

Visit to Shiquan, Shaanxi
2011-10-13 to 2011-10-17

Introduction

Under a three-year agreement of 2010 between of Shaanxi Soong Ching Ling Foundation and Hong Kong Friends of Guangming Association, a series of training and education programs was being arranged for the 26 schools of for the counseling and psychological support of the Left-Behind Children (LBC) in the municipality (children whose parents had left for the cities and outside provinces for work).

In 2010, a party of three clinical psychologists from Hong Kong (comprising Eddie Li Kam-wah, Joseph Lau Kai-tai and Ingrid Mak Wing-fun) visited Shiquan between 2010-08-04 to 2010-08-08, and ran a two-day course for a group of teachers on basic developmental psychology and management of emotional and behavioral problems in children. The course was met with good success. As a follow-up, the same party of psychologists paid a visit to Shaanxi between 2011-10-13 and 2011-10-17. 38 teachers from the 26 schools of Shiquan, most of them being in-house serving counseling teachers together with a group of 10 newly appointed teachers, attended another two-day training course from 2011-10-14 to 2011-10-15. The focus of the training had been to further equip the teachers with updated psychological methods of behavioral analysis, to discuss difficult cases encountered by the teachers, to demonstrate the use of small-group counseling formats for LBC at different developmental stages, and to encourage self-care and peer support amongst the counseling teachers. A visit was also paid to a primary school (Wujing Chunlei Hope Primary School) to have further understanding of the educational and counseling facilities for residential children.

Timing and Weather

It was in autumn, about two weeks after the National Day Holidays. The weather was pleasant, cool and sunny. In fact, we were informed that the best days of visits for Shiquan would be either in April-May when it is still early summer, or in October-November when it gets cooler, rather than the summer holidays. This would be borne in mind for future visits.

Travel to Shiquan

The party took an early morning flight from Shenzhen to Xi'an on 2011-10-13 arriving at around 1200 noon after an one hour's delay. The party was received at the airport by Mr. Fan Feng, Secretary of Shaanxi Soong Ching Ling Foundation and his staff. After travelling from Xi'an to Shiquan, the party was settled in a comfortable hotel called Jinjiang Business Hotel.

Participants of the Course

The core group of 28 counseling teachers came from 26 primary and secondary schools of the Shiquan municipality, all having LBC in their students. In 2008, a batch of 30 counseling teachers were recruited under the sponsorship of the Shaanxi Soong Ching Ling Foundation and the Women's Federation as a pioneering project to improve the counseling support to the LBC. These counseling teachers were mainly university graduates who came as half-volunteers with a two-year contract, and got remunerated only 40% of the salary of the regular teachers. This year, the party was glad to note that out of the core group of 28 counseling teachers, 26 had already been appointed as regular teachers with comparable salary. This would provide good stability to this cadre of counseling teachers, and would certainly benefit the welfare of the LBC.

As aforementioned, at the request of the Women's Federation, 10 additional places of the current training course were given to a group of newly appointed teachers of Shiquan, so that they could understand more the theories and skills of helping LBC. Therefore, there was a total of 38 participants in the training course.

Situation of LBC in Shiquan

According to the statistics provided by the Women's Federation, about 9,000 school children in Shiquan were LBC (total for the whole of China: 45,000,000). About 5,000 of them lived in the boarding schools. They occupied about 40% of the student population in schools that provided boarding facilities in the municipality.

Venue and Facilities

The two-day lecturing was conducted at Quanxi No. 2 Primary School which was centrally located in the municipality of Shiquan. The lecture room was spacious and accommodated up to 150 students. Facilities included computer and projector, writing board, and wireless microphones. Small group discussions were also conducted in the lecture room. Tea and ample drinking water was supplied to participants.

Reception

Mr. Fan Feng, Vice Secretary General of Shaanxi Soong Ching Ling Foundation accompanied the party to Shiquan. After arrival at Shiquan, the party was received by the Ms. Fang Longju, Municipal Chairperson of Women's Federation of Shiquan, Ms. He Xia also of Women's Federation and Ms Xia Yu Qin of Education and Sports Bureau.

Opening Ceremony of the Training Course

The course started with an Opening Ceremony at 0840 on 2011-10-14 when welcome speeches were delivered by Secretary General Fan, Chairperson Fang, and Mr. Ruan Changling, Secretary of the Education and Sports Bureau of Shiquan. The course lasted for two full days from 2011-10-14 to 2011-10-15.

