

Training News and Updates

Curriculum development is progressing and we hope to have the first module, "Children and Trauma," available sometime in June. The course, containing 15 lessons in curriculum format with learning activities, will include a CD with accompanying overheads (in color) for making either transparencies or handouts.

If any one wants to "reserve" a copy of this curriculum package, let me know! We are trying to determine how many we will need to publish. I also will need to know the video format you can use—VHS, PAL (European) or DVD.

Prayer needs for the Training department include:

- completion of the curriculum; for Marj as she does the lay-out and for guidance in how to market it;
- the ROH May training and the new candidate training program during the month of June;
- additional workers called to help with training.

Will anyone be home in May?
We are having a ROH open training at the Latin American Bible college in La Puente, California May 26-29.

It looks like we may have five or six new ROH workers on the course! You can get full information on this conference from the ROH website.

The training focus of this newsletter is on counseling children. Whatever our role, we will end up dealing with children who have suffered enormous trauma-related losses with ensuing emotional wounding—wounding that stems from situations of exploitation. These tragic situations cause children to experience many vital losses that hurt very deeply and result in overwhelming grief. Losses result in destruction of trust, no sense of being created in the image of God, feeling unloved and incapable of giving love, lack of a sense of belonging, loss of innocence—all of which leaves a child not only with a sense of low self esteem but with loss of hope.

These losses have a profound impact on children's spiritual formation. If children cannot trust people, how can they trust God? If others don't love them, how can they believe God loves them unconditionally? If their own families reject them, how can they believe God wants them to become a part of His family? Or, how can they visualize God as a compassionate, loving Father when they have experienced the worst form of abuse from their earthly father?

Treating children in unjust ways eliminates their capacity to understand the difference between right and wrong. Thus, children who have been traumatized by injustices lose the moral base from which they can discern moral values and develop their spiritual lives. Our task in restoring these

children to emotional health and hope is not only vital for their wellbeing, but also foundational to leading them to Christ.

Every culture has distinctive ways of communicating, expressing feelings and dealing with grief. Children learn these ways as they grow up; it is part of the social knowledge their culture imparts. For example, there are great variations in the way a culture seeks advice and how it is given, or how people talk about themselves. Non-verbal communication varies, too: smiles, nods and silences mean different things in different societies.

Even within societies, styles of communication differ according to social class, whether urban or rural, as well as age. Communication between adults and children also varies. For example, different cultures have different ways for adults to give advice and comfort to a child. It is important to use ways of helping children that are appropriate to their culture.

In her article, "Counseling Children Across Cultures," Heleen vander Brinken superbly alerts us to vital cross-cultural factors and issues for workers to consider when helping children work through the grief process. She helps us shed our Western ways of thinking and gives valuable clues in how to tap into the needed source of knowledge and understanding we can derive from the local people and culture. Prayerfully read this article and consider how you may need to make your counseling approach more culturally relevant to serve the children and their families more effectively.

continued on page 4

Counseling Children Across Cultures

Heleen vander Brinken currently is involved in full-time ROH ministry in Sierra Leone. As part of her degree work as an ortho-pedagogue in The Netherlands, Heleen spent a summer at an orphanage in Guatemala. During this time she became aware of her Western approach to issues concerning child practices, mental health and counseling. Heleen discovered there is no universal approach to child rearing and counseling. This revelation led her to research the challenge of thinking through issues related to the area of biblical cross-cultural counseling of children which would provide some basis for theory development in this area. The following article is condensed from her research paper, "Counseling Children Across Cultures."

I. THE PERSON OF THE COUNSELOR

What happens when a Western counselor is confronted with a child-in-need in a culture different from the counselor's? The counselor soon will notice the way in which differences in worldview lead to different interpretations of a problem. Our understanding of the culture and worldview of another people will have a great influence on our ability to identify with them. An understanding of other people also leads to a change of attitude. From an ethnocentric perspective, one should seek to move to one of empathy.

Empathy is the way of comprehending the situation from the perspective of another. It does not mean that one is condoning or condemning, approving or rejecting the other's viewpoint. Empathy is the attitude of appreciating how other people perceive the situation, without condemnation. This approach does not mean that the person rejects all judgment, but it does mean an appreciation of another's perspective.

Christian cross-cultural workers will have to examine their own interpretation of a situation, not only in the light of their own worldview and the worldview of the country they are working in, but also from a biblical perspective. In this process counselors might come to the conclusion that the people with whom they are working are looking at the problem in a way closer to what the Bible teaches than does our own Western interpretation.

The process of cross-cultural counseling requires the ability on behalf of the counselor to critically examine his or her own feelings, attitudes and expectations. Workers often feel angry about the way a society seems to lack in giving care to children who, in their perception, are in desperate need of help. Many workers go through periods in which they become highly frustrated about the culture in which they are working. Unconsciously these frustrations may feed feelings of ethnocentrism.

