsellors to understand the ground rules set by each class. Thus the two important educational partners in school speak the same language and this consistency will help pupils to be more responsible and self-disciplined. Discipline problems will be minimised and the maximum learning and nurturing environment will be achieved.

I have listed the most obvious, immediate benefits for more mutual communication between the teachers and counsellors but the list is not exhaustive, because not all of the benefits are predictable. After some time using a more ecosystem approach, a great many

more benefits may well become apparent.

8.4.3 For the policy makers from MOE:

This study revealed the dilemmas faced by the counsellors working in the Singapore secondary school system. The wider school climate and learning environment that contributes to the pupils' problems is worth attention. Most counsellors lamented that the schools focused too heavily on academic standards and that those pupils located in the lower streams were not engaged in studies. Is the role of the counsellors a supporting role to the educational system? Are counsellors supposed to support the pupils so that pupils can do well and enjoy studies, rather than doing the fixing and mending work for the pupils who are not able to survive in the system? Is school a place for nurturing the cognitive, affective and the social needs of pupils? What happened to the school system that the academic aspect has paramount importance and the rest of the pupils' needs, such as the affective have become secondary? This group of counsellors, working against all the odds, tried to confirm to the pupils that there are many ways to succeed, and tried to express to the pupils that it is not the performance but the process that counts. However, the wider context of the school setting, and the labeling culture sent the opposite message to the pupils. This emergent theme that the counsellors expressed is the most subtle dilemma they experienced.

The counsellors in this study accepted their role as a supportive one in an educational setting. One counsellor spoke about raising the profile of school counsellors. This study shows that the counsellors devoted themselves to the job, involved themselves in the very personal and sensitive issues that the pupils faced and built an intimate, therapeutic relationship with pupils. Their primary role was to support the pupils in learning, as emotional or behavioral problems will get in the way of learning. They never strike to gain recognition or fight for a more professional status. Professional

status, however, will help in their professional delivery of counselling services in the school setting.

The findings of this study suggest that there does not seem to be a well-established and standardized role description of school counsellors in Singapore. The pivotal position of the policy makers of the education system is apparent. The duty of the counsellors is onerous as it deals with the transformation of the lives of the pupils. The role of the school counsellors will be forever as a tool of the educational system to fix problems or help the pupils to adapt to the system. The dilemmas experienced by the counsellors are part of the system but they are reluctant to raise dissent as they also want to be seen as integrated into the system. Perhaps if a more neutral position is given to counsellors, they may be in a better position to advocate and support the pupils, rather than just trying to get the pupils to conform according to the demands of the school system. When counsellors can give a genuine feedback to the schools as they work closely with the pupils, they will be in a position to discuss openly the matters close to their hearts. In this way, counsellors will be functioning in an active role to help to develop the pupils and improve the counselling service's support to the school.

My findings suggested that there was a strong link between the unclear job description and stress experienced by the counsellors. As the counselling service involves remedial, preventive, developmental and consultant work, the job scope is rather extensive and it requires a flexible role description. Counsellors in this study obviously preferred a more direct role of working with pupils (the counselling and group facilitating roles). The consultant and coordinating roles were probably regarded as non-direct counselling roles. In order to give the coordinating and consulting roles a more professional status, either training or role refinement or re-emphasis is needed. Then clarification can be achieved for all parties. Clearer job descriptions need to be established so that other school staff, such as the Head of Year, and Head of pupil welfare, can share some of the pastoral care and will know what to expect and how to work collaboratively with the school counsellors. The

clause about the school counsellor's job scope being left to the interpretation of the school's principal may need to be amended so as to establish a general definition which can be applied to the whole scope of the work. This will lower the stress of the counsellors, and thus improve work morale and enhance work effectiveness and avoid work burnout.

At the moment the MOE is aiming to have one counsellor in every secondary school. The population of most secondary schools in Singapore is close to 2000 pupils. The ASCA (1999) suggests the counsellor-pupil ratio for effective programme delivery to be a maximum of 1: 250. Beyond this figure the expectation of an effective service is considered rather unrealistic, though the job scope description of counsellors in Singapore is different from that of the US. The ratio of one to two thousand makes it very tough for counsellors to work effectively with the pupils in need. The MOE can raise the placements of counsellor positions and provide training for each school. Probably one counsellor is needed for each level of pupils if the counsellor needs to be involved in some class room guidance work. Meanwhile, because counsellors cannot be magically reproduced at a fast pace, probably this goal can be achieved by a systemic planning and implementing from MOE level.

8.5 Concluding Remarks

After this study, I must say, I pay tribute to the many anonymous counsellors working quietly and steadily, against all odds, in the Singapore secondary school system. The isolated guidance and counselling room in the school represents a place of oasis for pupils. I am surprised to find out how all the counsellors I interviewed in this study practise humanity in a quiet way. They are not contaminated by the values of economics or a competitive society. They believe in the good of pupils, always hope for the best and they place the needs of the pupils close to their heart. I am very touched by their dedication, working with challenging youths in a highly developed urban city. They are the unnoticed heroes and heroines. But, their sacrifices and dedicated lives could be short or may not produce long lasting effects on pupils, if the factors that have contributed to the

dilemmas in their experience from the bigger environment never change.

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Appendix 1: Informed Consent

Dear Principal

My name is Kok Jin Kuan, a student from the EdD Programme at Durham University, England. I am currently doing a research project on a qualitative interview study of Singapore Secondary School Counsellors' perspectives on their roles and jobs. This study will help us better understand the role and the work of a school counsellor in a Singapore Secondary School system. I hope to get permission to interview your school counsellors to help with my studies. Voluntary journaling and a series of interview sessions (approximately two interview sessions and one focus group meeting) will be conducted at the counsellors' convenience. The information gathered will be analyzed for educational purposes. Personal information given will remain anonymous and kept confidential. I will provide a summary of the research finding to the school at the end of the studies.

I am also a counsellor and, have experience working with secondary school pupils. I can conduct a workshop on stress management for free if your pupils are in need of it. I can also provide in-service training for your teachers on counseling.

I hope to receive your favourable reply. Thank you very much for you kind consideration.

