

Republic of China Invites Oregon Psychologist

By Michael Conner, PsyD

All my years of training and clinical and consulting work did not prepare me for what I experienced while traveling, teaching and consulting in Taiwan. This work was a profound experience that resulted in a personal and professional transformation. It took only three days to unpack my baggage when I returned home. I am sure it will take months to unpack my mind and my heart.

I had never been to an Asian country. My adventure began in December 2006 when I was invited by the Chinese government and a foundation to lead an Asian conference. The purpose was to provide training and consultation on the subject of screening and crisis intervention for adolescents. They wanted me to present 15 models and to emphasize experiential and outdoor interventions.

The basis of my consultation and presentations was my work since 1989, from which I recently published a book in 2006 titled *"Crisis Intervention with Adolescents: A Guide for Parents and Professionals."*

This Is Your Psych Support Panel

Please call any of the panel members listed here to seek support for yourself, to make suggestions about ways to enhance mutual support among Oregon psychologists, or just to thank them for their willingness to be of service to the professional community. They are working to develop proactive programs for the prevention of your distress or impairment.

Eugene

Debra Jackson, PhD

541.465.1885

Polly Jamison, PhD

541.343.9697

Richard Klotz, MS

541.954.9824

Portland Metro Area

Michael Brent, PhD

503.639.2300

Katherine Leonard, PhD

503.292.9873

Ed Versteeg, PsyD

503.684.6205

Also, in 2005 I helped launch an Internet-based screening system called *StepOne for Parents™*. *StepOne* is a new approach to behavioral health screening that is designed to involve, educate and empower parents to seek care for their children while protecting their privacy and right to advocate for their children.

Honestly, I was afraid to go. I had training in multicultural psychology. I have even worked with Asian people in the U.S. But I was asked to do something that seemed impossible. I would be teaching a new subject. I would be the first American to present this topic. I had to convert everything to Chinese. I had to use interpreters. I was being asked to give 3 lectures and 6 workshops. They wanted experiential training - not just lectures.

Three months later I was in Taipei. For two days I rehearsed my presentation with 5 interpreters and two graduate students from a local university. My audience would consist of 150 psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and counselors as well as government officials and members of several foundations. My presentations were video taped and transcribed.

Most of the people who attended the conference understood a little English. Several of my translators had advanced degrees in counseling and psychology. Still, I could see that there would be translation problems. I needed to be clear and to the point as much as possible. Was I scared? Not really. I felt confident that my translators would not let me end up looking like the movie "Borat."

Participants were very interested in my experience and knowledge of crisis intervention methods and models. But to my surprise, people thanked me a great deal for the attitude I expressed. So after a while the conference took a new direction. I think I entered some state of connection with my audience. But to be honest, I think it was because my interpreters did a very good job.

During one workshop I began to share my experience as a human being and a professional who wants to help children during a time of crisis. I talked about the meaning of family and the "undiscovered hero" that lives within each child. I talked about happiness, optimism, strength and virtue, and how children struggle

to become engaged in a meaningful life. People cried. At one point my translator could not speak because she was so overwhelmed with emotion. I stood there in silence with my arm on her shoulder as she wiped the tears from her eyes.

One of the most powerful training tools seemed to be my talent for telling stories. These stories resulted in powerful feelings and lessons to my audience. I could see men trying to hide their tears. So I said "Real men cry." Then women applauded. A Chinese man who was filled with emotion said, "Yes, but real men tell stories that make other men cry." After that, a younger participant called me Michael-Father. I think something was lost in the translation.

At the end of the day I went to my host and asked for guidance. I wanted to be certain he would not be shamed because I did not finish all of my PowerPoint slides. He thought for a moment and said, "It's OK. Just be yourself. That is the greatest gift. The knowledge is important, but your attitude is more important. Everyone is learning." Then he hugged me and said he would see me in the morning.

Something happened that stunned me on the second day of the conference. A government official asked for a meeting with me. It turned out that she wanted permission to translate my book into Chinese and to distribute copies to every professional in Taiwan who worked with children and families. I was stunned.

And so it continued on like this for six days. There were at least a dozen "peak experiences." During the outdoor intervention section I demonstrated how to engage youth in therapy and how to use metaphors during an experiential activity. In this case I was teaching children to make a fire using primitive stone tools (not a lighter).