Hesselgrave highlights another important aspect in cross-cultural counseling. He points out that the Christian worker who ministers interculturally must be prepared for a wide variety of perceptions about his or her role and function. In most non-Western societies

"specialist helpers" fulfill a spiritual role as well. Western counselors must realize that in the initial stages of any relationship, their role and function will, in a significant sense, be prescribed by the receptor society. Hesselgrave comments: "On the positive side, this realization may jolt the Christian workers out of some mistaken preconceptions of Western culture and force them into a more biblical worldview where the spirit world is more immediate and powerful. On the negative side, they may be frustrated in their attempt to overcome local expectations as to their role and purpose." (Hesselgrave, 1984: 122-23)

Much more could be said on this topic but hopefully it has become clear that a cross-cultural counselor should always be open for critical reflection on his or her work with regard to the issues mentioned. Although these issues may not always surface in the relationship between the counselor and a child, they probably will in the relationship with the wider family.

II. THE DIAGNOSTIC PROCESS

We can already conclude that in diagnosing children cross-culturally, we probably cannot just rely on our Western methods and tools. First of all, we need to show respect for explanations given by the society where we are working and even explicitly ask for such explanations. Even when these people seem to be highly westernized in their thinking, their worldview is not necessarily completely similar to ours. Cultural issues become deeply personal in times of crisis. Under pressure, people will start to question the correctness of their new way of looking at things. Therefore, to listen carefully to the explanations that are given is of crucial value in the diagnostic process.

Listening and Observing

One learns cultural values and insights through listening. An important prerequisite for careful listening is a thorough knowledge of the language of the person being interviewed. Another powerful tool in the diagnostic process is observation. Again, awareness of cultural issues is critical. For example, in many cultures, under certain circumstances, it is not acceptable

for a child to make eye contact with an adult. In Western societies, however, children are encouraged to make eye contact and a lack of it is seen as impolite and even indicative of certain developmental or emotional problems.

Importance of the Social Context

In general, Western workers need to be willing to include the larger social context in interpreting problems and to show more openness toward spiritual explanations. When we realize the importance of the extended family and the community in child rearing practices, we also can expect them to be important in defining the problems.

Spiritual Issues

Spiritual issues need to be explicitly addressed in the diagnostic process. The better workers know the local culture and the people's spiritual beliefs and practices, the more specific they can become in their questions. For example, do the parents (or maybe the child) give a spiritual interpretation of the problem? Is there possibility that witchcraft is being used against this child?

A description of the plight of an African child with a slowly developing, epileptic condition, highlights the role of spiritual beliefs in working with children. The neighbors and the community believed he was an incarnation of a dead relative who, though courageous, was wicked and brutal in life. The handicap was thought to be the result of the anger of the gods on the dead man.

To gain knowledge of spiritual beliefs, the help of local people, especially Christians, is vital. Their advice, together with our professional skills and experience—all submitted to the guidance of the Holy Spirit—will be crucial in interpreting spiritual dimensions of a problem.

III. THE COUNSELING PROCESS

Like the diagnostic process, the process of counseling should be holistic including the psychological, social, spiritual and (if applicable) physical dimensions. It is especially important what the parents expect from the treatment and how they and the wider family, or even the community, expect to be involved. We must constantly be aware that our Western concepts may clash with the values of the local culture.

Not only the aims but also the methods used and the advice given should be looked at critically in the light of the culture and, even more so, in the light of

Scripture. In Guatemala I realized that the way Guatemalan Christians discipline children does not always correspond to my (Christian? Or maybe Western?) opinion about discipline. Only after trust has been gained and people have come to appreciate our attitude of respect can we start to challenge issues like these.

The Western emphasis on individual counseling is less likely to work in a non-Western context. Counselors, therefore, have to be open to working with larger groups, including parents, siblings and, in some cases, even the extended family and community.

One also has to be aware of the importance of symbolism in the counseling process. The non-verbal is often seen as being more important than overt verbal expression. However, in a culture where magic is still fulfilling an important role, we need to make sure that children understand that the symbols and rituals we use are just that and nothing more. Other cultural responses to be aware of stem from a shame-based society.

We need to be open about our Christian faith. As we believe that ultimately the answer for all problems is found in Jesus, evangelization and/or discipleship will be an integrative part of the counseling. Spiritual issues need to be dealt with in a way acceptable to the

Cross cultural workers, wherever they might be in the course of their study or ministry, should begin to think through a culture-sensitive approach to counseling on the basis of available knowledge as well as personal experience. This process will occupy one's attention throughout the entire course of his or her ministry in any given area. (David Hesselgrave, *Counseling Cross-Culturally*, 1985:214)

local Christian church. When working with Christians families, ideally there should be a strong link between the counselor and the family's pastor.

