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Satir Around the Globe

Satir Theory and Sculpting in Social Work Education: Helping People to Help Themselves

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As a new profession in China, social work is still in the discussion stage with regard to the term "helping people to help themselves" which means helping our clients and, at the same time, teaching them to develop self-reliance. The definition of this term is "caring for people's problems, respecting individual differences, helping the clients to resolve problems with social workers and helping themselves to close the case" (Li, 2002, p. 47). The Chinese Encyclopedia of Social Work also explains that "we can use necessary conditions and professional methods of social work to help the clients recognize their potential so that they can solve their own problems." (as cited in Li, 2013, p. 6)

Helping people and developing self-reliance in clients is one of the professional values and goals and is fundamental to the professional social work specialty (Liu, 2016). We also find it to be consistent with the values and goals of social work in America. In many textbooks about social work in China, the term, "helping people to help themselves" is basic and elemental knowledge in defining social work. However, we almost never can find a more detailed analysis of this in Chinese textbooks. There is also a lack of research on this topic in academic circles.

By August 2017, there were only 73 articles with key words "helping people to help themselves" by Chinese authors listed in the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). The reason for this phenomenon may relate to the differences in the cultural background between China and western countries. Group consciousness prevailed over a long period of time and limited the establishment of self-help in China (Yao, 2009). The perspective of humanistic theory is necessary for the further development of social work in China. The Satir Model can provide specific theoretical views and practical methods to understand "helping people to help themselves."

Understanding "helping people to help themselves" with the Satir Model

The Satir Model of family therapy was created and developed by Virginia Satir through nearly 50 years of practice in many different cultures. Her approach reflected her observations of the world, namely, that people everywhere and anywhere have internal resources and choices, and that they can change (Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori, 1991). Virginia Satir used the term "growth model" as a way of perceiving the world, in contrast to the predominant model at the time, the "hierarchical model." She helped people discover their own individual resources and their ability to make decisions based on their own levels of self-esteem (Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori, 2007). The aims of The Satir Model are consistent with "equality and justice, people-oriented," which are professional values of social work (Liu, 2006). It is beneficial for students to understand and master knowledge of social work in a deeper way. In my opinion, we need to understand the term "helping people to help themselves" from two aspects: (1) the definition of a person within the concept of self-reliance and (2) the importance of two-way help, that is, the social worker can help people, and people can learn to help themselves.

First, there are some ways to define a person based on the growth theory of the Satir Model. For example: "People have an inborn spiritual base and sacredness, and they manifest a universal life force" (Satir et al., 1991, p.14). Using the Satir Model, we could define a person from their body, mind and spiritual parts. Satir used "the self" to explain the whole person and pointed out that "The future of human relations disciplines and modalities lies in the integration of their partial views of man in relation to the five basic parts of the self, which are: the mind, the body, the spiritual part of the self, the report of the senses (the interaction between mind and body), and interaction with others (social relationships)" (Satir, 1983, p. 230). This definition sets up the fundamental knowledge of how to define people in terms of "helping people to help themselves."

From this perspective, the first step in "helping people to help themselves" is to recognize that the person who needs help is not only defined by his or her social role, but also that each person is unique with an inner source of strength and validation (Satir et al., 1991). This concept is fundamental to understanding people in the social work context, and it differs from the predominant model of the time, the "hierarchical model," that understands people primarily based on their social role. Roles imply a function in a specific relationship at a particular time (Satir et al., 1991). They are not the whole of a person. From this perspective, social workers should use their professional knowledge to support clients based on the clients' own inborn spiritual base, and thereby, help them to become aware of their inner resources and recognize their own abilities.

Secondly, we can combine descriptions of how to define a person with Satir's therapeutic beliefs to understand how to realize two-way help (social workers can help people and people can help themselves) through the lens of the Satir Model. Based on the essence of a person as defined by Satir, we can realize that everyone has their own inner individual resources and the ability to cope with or change whatever problems they may have encountered. "We have choices, especially in terms of responding to stress instead of reacting to situations" (Satir et al., 1991, p. 16). Because of people's differing childhood and life experiences, they have many familiar behavior habits which they are prone to repeat when they encounter some stress in their lives. Especially in modern society, people are often so busy working and living life and being concerned more with the outside world and the development of material prosperity, that they often deny their own experiences and accept, instead, the voice of authority (Satir et al., 1991). When they face an unfamiliar or difficult problem, they usually feel fear, and want to give up or run away. But Satir said, "the problem is not the problem, coping is the problem" (Satir et al., 1991, p. 17). Social workers need to help their clients to change their coping ways and the effects of their own old, familiar behavior patterns. In doing so, we can also help the client to find their own inner resources in order to look beyond the obvious event to understand its context and its many contributing factors (Satir et al., 1991).

