
Title	Roles of the Singapore Psychological Society and its contributions to education
Author(s)	Yau, Tow Yee and Lim, Kam Ming
Source	<i>MERA-ERA Joint Conference, Malacca, Malaysia, 1-3 December 1999</i>

This document may be used for private study or research purpose only. This document or any part of it may not be duplicated and/or distributed without permission of the copyright owner.

The Singapore Copyright Act applies to the use of this document.

ROLES OF THE SINGAPORE PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY AND ITS CONTRIBUTIONS TO EDUCATION

Yau, Tow Yee and Lim, Kam Ming
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Abstract: The Singapore Psychological Society (SPsS) was established in 1979. Its primary objective is to advance psychology as a science and as a profession in Singapore. The society strives to accomplish these objectives through: 1) disseminating information about the roles, responsibilities, qualifications & training of psychologists; 2) organising public talks on matters in particular fields of psychology; 3) advocating and maintaining standards of professional ethics among psychologists in Singapore (in respect of the teaching, researching and practising of psychology); and 4) seeking to ensure that only appropriately qualified persons conduct and interpret psychological tests. Recent SPsS's profession education and community psychology programmes included talks on psychotherapy, psychological assessments, and employment trends in Singapore. The SPsS intends to set up a website that would inform its members and the general public about SPsS's activities and functions. SPsS also provides career guidance information for teachers & students interested in psychology or other related courses. A significant number of SPsS members are educational psychologists working in the Ministry of Education, or providing psychological services through social service or private practice agencies. SPsS encourages school teachers and administrators to join the society and to be familiar with the contributions of psychology and the roles of psychologists in education

Introduction

This paper will outline the history of the Singapore Psychological Society (SPsS) and its growth of memberships during the last 20 years. A section is devoted to the mission of the SPsS in advancing psychology as a science and as a profession in Singapore. The final section discusses the contributions and future directions of the SPsS to education in Singapore.

History and Status of SPsS

The Singapore Psychological Society (SPsS) was established by a group of dedicated and committed psychologists in 1979; and has a membership of 40 members. Its primary aim is the advancement of psychology as a science and as a profession in Singapore. Specifically the Society functions:

- To promote and disseminate knowledge in psychology and its applications for the benefit of the individual and society.
- To promote psychological research and organise meetings on matters in particular fields of psychology.
- To introduce, encourage and maintain proper standards in the development, use, evaluation, or standardisation of all instruments, techniques or devices for use in the practice of psychology in Singapore.
- To seek to ensure that psychological tests and equipment are made available only to persons whom the Society deems appropriately qualified.

- To advocate, set up and maintain high standards of professional standing and conduct for its members in respect of the teaching, researching or practising of psychology.
- To disseminate information about opportunities for professional work, and to make recommendations from time to time to members and to employers about desirable qualifications and remuneration.
- To safeguard the professional interests of members and to support all legitimate efforts to extend the knowledge and professional expertise of members, whether by research, encouragement of the publication of reports, documents or books on psychology, by facilitating access to relevant material, or by any other legal means.
- To liaise with organisations of psychologists elsewhere and with societies representing other professions, and to foster good relations with the public.
- To lay down the requirements for membership of the Society and to maintain a register of members with details of their addresses, qualifications, appointments and experience.
- To collect funds from membership fees, or donations; to keep proper account of such funds and to administer them in accordance with the Society's aim.
- To do all that may be necessary and proper to protect the individual or general public against unsound practices, and to restrict the use of the term "Psychologist" to Full members of the Society and to those whose qualifications are acceptable to the Society.
- To exercise such other functions as the Society may from time to time deem feasible and desirable to realise its aims (Singapore Psychological Society, 1997, p. 4).

For the last 20 years, its membership has grown from 40 members to 186 members in 1999. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the SPsS's membership categories as of November 1999.

Table 1: Membership Categories of Singapore Psychological Society (SPsS) in year 1999

Membership Categories	Number of Members	(%)
Fellow	2	1.08
Life	11	5.91
Full	105	56.45
Affiliate	57	30.64
Associate	1	0.54
Student	10	5.37
Total	186	100.00

The requirements for membership of the Singapore Psychological Society are:

Student Subscriber (\$20.00 per year): The minimum requirement is full time study with one or more Psychology courses in a tertiary institution.