Sincerely Yours

Jin Kuan

EdD Programme

Durham University

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet:

1. The participants agree to keep some kind of record, either in a diary format some reflection journaling during the three months of research process. The written record will be shared with the researcher and become data to be analyzed.
2. There is no right or wrong answers for the journaling entries. It is a platform for the participants to jot down some thoughts and feelings about how they see themselves and the job they are doing. The participants are encouraged to pen down whatever they have in mind or any reflection they have after working with some of the pupils or after a day of work. There is no fixed number of entries, preferably at least one or two entries per month. There is no length or restriction of the entries. Participants can pen down as and when they feel they want to do so. The record will serve as unobtrusive data for a better understanding of the internal landscape of what it is like working as a counsellor in the Singapore Secondary Schools. If you are not working fulltime as an in house counselor, you may be engaged running some guidance programme or group work with the pupils in the Singapore secondary schools. All the descriptive data will be coded during the analyzing procedure and all personal information kept confidential. Personal opinions or feelings will not be identified as the participants will be coded with numbers and confidential data will be handed with care. Participants or characters in stories told will be presented with fictitious names. After all the diary entries collected, researcher will arrange for one face to face interview. For participants who opt for diary writing, there will be all together two interview sessions.
3. Participants who are not used to writing reflections can choose to have three sessions of one-hour semi-structured interviews.
4. The participants will have a chance to read and correct/ edit interview transcripts. An opportunity will be given for the informants to give feedback on findings before they are finalized.
5. Recording may be needed during interviews upon consent.
6. The participants are free at any point of the research process to give feedback on how

they feel about the way things are going or if they have any queries or suggestions about the research process.

7. The participants will have a copy of the summary of the research findings by the end of the studies. The findings will be written and presented as an EdD dissertation to Durham University, England.
8. The participants will be given a token of appreciation by the end of three interviews or after the journal writings are collected at the end of the three month research studies.
9. The participants are able to withdraw from the research studies at any point of the research process should he/ she feel uncomfortable about the ways the research is done.
10. Kok Jin Kuan is a research student from Durham University, England and she will follow the Durham University School of Education Code of Practice on Research Ethics. Her research proposal is approved by Durham University's Ethics Advisory Committee.

Appendix 3 : Interview Questions

First session: General questions about role/ work/ experience

1. Describe your counselling experience with pupils.
2. Share your most satisfactory moment of your job.
3. Can you share some of the challenges faced?
4. How do you feel about working as counsellor in a school setting in Singapore?

Second session: Goals/ counselling approach/ motivation of change

1. How do you think pupils can be helped (normally what do you do when pupils are referred to you and how)?
2. Can you describe what you do when pupils are referred to you?
3. How would you describe your experience as a school counsellor in general?

Third session: Wider context

1. What are the contextual factors that enable or inhibit your ability to carry out your role as a counsellor in the local school system?
2. Have you any experience you wish to describe or comments to add?

Appendix 4: Research Consent Form

TITLE OF PROJECT: Advice Giving, Guidance or Counselling

Research pupil: Kok Jin Kuan (Durham University, EdD Programme)

(The participant should complete the whole of this sheet himself/herself)

Have you read the Participant Information Sheet? YES / NO

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss the study? YES / NO

Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions? YES / NO

Have you received enough information about the study? YES / NO

Have you given consent for recording the interview sessions? YES / NO

Do you consent to participate in the study? YES/NO

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study:

* at any time and

* without having to give a reason for withdrawing and

* without affecting your position in the University?

YES / NO

Signed **Date**

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS)

Appendix 5 Interview Schedule

| Participants | First Interview | Sec Interview |
|--------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 101 | 5 Sep 07 | 19 Oct 07 |
| 102 | 10 Sep | 1 Oct |
| 103 | 17 Sep | 8 Oct |
| 104 | 14 Sep | 19 Nov |
| 105 | 10 Sep | 18 Oct |
| 106 | 4 Oct | 1 Nov |
| 107 | 19 Sep | 15 Oct |
| 108 | 19 Sep | 15 Oct |
| 109 | 14 Sep | 25 Oct |
| 110 | 14 Sep | 25 Oct |
| 111 | 13 Sep | 29 Sep |

Appendix 6 (a) Interview 102

(R: Researcher; C: Counsellor)

R Thank you for your time and thank you that you agreed to help me although we don't know each other. I'm very interested to find out your counseling experience. Could you tell me more about what you normally do in this line of work?

C As you know this scheme I'm involved in is school-based counseling so my counseling work revolves around the students in this school. The cases I received are those assigned to me by the school's full time counselor and I would then schedule sessions with the students. Depending on the needs of counseling, the session can range from one to more than ten sessions

R Just now mentioned that you got students referred to you and you schedule sessions with the students depending on the counselee. Normally what kind of student you are seeing?

C There's a range, in fact my cases range from some with learning difficulties like ???. ADHD and then leading to behavioral problems in the classroom, I have cases like that. The majority of the cases are students with relationship issues.

R GBR?

C One or two GBR, surprisingly not so much GBR as relationship issues with the family members like parent. some are with peers. More with peers rather than GBR. I do have one or two cases, it could be the other counselors in the school are handling GBR but those that are assigned to me that are not so many GBR cases. Is more relationship issues.

R With parent?

C Yes, with parents, with family members. So that I would see formed quite a large number. I would account that for teenage difficulties in teenage years where they want to have a greater freedom and parents start asking them questions about their movements, they react quite badly to it. I also have student relationship issues with parents because of the breakdown of parents' marriage. Some of the issues are related to that. But largely is due to parental control over the perceived.

R It's the parental control at the perceived freedom.

C Perceived, curving of the freedom. I also have few cases of bullying. Students encounter bullying by their peers. I have also a few cases of students encountering grief, overcoming the loss of their parents due to early death. When their parents remarry, they feel the loss of their original family structure. So these are the main issues. I guess this will be a common pattern.

R Quite challenging and interesting.

C Yes, the most challenging part of a few of the cases I handle here will be school refusal. I have two cases, one it started off with the students felt that they were being bullied, hounded by the other school friends. But usually I find that is not so simple. The student who is absent from school due to bullying has other personal issues.

R Such as?

C Such as They have some things which they did which make their persecutors look down on them. In the first place was revealed by the persecutor herself. She herself reveals.

R Such as?

C I have to share with you the actual situation.

R Maybe not the name.

C This student got herself at first boast the fact that she has a boy that is so in love with her, would do anything for her and this boy is like. But later turned out that this boy became so stuck onto her, it's like a case of fetal attraction. You know the movie fetal attraction where this boy become so struck by love for her, refused just to leave her house even, just stay on at her house and sweet talk her mother into accepting him. The girl wants to end the relationship but the boy refused to do that. So when this happened, I think the girl is emotionally burdened by the situation. But she has already told her other school friends in the beginning when the relationship was fine. She boated about how this boy was in love with her. So later when it didn't turn up well, I suppose I do detect that the girls were jealous with the friend that she could get a boy so attracted to her. And later when she got into trouble, she wants to terminate the relationship with the boy, she couldn't. So it was a case that she is stuck with the relationship that she's not longer happy with. But yet her schoolmates still comment her and later when they found out about her situation they begin to continue taunting her so leading to her not wanting to come to the school, but yet at the same time being stuck with this boy. So it is like a dual pressure. The mother is a misdirected love for her, instead of reading what the daughter wants. Firstly the mother got to accept the boy to the extent of even allowing this boy to stay in her house. So it leads a very complicated relationship. The boy's father has to work overseas. So whenever the boy's father is in Singapore, this boy, this young man will then leave the house. But whenever the boy's father is out of the town he will come and again stay in her house. Since this started the girl has been coming to school very, very infrequently. Turn up one two days a week, or even just one day and then again absent herself. So the so called bullies have been ??? by the school's disciplinary committee and dealt with. So now the girl will have to be coached. I