SUMMARY

We can conclude that the way we perceive and treat children-in-need is highly predicted by the worldview of the society of which we are a part. When Western counselors work within a non-Western setting, they need to be aware of the way their worldview will influence their observations and interpretation. When counselors are Christian, their task is even more complicated. They need to critically evaluate both their own worldview and the worldview of the culture where they work, with its consequences for childcare, in the light of the biblical worldview and biblical teaching on children and crisis.

Caregiver's Time Out

Marj McDermid



The crucial importance of physical touch in the lives of all children cannot be overemphasized,¹ says Dr. Daniel Sweeney. Although tactile stimulation is particularly needful for development in young children, the need for touch doesn't end there.

Dr. Sweeney further states about children, "To be untouched is to be unloved. Certainly, to be untouched is to be alone."² Those words ring true for all of us.

The Gospel of Luke says of Jesus that He deliberately "reached out and touched" (5:33). The one he touched in that instance was a leper, an untouchable (giving a new meaning to servanthood).

The woman of the street who touched Jesus had her sins forgiven (chapter 7). The woman who simply touched his garment was healed of a chronic disease. In fact, everyone who touched Him experienced healing (4:40). He placed the amputated ear back on the High Priest's servant and restored it (22:51).

News/Updates

...cont'd from page 1

Who will be our next inspiring writer? Please share training ideas with your colleagues—whether short or long! Networking is vital in any ministry and I would like to see more of this happening in Rainbows!

Our prayers are with you as God uses you to be mighty instruments of His loving and healing to a generation of children who have lost their way. May He ever keep the flame of compassion burning brightly in your hearts for His precious children.

In our work we delight in the story of Jesus taking the little girl's hand and raising her back to life (8:54). All these accounts portray Jesus' love and compassion for humankind—for us.

Jesus, in another familiar story, took loaves of bread in his hands, blest them and broke them to nourish a needy, hungry crowd (9:16). We must always remember that we are the hands of Jesus today to the abandoned and forgotten children of the world. What a joyful challenge to reach out, to touch, to heal, to feed, to bless, to love these children in Jesus' name! How blessed our privilege to love and come alongside them and their hurting families!

I love this next picture: After His resurrection Jesus came to His disciples, walking on the water in a storm. Remember what He said? "TOUCH ME and make sure I am not a ghost" (Luke 24:39). These workers did not need to fear. They just needed to recognize Jesus, to look for Him in the storm. They were not alone. The Creator of the sea and the storm was there and said, "Touch me! I'm real."

So He is real with us today, if we look for His touch in our lives and work. Someone once said, "Don't leave your 'quiet time' until you know Jesus is happy with you." At that moment—the moment when you feel Jesus' touch—you know you are not alone or unloved or unproductive.

¹ Daniel Sweeney in *Children Affected by HIV/AIDS*, MARC 2002: 73-74.

² *Ibid*

RESOURCES

* HIV/AIDS

World relief has a superb three-part video on the AIDS crisis in Africa. Each lesson is about 12 minutes in length and includes:
Lesson 1: No Hope for the Poor
Lesson 2: No Hope for Tomorrow
Lesson 3: The Only Hope

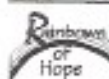
This powerful video brings the horrible crisis of AIDS into stark reality. African pastors and church leaders address the issues and struggles of confronting the crisis, adding to its value. World Relief will send one copy to each person requesting it. The best way is to e-mail <worldrelief@xc.org>.

* Children and Prayer

If you are wanting ideas for getting your children involved in prayer, check the Esther Prayer Network. Their vision is to mobilize and network a global "army" of praying children united to reach their generation. Their purpose is to teach, train, equip children and leaders so that children can be praying "world shapers." They have lots of tools to teach children to pray.

* Helpful Book

Nurturing Spirituality in Children: Simple Hands-on Activities (Peggy J. Jenkins) is a fantastic resource book of lesson ideas that teach children spiritual truth. The lessons are adaptable to any age group through to teens: Seedlings (for the beginning learner); Sprouts (for the more advanced learner); and Full Bloom (for the experienced learner). Lessons can be used in the home, school, Sunday school or clubs. Peggy uses various objects for short presentations (around 10 minutes) of a vital spiritual truth. She suggests that if the props are impossible to obtain or inappropriate culturally, one can use pictures or "paint" word pictures to get the point across. (Order through Phyllis if you would like a copy.)



Rainbows of Hope (ROH) is a ministry of WEC International.
Phyllis Kilbourn, ROH Director of Training <75573.3070@CompuServe.com>