Run-down of the Training Program

The run-down of the training program was as follows:

Date	Time	Topic	Psychologist
2011-11-14	AM	Functional Behavioral Analysis. Assessment forms for FBA.	LAU
	PM	Case Presentation and Discussions	LAU, LI & MAK
		Q & A Session	LAU, LI & MAK
2011-11-15	AM	Psychological Aspects of LBC	LI
		Use of Experiential Learning and Small Groups	LAU & LI
	PM	Demonstration of a Group Project by a counseling teacher	LI, LAU & MAK
		Role Play for a Group Project	LAU & MAK
		Concluding Remarks and Recommendations	LI
		Closing ceremony	Presided by Secretary General FAN and Chairperson FANG

Day 1

Joseph Lau started Day 1 with an in-depth discussion of the Functional Behavioral Analysis model. Since some basic concepts of developmental psychology, communication and counseling with children had been covered in the last training course in 2010, the intention this time was to equip the teachers with more practical psychological skills for better focused attention on children with various behavioral difficulties. The classic FBA psychological model was chosen because this was relatively easy to comprehend, and it would encourage teacher to trace back into the different antecedents and consequences of behaviors, be they adaptive or maladaptive, and analyze how behaviors had been maintained or encouraged. Every behavior was in fact the tip of an iceberg, the root of which actually reflected individual differences in intellect, background, emotional

development and previous experiences. Mr. Lau ended the morning by introducing three assessment tools for FBA for reference by the teachers.

In the course of teaching, it was noted that there was considerable differences amongst the teachers in their psychological knowledge. Several of these counseling teachers (five) in fact had major in psychology in university, and so were quite familiar with basic concepts of developmental psychology and behavioral analysis. However, the rest was quite staggered both in their teaching experience and in their knowledge in counseling and psychology. So probably, there is a need to consider and design a two-level training for counseling teachers in the future: (a) a more basic training for those without former academic training in psychology and (b) more advanced training for a smaller group with former psychology training together with a few others who had shown better performances. Those who had received more advanced training could serve as a Seed Group in the future and eventually become peer leaders for the rest of counseling teachers in Shiquan. This would enhance better use of resources, and help develop the spirit of peer support and mutual sharing amongst these LBC teachers.

During the lunch break, the party went to pay a visit to the Wujing Chunlei Hope Primary School with the assistance of their counseling teacher, Mr. Chen Gang. A few pictures were taken from the school premises, and it was well noted that this school had spent considerable efforts in developing various extra-curricular programs and amenities for the LBC:

Heart-to-heart Elder Sister Program – where students could write and share thoughts and emotions.

Special Peer Support for Younger Students – younger students were paired up with older ones, sleeping in the same bed, and giving guidance like siblings.

Essay Writing and Displays – students were encouraged to write down their thoughts and emotions through essays. A moving essay describing how a student was overjoyed upon the news that mother was coming home, while she later got very disappointed that mother in fact could not come back.

Telephone Link with Parents – China Mobile sponsored a scheme whereupon LBC could phone their parents at reduced cost, as well as sending automated SMS to parents upon the resumption of school by their children on Mondays, etc.

Separate Rooms for counseling and meeting with parents.

In the afternoon of Day 1, several cases were presented by the attending teachers. The nature of

cases presented were mainly common problems encountered in school children that were of relatively less serious in nature – e.g. lacking in interest in school work, social withdrawal and adjustment issues especially upon first joining school, frequent lying, taking possession of properties of others and negativism. Joseph Lau took several of these cases and analyzed them with a FBA perspective so that the counseling teachers could use the model for better understanding of the maladaptive behaviors.

Day 2

In view of the disparity noted amongst different teachers in psychological knowledge and teaching experiences with LBC, Eddie Li started Day 2 with a re-cap of the different psychological aspects of LBC from previous academic research studies. The number of LBC in China (now around 45 million for the whole country) would maintain at a high level, because of sustained economic development and the demand for many workers in cities. The responsibility of care to the LBC was often put on the shoulders of the schools and teachers. Counseling teachers were given a huge responsibility for guiding through these children at their most important and critical developmental stages in life. Counseling teachers should therefore become familiar with the different psychological aspects of these LBC, and would be assuming the multiple roles of a teacher, a substitute parent, a role model, a guide in living as well as a counselor. With these roles successfully implemented, they could make a huge difference to the future living of these LBC.