find this very challenging while I teach her the skills to stand up to bullies and all that. The happy thing is that the form teacher and me the counselor have visited her home and pointed out to the mother that this is not a healthy situation for a young girl, to have a boy stuck in the same house. And the mother sort of have said that this boy has become her God-son. But recently it seems that the boy on his own called. So I visited the home, I didn't meet the boy, I told the mother the boy is also somebody's son, you should advise the boy to go home, and the mother told this boy...Actually she didn't chase him out because the boy threatened to commit suicide by jumping from the flat. So it is an emotional blackmail for the girl and the mother. At first she's afraid that this young man, because of the love for her daughter who don't want him that he will jump from the house, so she has sort of just accepted the boy. According to the girl, the boy sweet talked her mother into accepting him. So recently it seems the boy on his own accord has, in fact I suggested to the mother why don't you tell the boy to go for counseling because the boy is not in my purview, he is from another school. That is what I heard from the girl herself that recently this boy has left her house, and I've been working with the father because the mother works night-shift, and the father has to work outstation very often. But the girl's father has sort of trying to be strict at the same time listen to the wife. It was sort of still very soft. This girl is like physically very/quite weak, always having gastric. She would say that she's having gastric and this was often given as a reason that she's not coming back to school. So I find that this is a very challenging case. So for last term I managed to get her to come back more often but each time was with me smsing her the night before. I think because of lack of motivation, she said she can't wake up in the morning. So I remind her to set her alarm, then she will come. So this time I decided that I will not sms her because I don't want her to dependant on anybody to always remind her, but I find that I need to seek cooperation of the parents because I find ultimately the parents play a very critical role. In all the counseling cases that I encountered, parents play a very critical role.

I think no counselee should ever go away with the idea that they can make a significant change. As significant change happened it was just that maybe we are lucky at the moment the client is ready to change. Not that we are able to do anything that significant, the client herself must be at that phase in her journey, it's like a journey. They must have struggled, stumbled and realized then they reach. Some people's journey in this difficulty is very long so they must take a long journey before they discover themselves. Some people's journey is shorter and the counselor happened to come in at the right moment, they can pick themselves up. But the counselor can never be with them 24/7, parents the immediate family are with them 24/7, I feel that they would have a profound impact if they can also play an enlightening role. So far this is a very challenging one. I find the challenging part is the motivational part for the person who is in a difficult stage in their lives to be motivated too see the way out of the current situation. So both my difficult cases are with students who somehow not motivated to come to school. The other case is because this student is from China, he is also very often absent from school. His main problem is actually finding tremendous difficulties coping with studies in English. When he was in China up to about Secondary 3 he was a very good student, performing well, doing well in school. Since he come to Singapore he cannot cope with learning English so that has greatly demoralized him to the extent he just give up. But because his mother is here as a PR he has sort of realize that the better option is for him to remain in Singapore but yet he can't find the motivation to work hard in his English.

R So difficult how do you cope with help him to motivate himself?

C I get him to analyze what is it life like in China compare to here and asked him to find out his own resources like his friends, his relatives and immediate families. Asked him to analyze what others think about him, what did others advised him, but all actually point to the same thing, all advised him to be in Singapore. But to be in Singapore he has to succeed in his studies because he is under student pass, but to

succeed in his studies means he has to put in a lot of efforts to learn English. But I sensed his resentment, he used to be a good student and suddenly he just couldn't do it because of his language. So felt that there is a tremendous resentment, although he denied it, towards having to learn English. So that is my assessment. Until I can make him to get over this, because he knows all the strategies, he knows the mother is able to provide financial support for him to get tuition, he needs to come to school, he needs to pick up his vocabulary, he needs to meet up with his friends, he is aware of all these but he just couldn't make himself do it. So this is the other case which I find very challenging. Sometimes one week it looks as though things are moving he comes to school, and then they say 'yes, yes' the first case to say yes because he's standing up to bullies. Then after one two day in school again he stops coming. This boy again the same thing to perk himself up so even got him to identify which are the school friends from china who can help him and also visited the mother and actually the home is in no way the figurative factor, both these cases the family support is there, only the child didn't see the support is there compared to other more unfortunate ones. So it is a matter of their own struggles with themselves and I find ultimately for a counselor this will be a great challenge because it's between the individuals. If it is a case that is to external factor due to parental support you can help them to see the light beyond the tunnel. But if it is something inside of themselves, it is harder. So like cases where they complained parents restrictive, I find relatively these cases can solve because you get them to analyze the parents point of view, what they want, I find that few of these cases resolved. But these issues which is within the counselee themselves, people within their own cycle is harder. So on the surface you'd see that there is nothing that is detrimental in terms of the parental support. Both cases have got parents that will in fact go all the way to help them financially and so on, any help. In case of the girl can't catch up, the parents even willing to give tuition, but again the girl said 'no, no, no' didn't want to take tuition. Then this boy is the same, the mother is willing to come out with all the money to give him the tuition to catch up with English. So these are the cases, in fact this morning I just found out the girl has not been coming again. I just checked with

the form teacher she hasn't been coming and I asked her to call me. The boy I have yet to check up whether he is here.

In terms of school behavior, they are not the aggressive or disruptive, so in that sense the teachers are not antagonistic against them. In fact the school has also been very supportive. In the case of the girl, the school committee took upon themselves to call up and then I also called up the 3 girls. They turned around and went to attack her further said why did she complain, so the discipline master move in and made them sign the agreement immediately that if they ever do anything to intimidate her they will be dismissed from the school, be suspended. So it was made very clear to the girls and so I wanted to tell this girl that she is not to be afraid at all and she is to stand up to them because in life she would encounter bullies either in school or at work. So physically actually they had not been touching her, they just glared at her and pass remarks. So she has to stand up to them you see. I asked her to role play.

R Just now you mentioned something I thought it was quite profound like for a counselor to change another counselee sometimes it's the phase of the moment she struggles and came to a realization that she wants a change.

C That we happen to be there.

R So what is our role?