Associate Member (\$40.00 per year): The minimum qualifications are one of the following:

- Degree or Diploma in any discipline.
- Engaged in a related field.

Affiliate Member/Overseas Affiliate (\$40.00 per year): The minimum qualifications are one of the following:

- Degree with 50% of curriculum in Psychology
- General degree in Psychology

- Honours degree in Psychology
(NB. Under Section VII.2(d)(1) of the Constitution, affiliate membership can be upgraded to that of a Full Member)

Full Member (\$50.00 per year): The minimum qualifications are one of the following:

- An Honours degree or equivalent, recognised by the Society, with 2 years' relevant work supervised by psychologists qualified to be Full Members of SPsS.
- An Honours degree or equivalent, recognised by the Society, together with a further qualification in Psychology which may be a Master's or a Doctoral degree or equivalent.
- A postgraduate professional qualification in a specialised field in Psychology from a recognised academic institution, such qualification having entailed supervised practical training in a variety of settings.
- A licensed, chartered or registered psychologist legally entitled to practise as a professional psychologist in one of the following countries or states: an Australian state, Canada, New Zealand, United States of America, United Kingdom or Great Britain and Northern Ireland, or such other countries as the Council may from time to time determine.

Fellow (\$50.00 per year): A Fellow must be well-established and has made substantial original contribution to the advancement of psychological knowledge or practice. Fellows of the SPsS shall either be proposed by Fellows of overseas psychological societies or by the SPsS council. Honorary Fellows shall be unanimously invited by the Council after seeking the counsel of eminent psychologists within and beyond Singapore.

In addition, many of the society's members are working in various government, private, business, and non-profit organizations. This data is being summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Place of Employment (Full members/Fellows) N=119 (as of 1997/98)

	%
Hospitals	15.9%
Universities	15.1%
Police	1.6%
Government ministries	6.0%
Special schools	6.0%
Commercial companies	5.0%
Counselling centres	9.0%
Unknown/not stated	41.4%
Total	100.0%

Table 2 shows that many of the SPsS members worked in the hospital (15.9%), university (15.1%), counselling center (9%), and special schools (6%). It is interesting to note that many members who work in the hospital and counselling centers are either trained in clinical or counselling psychology; whereas many members who work in the special schools are either trained in clinical or educational psychology.

In addition, Table 3 shows the breakdown of SPsS members' highest degree earned by country of university. The top three highest degrees earned by country of university, among our fellows and full members are United Kingdom (n = 34), United States (n = 25), and Australia (n = 23). However, in regard to the highest degree earned, that is Ph.D., United States has 15 graduates and United Kingdom has 9 graduates.

Table 3: Highest Degrees Earned (By Country of University) (1997/98 membership)

Country	Fellows/Members (N=119)				Affiliate Members (N=78)	
	BA/BS	Master	PhD	Total	BA/BS	Master
Australia	6	16	1	23	28	
Brazil	1			1		
Canada	4	1		5	8	
Denmark				0	1	
Germany			1	1		
Holland			1	1	1	
Hong Kong		1		1		
India		1		1	1	
Netherlands	1			1		
New Zealand	1	10	1	12	2	2
Singapore	6			6	15	1
South Africa		1		1		
UK	5	20	9	34	5	1
Unknown	1	4	2	7	9	2
USA	1	9	15	25	1	1
Total	26	63	30	119	71	7

Contributions of SPsS In Education and Future Directions

SPsS's education and community psychology programmes have included talks on psychotherapy, psychological assessments, and employment trends in Singapore. In addition, SPsS has been actively involved in providing career guidance information for teachers and students interested in psychology at the major career fairs and exhibitions (e.g., Career Exhibition 1999 that was held in March).

Professional psychologists such as clinical, counselling and educational psychologists must have postgraduate qualifications that are recognised by the Singapore Psychological Society. In other words, SPsS as a professional organization, has a major role and responsibility of providing accreditation of university degree programmes so to meet the stringent standards of professional psychologists in Singapore. As a step toward this goal, SPsS has been meeting with the Australian Psychological Society to implement a system of accreditation for the psychology degree & postgraduate degree programmes offered by Australian universities in Singapore (i.e., off-shore programmes). In addition, SPsS is in the process of establishing a society registry of recognised professional psychologists. This registry is in addition to the regular list of SPsS full members. Full membership of the SPsS does not necessarily entitle one to be included in the registry of recognised professional psychologists. This would provide better regulation of psychologists who are providing applied professional services to members of the public in Singapore.