Coincidentally, aboriginal Taiwanese people made fire the same way Native American's made fire. So I decided to tell the audience a story about a Chinese man who, as a child, heard stories about his ancestors who made fire with their hands. He did not believe he could make fire so he never pursued his curiosity. So I taught this man how to make fire. He made a fire

Continued on page 15

and the entire experience became a powerful metaphor for crisis intervention. Then everybody wanted to make a fire. So once again my wonderful PowerPoint was brushed aside. Participants wanted to discover their strengths and virtues by making a fire.

Everything went well and the closing ceremony was very meaningful. We had a "trust" circle and people spoke from their hearts. After the conference I was invited to visit one of the largest children's foundations and four representative programs that provide intervention services to families and youth. I was also invited to come back and visit outdoor programs that were within three-hour drives from Hong Kong.

During my trip I learned a great deal about Chinese culture and mental health issues. The reality of my experience in the culture enhanced what I was trained to expect; but it was much deeper and more meaningful. I discovered that many regions of China, Taiwan in particular, are modeling their mental health system after the United States. I discovered that the westernization of Chinese people is having a tremendous positive and negative impact on their culture. Also, Chinese people like Americans. They are required to learn English but have little opportunity to practice and interact. They want to talk with us. Education is also extremely important. Children can go to school for 8 to 12 hours a day with no summer break.

I had heard that the Chinese people are generous, respectful and kind. But the impact of this behavior was almost more than I could bear. I received so many wonderful and meaningful gifts that I was completely overwhelmed. To say these people are polite, kind and respectful is a huge understatement.

I found that Chinese people are extremely concerned about details and group process. They value and want qualified instruction to a fault. I was surprised to see how stories of strength and virtues could have such a powerful impact on such highly educated people. They are extremely sensitive and have deep feelings—but you have to look closely. Participants were excited when I presented principles of Dr. Seligman's Positive Psychology. I explained how positive psychology was a powerful prevention and intervention tool.

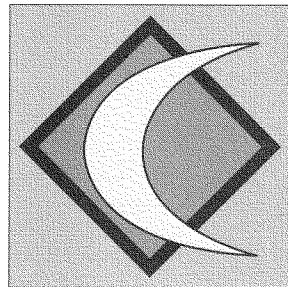
Chinese culture is historically very goal directed and their definition of success is strongly influenced by the avoidance of failure and guilt. Their drive to not fail can be so strong that they can miss emerging opportunities and the risks along the way. They can have difficulty deviating from goals unless the expert gives them permission. Yet traditional Chinese parents can be extremely controlling and critical of their children. It can be a big psychodynamic Buddhist complex.

To my surprise, people wanted my opinion about everything. I got lucky and said, "I can give you tools and share my experience, but you must understand that I know nothing. The only power I have is the power you give me." A quiet man said in English, "That is very Zen." Then the group laughed. And I laughed. I got the joke.

Why me? Why did they invite a psychologist from Bend, Oregon? I'm not exactly sure. I was simply called one morning by a man with an Asian accent who identified himself as a professor at a University in Taiwan. He asked me if I would come to Taipei to lead a conference. Without hesitation I said "Yes." And that was all there was to it. I did not apply to be part of the faculty. I was invited. I later discovered that my name was recommended

by a number of experts. My professional life has always been one adventure after another. Only this time I went to a land far away.

Michael Conner, PsyD is an engineer and licensed psychologist. He is a graduate of Pacific University's professional psychology program and completed a post doctoral fellowship in clinical psychology at Kaiser Permanente's Graduate Medical Education Program. He has extensive experience working in emergency department psychiatric services, community crisis intervention, primary medical care, law enforcement, residential treatment, hospitals, health education, outpatient mental health services, airlines safety, outdoor programs and private practice. His book, "Crisis Intervention for Adolescents: A Guide for Parents and Professionals," is the first and only comprehensive book on the subject. Dr. Conner also designed and implemented the first and only comprehensive mental health screening system that operates on the internet. The book and screening software has been reviewed and was developed in consultation with leading experts in computer science, psychology, medicine and professional ethics. Dr. Conner will be actively involved in MRI's Outdoor Therapy Institute to be held in Bend, OR, in September 2007. The Outdoor Therapy Institute will train licensed mental health professionals to work with and make appropriate referrals to adventure, wilderness and outdoor behavioral health programs. See www.OutdoorTherapy.org for program information.



Cathy Moonshine, Ph.D., MAC, CADC III

Licensed Clinical Psychologist

**Training
Consultation
Clinical Supervision
Program Administration**

503-750-2571

3434 SW Kelly Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97239

www.drmoonshine.com