C We are hoping to shorten their journey but we must never go away with the idea that if the journey needs to be very long, it just reminds me of tracking, if the distance between this village and the next is 12 kilometers over very mountainous and difficult journey, no matter what you do you'd just make the journey slightly better and say that eventually you will reach the next destination. And then get them to accept that life has difficulties so just to lighten their journey. But we should never go away with the idea that we can shorten the journey. Let's say between this village and the next is 12 km and you have to go through so many valleys and things and

there is no any modern transportation in this place except by foot, no way. But it's just like when we are tracking and somebody said that look around the scenery is so beautiful, that is the journey they journey through. So the counselor is just somebody there to make the journey less tedious. But we can never hope to shorten it happened that the journey is very short and then you come in and it's successful within a short time.

R So we cannot boast around that we are very effective?

C I hew that.

R You are very humble.

C Sometimes I tried also that we should not be so easily like 'whoa' just because they come to school, maybe I'm comforting myself. That is how this person's journey is, so difficult.

R To be a counselor, according to your definition is just to be there to lighten the burden....

C It all depends on how they reach; it's like reaching a destination. If they see the difficulties they are going through is temporary, then they will walk a bit faster. It just like some people when they walk from this village to another 12 km, this is my own life experience, some people will take just 4-5 hours either because they are you, they are fitted; some people will take 10h doubled the time. So the counselor maybe to see if the person is like a fit person, can you do the journey very short? So he'll just have to take that. But we can lighten maybe by making them see some beauties even in the suffering they are going through and see it as part of the journey either it is reflection on the choices that they made, the mistake that they have made, some unforeseen circumstances that are beyond their control. So I supposed that is the role that we can play to get them to see things in another perspective, to lighten

the journey. to maybe make them journey through this difficult stage more acceptable.

R You summarized very well the role of a counselor that is in a very profound and deep sense in a way that I am very interested to find out why you have this kind of feelings, and profound understanding and experience about the role of counselor just being there to lighten and you emphasized so much of the inner motivation of the client?

C I guess it maybe because this is where I also observed, let's say counselors, I'm not necessarily related to chronological age, for a counselor to have gone through a lot themselves even though he may be younger would be able to have that patience and humility to accept that their role is not, cannot be miracle worker. There maybe such counselors but I feel that having gone through life I perceive those also in friends. If you see friends that were also in problem now I reflect everybody has to go through this. Unless the person wants to see it to resolve his problems come to a realization. Unless he wants to proceed with this journey to get to the destination, he would just decide that he doesn't want and half way stop the journey to return back. Ultimately it is the person's choice even if friends you see them struggling with life journey. So I guess counseling learning the art of getting about the journey through life, I find that it makes me come to this conclusion about counselors.

R Working with friends mostly they are adult like the friends experience. Now we are working with the secondary students, the most challenging would you say that it is this year-group?

C Yes. As all the psychologists have really went documented, this is the phase of their life that they have to struggle through. So it helps to take somebody to empathize with them say that 'hey everybody go through this' and this difficult stage is something they have to realize.

R The most difficult part for this year group they need to walk through you say which aspect? Self-esteem?

C They have to realize that they need not be so dependant on others for their own self-esteem and I find that basically students in this group either they have, I think basically there is an educational ... I find that a lot of, relatively I'm quite lucky in the sense the students' background, family background had been very good. I became an orphan only in my fifty, my father passed away only when I was near fifty and my mother passed away when I was in my fifties and some of these kids lost their father only when they are 8 or 9 years old, they lost the father figure. I can empathize with them. So I find that a lot of the struggles that the students go through I read about it in books. And then because of the parental support it made us love books so although I didn't struggle in my own life but through readings I have know a lot about terrible human conditions and how people struggled through watching movies with my mother. So I come to know, I find that students actually could benefit a lot if they could be taken through life experiences also maybe through watching movies, through books. But a lot of these kind of experiences are not happening to our students nowadays. So they are getting very instant rectification through materialistic things, interacting with friends, comparing what kind of things they buy, nail polish they have to keep with then 'in' group painting their nails, punching their ears. So they think that these are the 'in' things that would make teenagers happy. But I do find that kids who are very well balanced even at this stage or alternative are those again have parental support to make them love books and other wider range of experience that can get them to explore human emotions in greater depth. So even in this stage of modernity, teenagers who have this kind of support whether through the school environment, through parents or through fellow peers, I find that they can cope better. This group that cannot, the home also do not have this kind of educational background, so they begin to think that having a lot of materialistic things is the basis of living a fulfilling life. I find

this group of teenagers find it harder to cope.

R So it's the family background, the whole environment has contributed to the make-up of the teenagers now?

C So you see some parents they themselves have no high educational background but they value education. So they pressed upon the children, so they'll bring them, they themselves they can't read but they will bring the children to the library, they will seek out other people to motivate their children. In that sense the background may not always be there, there are some parents who don't have that education but they are enlightened. But some they are not.

R But the majority would you say family background if they are mostly disadvantages, it will have a great impact on the student.

C They may love the child in terms of variety physical supporter materials. The most powerful part of a person come from the self is the mind.

R Would you like to elaborate a little bit more?

C That means the ability to analyze situations at a higher poundage point not just at the problem situation.

R That means we need to educate their minds to change their mind so that they can think?

C I find that even if they live through life difficulties, they need somebody to point out to them 'ah, ya this is the difficult stage' and how do you see difficult and how can you make the situation better for yourself? So get them to realize that.

- R In that case I would like to find out that since counseling is so challenging and difficult, why are you here? What motivates you to this job? What is the best part of the job?
- C I think I went into it actually is also to ease off retirement because suddenly I've been working for 38 years and...
- R As counselor?
- C No, is in education. I only have occasional chance to play the role like advising the students and teachers when I was working as a school principle.
- R So in school you counseled students before?
- C I have some occasions but most of the time I have to be a disciplinarian which is very different.
- R Wow, it is a quite contradictory role.
- C Yes, I find that ultimately is to appeal to the reason, is to get the person to '分享' (means sharing) in Chinese is more critical rather than using external discipline, application of rules and procedures, sometimes that when it comes into play as part of the motivational factor but ultimately the person has to think for himself, the choices of action he needs to take. So when I saw the MOE advertisement inviting part time counselor I thought that that would be a very, very different role. Normally I like things that are challenging and I'm quite greedy to learn new things. I realized that as I analyze into my task line, I like to go into things that I've never done before. So for example earlier on I would see peer people running the marathon, so I said 'I can do it and I will go and try' and I actually practiced and completed it. So a lot of things I find that I like to do.

R What are the greatest differences from your previous role?