The party then introduced the theories of experiential learning – an important learning modality where students could learn through their own exploration and sharing. The concept of group counseling was then taught, so that the counseling teachers could broaden their dimensions in their services to the LBC. Rather than just focusing on one-way teaching, or using dogmatic lecturing of rights from wrong, they were recommended to consider using small group modalities so that students could learn through sharing their own experiences, listening to their peers, jointly working towards solutions of various issues and promoting feelings of brotherhood (sisterhood) support. This would be especially useful and helpful when more personal and developmental issues, e.g. adjustment to residential life, feelings and emotions towards working parents, adolescent adjustment, rather than purely academic acknowledge were involved. In the course of teaching, it was noted that most of the counseling teachers were not very familiar with this mode of small group counseling. In view of the well-proven benefits of small group counseling, teachers were encouraged to consider using it in their future services to the LBC.

In the afternoon, a school teacher from the Wujing Chunlei Hope Primary School, Mr. Chen Gang was asked to make a presentation on his group program on Ethics Training for LBC – a four-session structured group program designed by him for primary school students. The background of Mr. Chen was that he studied applied psychology at university, and he joined the

school as a counseling teacher only last September. In the past year, Mr. Chen had designed several group counseling programs for the residential LBC, so would give a powerful demonstration on how these programs could be run. Mr. Chen was therefore asked to describe the background theories for designing such a group program, the contents of each of the sessions, the use of story-telling to suit the interest of children, and his own experiences of running the program. Much interest was generated amongst the counseling teachers, and many stimulating questions were asked.

In the second half of Day 2, Joseph Lau and Ingrid Mak led a demonstration and a role play participated by seven teachers on a facilitator training program documented by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. In the demonstration, teachers were provided with several training materials on the running of these groups, so as to stimulate further interest on the subject.

Eddie Li concluded the two days of training by raising the following points:

- The party from Hong Kong well respect the commitment and enthusiasm of the counseling teachers in the education of LBC. They did have a heavy responsibility, but with good practice and perseverance, their work would certainly bear fruit.
- It seems that the education of LBC had moved into a new era in Shiquan. This time, the party saw enhanced financial support for the counseling teachers in Shiquan, moving their status more on par with the regular teachers. The party also saw well qualified graduates, some in psychology and counseling, joining into the occupation, and some good work was already designed and materialized. So for the future, it would be best to further develop the skills of every teacher according to their background and experience. A peer support system could be further worked out, so that every teacher could feel supported by their peers through sharing of ideas, sharing of success as well as management of difficult cases.
- The party particularly encourages the broadening of modalities in the education and counseling of LBC. Particularly for the case of counseling teachers, they might consider more broadened use of small group counseling. This would especially be useful for addressing different developmental issues such as adolescent adjustment, or emotional issues such as sentiments towards parents, adjustment to group life, etc. Subject to further liaison with the Women's Federation and the Education and Sports Bureau, the party would be suggesting some pilot programs in group counseling which individual counseling teachers could take up and start at their own schools. When the party came in the next year, these experiences could be further shared and consolidated.
- At a suitable occasion in the future, a group of teachers might be invited to Hong Kong to further understand current development in services to children and adolescents.

The closing ceremony was attended again presided by Secretary General Fan, Chairperson Fang and Ms. Xia of Educational and Sports Bureau.

Day 2 ended with a closing ceremony presided by Chairperson Fang and a group photo session.

Conclusion

The training course had been well received, and the original objectives had been broadly met. The party of three psychologists from Hong Kong was very glad about the development of the counseling teachers in Shiquan, and noted that perhaps a new era had commenced. The party considered that in view of the disparity of psychological knowledge and counseling experiences of the counseling teachers, there will be a need to provide two-tier training for these teachings in the future – a more basic tier and a more advanced tier. Several of these teachers could then act as a Seed Group and lead the other teachers in several clusters for peer support. It would also be advantageous if eventually some of these Seed Group could be invited to Hong Kong to have more exposure to current child guidance programs at a suitable time in the future, so as to further enhance their standards. Further discussion with the Hong Kong Friends of Guangming Association would be needed.