Teaching "helping people to help themselves" with the Satir Model

By understanding the connotation of the term "helping people to help themselves" within the Satir Model, we can teach students the meaning of self-reliance more clearly in social work classes. It helps students to understand that the goal of social work is that the social worker is a supporter with professional knowledge, who is there to coordinate, influence, advocate, and prompt clients to find their own resources and self-actualize gradually (Liu, 2016). Further, I have created an innovation in the teaching of social work classes in China using "sculpting" from the Satir Model to create an experiential class in social work.

Satir would demonstrate her picture of the family through sculpting. Sculpting is a way of informing others and ourselves about our internal process in relation to others and ourselves. Satir set up physical pictures in which people/clients could illustrate or represent relationships and feelings rather than only talk about them (Satir et al., 1991). In her book, Satir shows the image of a family using sculpting. The process is defined as "self-nonverbal used in space" (Satir et al., 1991, p. 264). Through the simulation of family relationships, clients can physically and actively demonstrate the family dynamics and features of their interaction. In other words, body posture is used to explore the relationship dynamics and, in so doing, creates the power to change (Liu, 2016). I have found sculpture can not only be used to show many

relationships, but also to be beneficial in mastering the knowledge in books and written texts. I have creatively defined the value of "helping people to help themselves" as a series of relationship sculptures for social work and the clients, which included two parts (Liu, 2016).

The first part is to make a sculpt showing the relationship between a social worker and a client in the traditional way. In this way, we usually think of it is as a meeting of two social roles, i.e., the expert and the client who needs help. When I was teaching "helping people to help themselves," I first invited two students to role-play a social worker and a client. I had them stand face to face at the appropriate distance and experience their roles, with the client imagining that he is a person who needs help. At the same time, the social worker was instructed to respond to the client according to his body posture, using no words. In the picture below the one on the left is the social worker and the one on the right is the client (Liu, 2016).
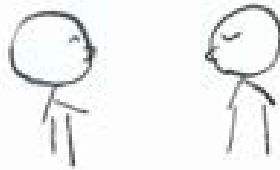
Figure 1. Social worker and client

After experiencing the first sculpt, we discussed the role-players' experiences, with input from observing students. The effect of "helping people without encouraging self-reliance" becomes obvious to the students. In this sculpture, we may find the client closely identifying with the problem. Sometimes clients have a major problem, they could find it completely overwhelming, and perhaps become unable to distinguish the difference between the problem and themselves. Clients usually feel helpless and fearful because they are in chaos.

Due to their problems, the clients usually think that social workers are specialists who are their only chance to solve their problems, AND social workers often are only too willing to help clients endlessly. This can result in the expert-for-help mode, which often leaves social workers feeling powerless and exhausted (Liu, 2016).

We need to understand the importance of the perspective of definition of a person with the Satir Model, recognizing that not encouraging self-reliance is the basis of the belief that change is impossible. This is also similar to the hypothesis of social work in China, i.e., "We can alleviate the problem and make people live happier" (Farley, Smith, & Boyles, 2010, p. 4).

After this exercise, I designed the second sculpting role-play from the perspective of the term "helping people to help themselves" using the Satir Model. According to Satir's definition of a person, we know we can define a person in terms of body, mind and spiritual parts. Using this perspective, we can distinguish the person of the client from the problem she brings. Three role-players then take the roles of the social worker, the client, and the problem. The sculpt is shown in Figure 2 from left to right: social worker, problems, and client (Liu, 2016).

Figure 2. Social worker, problems, and client

As Satir said, "the problem is not the problem, coping is the problem" (Satir et al., 1991, p. 17). We can use this sculpting method to play out different coping survival stances between "problems" and "the client." It not only shows the interactive process of the effects of the problem on the client, but also helps the student to understand the external and internal parts of people. From the perspective of the social worker in this sculpt, we can distinguish the difference between the problems and the other parts of the person, thereby, helping the person to mobilize their resources (Liu, 2016). Students are able also to learn that problems are only the external effect on the client, and that in this process the many internal resources of the client can be uncovered.