C The previous role I find that is very directive, I can direct and coordinate for things to happen. For example I can work with my H.O.D. my greatest believe is that if people were to live, because you see that one can only live one's life in one way, but though reading we can be so exposed, there are so many thoughts in mind. Even when I was a school teacher, I was teaching the N councils in a boy school, I also want to motivate them because I realized as a child, reading is one of the greatest pleasures that I find. So as a principle I can design. I met my head of English and said that we will make reading of a certain number of books and I find that in the JC the students can be very good in maths and science, but in terms of their general knowledge, reading habit very shallow until now recently they changed, they introduced literature. Previously they don't even have this subject – Literature in school and the students hardly read. They are good in memorizing facts, producing good answers and all that but they don't read. So I find that as a principle I can make it happen, I discussed with my English head to have all the students to read 20 books in JC 1 & 2. So that is what I can do and make it happen, very directive, here you cannot because here you're working with individuals. You can have a program in the school but if this child.... So that's why if you have a program or something, then the child knows that he has to fulfill his duty. As a student this is what the school wants you to do, so that is the duty. So it is more at the macro level, but at individual it is more an individual level. Macro level means as a principle I can say 'hey, ya I can implement something very good like this' then it will happen. But at the micro level, some teachers will say 'hey this student is not interested to read' and how do you want to get and this student didn't even want to come to school. Then sometimes is the breakdown of communication, I also have a case when I was a principle, this girl is also school refusal, didn't come to school and I only came to know about it. So as a principle I can implement something that is to make sure that any absentee more than 3 days in school we have to investigate. And I find that because I investigated,

that girl later was brought back to school. it was just a simple matter of misunderstanding between the girl and the teacher. You know at JC level the fore teens, late teens they are so sensitive to words. The teacher passed some remarks, they are so hurt, they never want to come. I feel sad because I was then to find out and then rumors were passed about her and her mother and later I myself happened to find out, so that incident made me realized that, can you imagine, over a simple misunderstanding, the girl would refuse to go to school.

R So you will work on an individual level?

C But you see if I have not investigated, I have found out what was wrong, the girl will just not come to school and she is in pre-U 2, just a few months to taking her exam. So that makes me realized individual because at school you have the whole system model, you are looking after the whole school, but it requires the individual level. But the system needs to be able to track, who is not coming? And why? Then the counselor will then work with the individual to investigate what can be done.

R So what is the best part you enjoy working on your individual level with the students?

C If you can get them to slowly realize that they themselves can be in control of their lives. That's why at one moment this girl said that 'I want back and think and maybe this year I can't make it, I may want to do it next year'. So it struck me that she realized. She didn't come to school for so long, she is not going to make it and she is deciding to repeat her sec 3 again. But I have to make her realize that the school may not accept you if you don't come to school, you are absenting yourself and also the bullies may still be here, they will be just one level ahead of you. So I worked with her to ask her whether she realized or not? If she is still not being able to stand up to intimidation then the problem is still there. But at least that moment she has told me that she is willing to think and she told me that she has been quietly thinking at

home. So the fact that she told me she's starting to think, it at least gives me some hope that hopefully she can think out of the situation and analyze her alternative options.

R So you enjoyed the moment when the students tell you she's started to think, the little change and there's hope.

C She has been thinking what she is going to do instead of keep saying 'I don't know, don't know...'. If they can start to think what other alternative options they can take, I think this will be the first step. Now the main thing is to equip her with more perspectives. That's why if she has been very well read, each time she comes to me I will ask her to read articles from Readers Digest, she will read! Even in a short 15 minutes, she will read the article. They have never read, only read 8days, all these various means the entitlement to buy this, buy that... So I find that there is always the educationalist part quitting out. So I don't know whether it's a good thing or bad thing for counselor, it's always that peeping out. So I must be conscious that I cannot lecture them.

R So you realized that to make them think to take on different perspectives, its kind of educational part. It will come out as an educator.

C Yes, I find. To enrich their perspective, that is where the educational part comes in. if you want to help them to make their journey, less tedious, see that there is a light at the end journey or there is a destination that they can reach, and there are more destinations that they can reach. So to enrich themselves, the education part has to come in. It seldom as emotional issue as one thing. I like the concept that the counselor has to be impaling, that means you equip the counselee, make them realize that the power is all within themselves. I think that is the goal for me in counseling. If they are not self empowered, the only was to self empowered is that they can seek out ways to learn.

R Can you make a very short summary like what do you think is the qualities is needed for a good counselor? Not necessary magic work wonders, but how to empower and lead to change of the counselee here?

C I think we must not look for quick fixes. Of course some cases are very straightforward and simple, that can be done. But in difficult cases we have to be patience.

Appendix 6 (b): Interview 201

Just now you talk about the student referred by the discipline mistress after the caning and normally what happen and how you counsel them

-some student referred by the DM for counseling but at the end quite resistance to come in for counseling because they have already been punished for example so me student committed or who are involve in fight have actually already receive canning, for example 3 strokes public canning in school so they feel they have already been humiliated enough punish enough so they ask why they have send for another round of counseling, they see the way the school punishing them, that they have been punished and why the counseling again why they come for another counseling the school punished them. This kids who can be quite recalcitrant who have committed serious disciplinary offences can actually view counseling as something negative as a negative experience. But normally when they come in I will explain to then the rational that we are not punishing them but it is to process with them to help them reflect to see where they have actually gone wrong and to help them see the difference clearly the counseling and disciplinary aspect . They actually are quiet accepting of it so they are able to accept it and they are able to cooperate. We actually have to work around the problem.

Initially they are quite resistance?

-Not all. Some of them. Those who feel they have already been punished very severely so they ask why are they coming again for counseling. They know that usually the DM would refer. So when the kids come in I would usually tell them with very forthright way who refers them and why they are here the first place. I think we owe them an explanation. Rather they come in they don't know why they are sent in and who refers them and for what reason they come in, you see.

Do you see the end of counseling and the disciplining in counseling can work hand in hand? In what way they compensate or compliment each other?

- Ya. I think this is a very interesting question. My operation manager actually commented once that in discipline they actually kill them or murder them and then after that. In

counseling we deal with the burial and the grief. So that's quiet interesting this observation. If we look at the analogy actually there is some meaning some significant to it because in discipline they have been punished and you know, negative consequences applied to them. But in counseling we actually apply a softer approach. The kids know that counseling is a softer approach and they see it as work hand in hand with discipline. It is actually getting the kid to reflect where they have gone wrong and actually to make reparation and restoration for what they have done wrong sometime to their victim and sometime to people they have actually hurt in the process. So actually counseling does compliment discipline to a very large extend. So in this scope actually work very close with the DM. Majority of my cases are referred by the DM, the discipline mistress.

Then for this group of students, do they see you as part of this school? Will it affect the counseling relationship?

- Yes in a way they see me as part of the school but in a way they also don't see me as part of the school. Part of the school in the sense that they know that I am in school and when they get into trouble they sometime referred to me and something like that. That they see me as figure of authority. But they also see that when they come in they don't get punish or don't get scolded. And they say they see a different teacher in this room Of course the concept of counseling is very alien to the kids still. They don't...because I have only been here two years So they see me as a different figure of authority and they call me teacher and sometime counsellor. But they see me as a very different figure... a different adult. Someone who actually listens to them and sometime on their side who understand them sometime lend them a listening ear. So part of the school and yet not part of the school. You know what I mean.

In our last interview we mentioned a lot about relationship with teachers. I wonder what kind of relationship with teacher would you ideally like to have?

- Of course I would like to have a very cooperative relationship with teachers a very harmonious working relationship where the teachers give me full support in the sense that when whatever I do for he kids that they reinforce, they compliment what I do and they fully support what I do. That's the kind of relationship I would ideally like to have.

How to achieve that kinds of goals? How to compliment and how to reinforce? What are you doing to those teachers? Are they doing the same or are you doing differently?

- It is difficult to say. I give you example- sometime I tell the kids to cooperate with the teachers, you know for example, they see me for problem issue relating to teachers issue relating to teachers. I told them top cooperate with teachers. But they come back to tell me that teacher shout at them. So it's like adopting harsh approaches to them, very strict with them. So it's quite difficult for me to really work around this problem. Working and getting cooperating with teachers is actually quite difficult because, I won't say it's difficult. It will require a lot of work in the sense that if you want full support from them you have to really get them to see what you trying to do and to support your effort in helping the child. For example, let's say about a person, a teacher refer a kid to you. You would actually have to get down to talk to the teachers very often to discuss the progress of the counseling case and the strategy you have adopted. And how the teacher in turn can actually compliment and supplement what you do within the classroom. But not all the time this is being done. this is only ideally definitely.

In order to achieve this ideal goal what do you see the school can do and what can they arrange? What can be done?

- Maybe the profile of the counselor would need to be raised.

In what way?

- As in say. The school to give the counselor more sharing slot. The principle and the VP and the management to give full support to the counselor so that the rest of the staff can see that the counselor is an integrate part of the whole system.

Integrate?

-yes

At the moment how do teachers or the school system perceive the roll of a counselor?

- You mean my own experience?

Yes.

-very mix reaction. Because some see me as like I say panacea to their ailment. I wave a magic wand. That's mean all the difficult kids they cannot handle they would pass to me, you know. So they see me as some one to help them with the most difficult children. Some see me in that role. Some think that counselling is a very easy process. They think that I am just talking to the kids, you see. So I have different reaction. Some have certain expectation. Meaning that they want certain thing to happen during/after the counseling. So their expectation may not be in tandem with my own expectation. As in what they want change may not necessary be what the counselor may want change. For example, let's say when they refer a kid; it is called a referral problem. But when you actually talk to the kid it turns out that there is a presenting problem. So there is actually a referral problem but actually the referral problem and the presenting problem may actually conflict with each other. So what I mean is that they may think that the problem lies somewhere, you know and they refer superficially the problem. But when you actually talk to the kid and you unravel a bit more you find that actually more deep rooted problem. Let's say misbehavior in class can actually or inattention in class can actually be due to actually something happening within the family. So it's not so much the inattention but it is something else which you have to address. So some teachers may not understand it. Because they think that the problem is the referral problem. But when we work with the child actually we work more with the presenting problem. So actually it's quite different. But of course I try to match the expectation of the teachers. I try to fit into their school system. Having been in the school system for so long by trying to help my colleague as much as possible by helping them with the referral problem as well as looking into the kid presenting problem. So I see myself as like working on the referral problem and the presenting problem to actually satisfy my client who in this case here are actually the teachers. The one who referred. So sometime it's a mix feeling ok because we have to ask our self or actually I have to ask myself,. Who is my client? The client my teacher or my client the

students? So if we do cause, the thing is if my client is the student then obviously I work more deeply into the presenting problem. But if I think more of my client as the teacher who refers in the first place and who expect to see result along the line of what they want then my client becomes the teacher. So in the school system it's very different from external agency external counselor because they actually have to satisfy the demands and expectation of the referral agents who are usually in the case of school system, usually the teachers. That's how I feel

It's quite difficult?

- Yes

You have to refer?

-yes

Do you see your client...is your client the teachers or the students?

- Yes that's what I am trying to say.

What is your answer to this question?

- When I first came in this school, my first year in this school, my client was my student. So I felt that you know working with student is most important helping them with their core problem. When I see that their referral problem, their presenting problem don't match I work on their presenting problem. In another word the client is the students. But I find that if I need to fit into the system I need to be accepted by my colleagues you know as part of them then I have to treat the teachers as also my client. In another words, I have to satisfy what they want because in the first place when they refer there is a certain objective and goal they expect me to achieve. So that is still something that trouble me, my client the student or teachers? I think a lot of counsellor faces this problem. I think of it as my student more my student rather than my teacher,

More your student?

- yes

So if there is conflict, so normally how you solve this?

- That's mean normally I ask the kids what they feel is the problem. I tell them they are referred by this teacher for this problem. I tell them exactly. I ask them whether they agreed, you know that those are the presenting problem and if they don't they actually explain to me why they don't agreed. Say for example. Inattention in class. They said no, I am not doing that. That's wrong perception. Because actually I was trying to get the attention of the teacher, or something else they explain to me. So when I realize that the referral problem is not the presenting problem, then I work on their presenting problem.

Then how do you solve the reference problem?

- Then I would get back to the teacher and explain that the referral, the source, the reason for the referral problem What actually causes the referral problem. Ya. Because sometime it could be due to classroom dynamic or the interaction style, the communication styles of the teacher herself or himself.

So you work as a mediator?

- Very often. So because we work as a mediator our relationship with our colleague got to be really very good. Because if the relationship is no good there would be resistance to working with you, you see. The resistance to like cooperating with you or to reinforce actually what you are doing with the kids or to see the kid side of the story. So when you gain their trust, gain the teacher trust then you can actually fight for the kid.

It seems to me that you understand and empathize with the student? See their situation more. Can understand them and try to help them to get understanding from the teacher.