Based on the two aspects of understanding self-reliance–and sculpting in class, we have had excellent results. From the data statistics of my class, "Introduction to Social Work" from 2015 to 2016, 82% of students agreed with "it can be helpful to understand the meaning of 'self-reliance'" using this experiential method. (Liu, 2016). Furthermore, I shared this teaching method with teachers of social work and other academic subjects and I received first place for the Young Teacher's Teaching Skills competition between the School of Sociology, School of Philosophy and the Political School at the university where I teach. Many teachers in this competition were more interested in the combination of teaching research of social work with the Satir Model. Some teachers shared their gains from my class and agreed with me that learning the meaning of "self-reliance" in the context of social workers and their clients can be explained more clearly with the Satir Model than with traditional learning methods.

Discussion

Social work is an art designed to help people (Li, 2013), which is the same goal as the Satir Model. Based on this consistency, we can explore the teaching of Social Work using sculpting to embody the term "help people to help themselves." Based on the value of human life, we can understand the meaning of "the whole person" and how to teach social workers how they can support the clients to help themselves. The definition of a person, the definition of an event and relationship, and attitudes toward change in the theoretical system of the Satir Model can provide rich results for us. It is not only because the content and beliefs of the Satir Model are consistent with the goals and practice of social work, but also the consistency between the Satir Model, the professional values of social work and Chinese traditional culture (Liu, 2016). There are famous lines in the ancient Chinese book, *The Three Character Primer*, by Wang Yinglin (Song Dynasty): "Man on earth, Good at birth. The same nature, Varies on nurture." (as cited in Wen, 2013, p.1). The meaning is similar to the definition of a person found in the Satir Model. We can explore and combine this theoretical system with the Satir Model to support more and more theoretical research and teaching practice of social work in China.

Secondly, sculpting is an in-depth experiential learning tool that can strengthen the depth of intellectual knowledge. Experiential learning is an innovative teaching mode that conforms to the current developmental trend (Gong, 2013). Experiential learning is equivalent to the significance of the discovery of learning. The students pick out certain events, and reconstruct perceptions of these events (Boydell, 1976). Sculpting in the Satir Model is a way to combine body language with internal experience in order to strengthen the understanding of events or relationships and internal influences (Liu, 2016). From the view of whole brain learning, it is an effective way to help students to step into the learning of their right hemisphere and recognize the integration of the whole brain education. In the traditional way of "left-hemisphere learning," students often think the professional values and goals are too theoretical and don't know how to use them in a practical sense. They can experience new possibilities by using sculpting with the different role-plays.

Last but not least, learning "self-reliance" for our clients is only one part of our teaching practice of social work with the Satir Model. We can also use sculpting to teach communication and to play different roles in case social work, group social work and community social work. Students like this way of learning very much. They can not only understand the intellectual knowledge of social work, but they can also better understand other people, different relationships and themselves. Following classroom learning, sometimes

they are able to solve some problems they have encountered. Some students who combined self-reflection with learning, said, "When I or my friends encountered difficulties, I know those are some influences we just met, which is a small part of our life. Maybe I'll know what to do and change." (Liu, 2016, p. 74).

By this, we could conclude that the theoretical system and the experiential learning with the sculpting interventions of the Satir Model is a method of human life education. Teaching that uses the "growth process" of the Satir Model can not only develop and deepen the traditional teaching dimension, but also help students mature and comprehend their own humanity and the meaning of human life. Perhaps we can innovate the life education of different subjects with the Satir Model.

Social work is a process of helping people (Li, 2013). The definition of a person is the concerning center of this subject. If we cannot understand a deeper definition of a person, helping people may appear to be an easy skill to learn. It also can confuse students of social work because people are so complicated. The Satir Model is valuable to learning and practicing social work. We are able to understand more deeply the knowledge of social work using the Satir Model. One reason for this is that there are, contained within the model, rich analyses that help us to understand experiences of human behavior. Another is that experiential learning with sculpting is suitable for case teaching and practicing social work. The most important reason for this deeper understanding is the respect gained for the lives of people in the view of the Satir Model. The theoretical research and innovative teaching practice related to "helping people to help themselves" in social work is a new exploration in teaching in China and in social work using the Satir Model. We believe it is a good beginning to doing more research in social work using the Satir Model.

Life education is an important part of university education. How to understand people and the value of human life not only belongs in learning to be a social worker, but also is meaningful for everyone and for our society. We trust we can use the theoretical knowledge of the Satir Model to stimulate more research in many different academic subjects and areas.

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