- Actually it works on both sides I try to get the teacher the kid to...usually what I do is I try to get the student to change to fit and to adapt to the teacher. Because I always tell them that you

know that many adults once they hit 30s 40s it is difficult, they are resistance to change. Adults are more resistance to change. Ya...then I tell them that you know they are easier, they are easier, flexible and younger they can adapt to change...they are younger....they can adapt to change easily. I try to get them to change. The way they see the problem, I try to get them to do reframing, to see their teachers in a different way, to see their classmate in a different way. You know and to work on their problem. Then I try to get the teacher to see from the student perspective actually to see what go wrong. Get the teacher to try to understand. This is a difficult child; I really understand what you are going through with this child....this is what the child is feeling so could we just work along and help the child as much as we can. In another words it is .quiet a delicate position....I put myselfI align myself with the need of the children. But I also align myself with the need of the teacher. In the first place the kid was referred to me are not easy kids to deal with in the classroom or you know ya...or they have post disciplinary problem. So I always try to let the teacher know that I fully sympathize with what they are going through. That the kids are difficult but you see they are facing some problem and perhaps could we help up in this area. So that when the child goes back to the classroom it's the first front line that the people faces are the teachers especially the form teacher or whoever they don't get along with. So this teacher when we work with them it's easier for this teachers to ...easier for the children and usually report to us because when I work with the children I ask them to work to change themselves and I also work with teacher to get them to cooperate to change their attitude towards the child. So when the child goes back to the classroom he gets integrated back because the teacher is in a more accepting frame of mind and the student himself is also willing to change so that it's a little easier ya...rather then you know the children see that....you know I just work with the teacher or I just work with the students I actually work with both. That would require very delicate handling because you have to put some issue very carefully very delicately to teachers sometimes ya...especially students bring up sensitive issue in the classroom. So if you really want to help the kids you have to be really careful what to say to the teachers. But we have to work with the students first before working with the teachers. So I work with both actually.

So your procedure would be to work with the children first ...

- ya

For one or two session or more?

-ya one two or perhaps three and then if the child still find it difficult normally I work with the teachers as well. And I find that normally in the cases when I work with the teachers is much easier and the cases are much more successful usually. When I work with the teachers, the teachers also give support to the students. Rather than I focus alone on the problem. It doesn't mean that all cases I work with the teachers because some cases are sensitive issue that the children come to see me about and they do not want you to vouch out anything so I cannot breach confidentiality. For example gender identity issue. They come up to tell me they are homosexual problem like that...it won't be right of me to tell this to somebody else so that it will become a very personal thing between me and my student and we work on it alone and of course the teacher won't know what is happening because I won't give feedback regarding this because this is very personal. So it depends on the issue. Some which are very personal I would not want to involve the teachers because in certain school I have been told that once the counselor gives feed back to the teacher, the teacher gossip or spread about to other teachers and its and that get back to the students ears or even the teachers tell the student to directly that the counselor told me this, this, this, that you said and after that the counsellor losses that trust and respect of the student because they see you as...you know you breach confidentiality and they longer trust you. So we have actually to be very careful ya... Usually when I want to work with teachers I seek the permission of the students...ask them is it alright or could I call your parent or you know tell your teacher about this that you are going through...and if the student gives me permission than usually I go ahead. Or if the student doesn't give me permission I try to persuade the child and explain to him why it is very important to gain parental or teachers' support you know...to help him to resolve his problem. And I feel that the most important thing is to let the child know that I am telling another person whatever he is telling me so that the student knows that I am not breaching confidentiality but certain information has to be given to the parent or to the teachers. So that they can help him with the problem.

Thank you for sharing this because last time we didn't get to talk about the teachers....relationship

with you. And would you like to talk about the wider context? You mentioned the problem of the kids actually they are not isolated, they could be some fire fighting contextual environment things. So would you like to elaborate that so that I can understand more.

- ya what I mean is some context, very often I won't say just this school very often in most school problem are actually systemic issue. When I say systemic it means that usually it a time of vicious cycle in term of he lives with the family the root cause lies with the family or the problem is you know, because of the family...the family dynamic...the teacher student relationship dynamic plus classroom dynamic in this case here or even policy of certain disciplinary rule you know...ya...so it's systemic. So very often we cannot work alone with the child because the issue is systemic. So we have to work with...like I said I work with teachers also work with...in this school I find myself most of the time working very closely with the family, the parents because the parent usually very sad to said here the parents are often are the root cause of the problem. Or the parents create most of the problems for some of the children here. So such as family issue, example mother hurling very insensitive remark to children then they come to school crying they cannot concentrate on their lesson or they tell their children you know, no need to go to school you so stupid anyway. I don't want you to go to school...so things like that then the children come crying or very insensitive remark, caning some form of...caning their children, parents caning their children hitting their children, belting their children, banging their children's head against the window or wall...you know this sort of thing...vulgarity against the children so when they come in crying so very often the kids complaint of parents not trusting them not understanding them limiting their freedom and things like that so a lot of things the children don't know how to work out with their parents. So very often I think the counselor becomes a mediator in this case here so have to call in the parents call in the children to get both to see the other person point of view actually.

.....how about the school environment and system? Policy like...disciplinary policy and the contextualize classroom and.....

- for example classroom dynamic...certain student want to be treated in a different way you know....but teacher treat them in a certain way in what they expect. They may not...they forever at conflict with the teacher....sometime they usually feel they shouldn't be shouted at,

yell at ...you know given warning you know sent to detention classes and sometime don't see the rational why the teacher are punishing them. Because of this they don't go for their punishment, don't go for their detention classes because they don't see the rational they don't see why they should be punished you see.

What is your role then?

- So my role is when they come in, when the teacher refer is to get them to understand where they have gone wrong, and how to accept the punishment. They have to accept the punishment and that's something quiet difficult because sometime the kids don't see why they are punish at the first place. They may feel the teachers are forever punishing them or you know pick on by their teachers that kind of feeling. So you have to really explain to the kid what went wrong so they can really understand and they can cooperate by going for their punishment so to speak.

It seems to me that part of your job is to explain to the student so that they understand why they are being punished and they would be called later. How do you feel about doing this part of your job?

- At first it was when I first started it was a little difficult because sometime when the kids tell me that they are punished unfairly that they talk to me I can understand what they are going through. And somehow sometimes I agreed with them that punishment is not necessary. They could get punished in a different way not necessary in that way. So I do understand because basically I am an ex teacher. I do understand that maybe that form of punishment not the most suitable for them. For example kid who sleeps during lesson, who don't pay attention during lesson are sent for detention class. I don't quiet agreed with that myself personally. But it's not in my position to go how to agree with how the teacher is punishing the student so I have to reframe it for the child and explain where went wrong. But sometime I in my heart. I don't feel too happy or too good about this that the kids are punished in that way because being an ex teacher I feel that they are other alternative way of dealing with the children. So this is my main conflict because sometime I don't see the punishment as necessary or suitable. So it quiet difficult in this case here because I wouldn't want to have conflicts with my

colleagues by telling them this. And sometime it is a bit difficult to explain to the children why they are punished in that way when you yourself don't feel that they should be punished.

Why do you feel so difficult?

- Difficult lor. So I still have to sympathize with the children to tell them Ok I understand how you really feel about this but the school have certain disciplinary policy and rule number xyz say this xyz so therefore being a school student you have to abide by xyz rules so you have to follow the punishment ya...that's how I get around it. I pointed out to them the black and white lah. So the kids see that way and I also tell them that the teacher care for them when they punish ya.. Otherwise they won't be sent for punishment. Very often I get argument with them regarding this...they don't see it this way. Also sometime the kids get very harsh punishment. I do negotiate with the dm...disciplinary committee...for example they get 20 detention 30 or I don't know how they manage to accumulate 30 40 50 detention and the kid have no time...the kid tell me they have to serve 30 40 or even 50 detention and one detention is about four hours. I am not going to serve. I am going to let them cane me...you know this kind of thing...so I have to get back to the teacher and say, "Look I think this is a bit ridiculous 50 detention...double detention...and they skip and then double again...one and so forth. That's how the kid in this school the naught one end up many detentions. Either they come in very rebellious because they don't want to serve their 40 50 detention, you see.

One detention one hour?

- one detentions about two three hours...5.30..two hours like this

So it would be 100?

- So I don't know how they are going to serve all. The kids telling me "Look if we time this times this we are serving till next year or something. And once they serve their caning they tell me....

Can choose?

- No they give up. They just give up you see and the discipline is after them you know to serve the detention the 60 50 detention, so they give up. The children rather be cane. "Ask them to cane me I don't know how to serve the 40 50 detention." So I ask them I go through with them again how they have been punished to get so many detentions. So they tell me because of something they have done wrong after that adds up double triple double double because they don't serve double double so end up a lot of detention. So sometime I negotiate on their behalf. I go up to the DM and say "Is it possible to give CIP community service work? Is it possible to reduce the number of hours for them? Is it possible you know give them one stroke and they serve how many...you know those kind of thing to negotiate for the children.

.....

-usually the discipline committee...they may not be too happy about it but they give me some face...that's what I mean about winning the trust and respect of the colleagues so they give me some face and say "You said like that. You feel like that. Ok lah" So they give me some face. Ok lah but I cannot be forever be seen fighting for the kid. Otherwise the teacher would think I am always on their side and they will say "You listen too much to the kid". So sometime I ask them what is the role of the counselor. Am I not here to listen you see. Don't listen too much to the kid, they tell me. So it's difficult in school in school context because our client are not really the kids sometime, it's the teacher because they refer it to us and they expect the problem to be solved. But the kids don't see it as a problem. Or to the kids it's the adult problem, the teacher problem you see. School context school counseling is very different from external counseling definitely. Because the external counseling works with the client it's very direct it's very clear who is your client, you see... to fight for their client to champion the right for their client. Here your client is not quite your student sometime. Very often not sometime. The client is the teacher, the discipline head how to work around this problem.

It's very difficult....very challenging?

- Yes. To counsel in school is very different from counseling outside.

Just now you mentioned hopefully with more talking, sharing problem solving you can get around....

- Higher profile given to the counselor. That's mean the counsellor is seen as given full support by the admins full support and the teacher see the admins as fully supportive of the counselor and giving the counsellor an important role in the school. Then he teacher would be more accepting of the counsellor...winning the trust.

What do you mean by full support? Can you give some example....?

- Full support would be like in some school I understand the principle support the decision of the counselor and whatever the counsellor or trust the counselor quite great deal, respect the position of the counselor, treat the counselor as the referral person as a professional person and....in another word be behind the counselor in her decision and in the way she works out things lah. That's what I mean by the support.

But at the moment you are of the staff working like compliment the disciplinary?

- I'm not so sure how the school perceives me but I think they see me as playing a supportive role.

To support the student or to support the teachers?

- Support the school.

In what ways?

- To support the school in helping them to deal with difficult students. I see my own role in this school as supportive.

Are you a support staff?

- I don't think I am considered a support staff because school counsellor is in the teaching staff. So we are actually teaching staff as supposed to support staff. But some who are not in the education service are on the MXO pay. MXO means they are at the level of the OM an AM. OM stand for Operation Manager and AM stand for Administrative Manager.

So the difference would be support staff and teaching staff. So once you are seen as the teaching staff

you share the responsibility of the teachers?

- Yes, not teaching. Teaching in an indirect way. Still teaching the values, indirect ways, teaching through character building, molding their right value. Teaching the right values for them to understand where they have gone wrong. To do reflection like things like this.

How do you feel about this definition of this role of being a counsellor? It's still a teaching staff teaching character like model them.the values?

- I'm quite comfortable to be a teacher counselor so it's like align with what I have been doing except that I am doing it full time.

Go back to the contextual issue... what can the school do to make the counseling service better to them because you mentioned actually your client are teachers and student as well. To make this counseling service more effective and more meaningful to...what can the school do besides giving counsellor higher profile. Is there any thing can be done to make the fire fighting less fire fighting, to make your job easier and more effective?

- Yea, to make my job more easier? definitely they can do like a few things like for example... the values education...there is this value education program in my school. It's a bit like PCCG in the past program can actually run a lot of mass program for the student for the general student popular so that they actually benefit and not all the students come to me for counselling. Another one is ...more preventive.....another one might be more school program, in another word more program to help them more progress for at risk kids rather than sending at risk kids for more counseling

-

Such as management program?

- program for at risk kids which we are now having, working with external vendor to run program for at risk kids, kids who skip school...kids who get into lots of problem.

What program are you looking at?

- They are running this year onward. AE department is running this program.

The name of the program is.....

- We don't have name of the program. We don't call it step up here. It's actually along the line of step up. In another words we select the at risk kids and actually get them to attend program run by external vendor. More like a holistic school culture where the student sees the teacher the staff, you know, in caring. So definately that can help. A caring school environment may not be easy for a main stream school.

What do you mean?

- What I meant is everybody got to subscribe to this idea because not everybody is caring. Sad to say. Or sometime I won't say not everybody is caring...I think I have to modify that. I think it's more like they are too busy sometime...so many problems that teachers are harassed with this day you see. So it's actually quite difficult for them.

Caring school environment for you...what does it mean? Because normally people will see school is a learning environment, study environment?

- No, when I say caring school environment it's not like align what Northlight School is doing under this principle Wong Yen Chin. She is very good. Northlight School...it's really wonderful what they are doing, so it creates a totally caring culture. They start off the day with EQ lesson, their EQ lesson with their teachers, the teacher have makan session with them...I think breakfast time with them or something and then I'm not so sure lunch time also with them. They spent their meals with their teachers and the teachers really look out for you know the student, the classroom interaction time in the morning. And when they come in it seem there are messages that...messages that tell them that school is proud of them that they can achieve that kind of things. That's what I meant by caring school culture. So it's not the teaching environment, it's more of the whole environment.

So it will take care of the well being so they would be less problem.

- Yes. That's mean overall the students feels they are cared for that when things happen they are people to go to and they fell happy to come to school you know they are usually adult

who cares for them. That's what I meant by caring environment.

So they feel happy they learn better?

- Yes. So actually when they are happy they learn better. That my ideal...less problem. I am not so sure when that can be achieved.

Is there anything you like to add?

- not really

Not really...

-yes

Shall we end?

- Thank you