Professionally qualified psychologists are those who have obtained a postgraduate qualification in a specialised field in psychology from a recognised academic institution, such course having included supervised practical training in a variety of settings. Academic qualifications alone are not a sufficient basis for recognition as a professional psychologist.

OR who are members of relevant division of a psychological body such as the British Psychological Society, the Australian Psychological Society or the American Psychological Association, being the national bodies responsible for the recognition for professional purposes of degrees in psychology.

OR who are chartered, licensed or registered with the appropriate national authority in their countries of training and are legally entitled to practise there.

The Singapore Psychological Society recognises such psychologists as entitled to designate themselves by an appropriate term describing their professional skills. Recognised designations are:

- Clinical psychologist
- Counseling psychologist
- Educational psychologist
- Occupational psychologist
- Industrial/organisational psychologist.

In order to establish and maintain internationally recognised standards in psychological practice, the Society does not recognise the use of these designations except where the criteria outlined above are met. Essentially the Society uses international criteria for recognition of applied expertise in psychology.

- The standards required by the following bodies are accordingly recognised for professional purposes:
- The American Psychological Association: Full members, in the relevant division, who hold or are eligible to hold a State license to practice.
- The Australian Psychological Society: Full members and/or registration as Psychologist in an Australian state.
- The British Psychological Society: Chartered psychologists who are in addition members or eligible for membership of one of the following divisions: Clinical Psychology; Educational and Child Psychology (including the Scottish Division); Occupational Psychology.
- The Hong Kong Psychological Association: Graduate members who are members of the relevant Division.
- And such other societies as the Council of the Society may from time to time recognise.

Academic qualifications

Additionally the Society recognises postgraduate research qualifications in applied or theoretical psychology from Universities or other Tertiary institutions, where these are also acceptable to the professional bodies listed above, or to the Public Service Commission, Singapore, or to the National University of Singapore (Department of Social Work and Psychology). Psychologists listed in the Directory of the Singapore Psychological Society on this basis have indicated the nature of their speciality interests and skills accordingly, but avoid the use of recognised practitioner designations.

Other Practitioners

Full members of the Society who may not meet the above criteria but who through a combination of academic qualifications and supervised experience may be deemed to have professional skills. This has been traditionally the case in Singapore. Such members are listed as Psychologists with an indication of their specialist interests/practice where appropriate, but without the designations used

for recognised fields of professional practice in psychology (Singapore Psychological Society, 1997, pp. 64-65).

Furthermore, there is a great demand for qualified professionals in counselling and educational psychology. The Division of Psychological Studies at Nanyang Technological University/National Institute of Education (NTU/NIE) has been responsible for producing local qualified Master of Arts (MA) graduates in Applied Psychology since 1997. According to the MA in Applied Psychology Handbook (1999), the rationale of this programme is “designed to provide theoretical knowledge, research insights as well as practical skills to interested individuals who have the pre-requisite qualifications to train as specialists in the field of Educational Psychology or Counselling Psychology” (p. 5). Thus, this objective closely fits into the SPsS’s aim of advancing psychology as a science and profession in Singapore.

Many of the students in the MA (Applied Psychology-Educational Psychology) programme are school teachers who are interested in working at the Ministry of Education as guidance specialists or educational psychologists. The SPsS has worked closely with NTU/NIE to recognize the MA programme so that her graduates are eligible for full membership status. In future, SPsS could play an important role of setting up a continuing educational system with NTU/NIE to provide on-going training and development for professional psychologists in Singapore. This would greatly enhance the knowledge and skills of the Singapore Psychological Society’s members.

SPsS is also keen to provide information about the practice & training of psychologists to members of the public. In line with this public service objective, the Singapore Psychological Society has produced a pamphlet entitled “Psychologists in Singapore: Who are they?” for employers and the general public. This pamphlet contains information about the different types of psychologists & their academic and professional training. SPsS hopes that this pamphlet will be useful for students who are planning to major in psychology, and also for teachers who are providing career guidance counselling. The SPsS has also established a society website that would provide information about psychology as a career and as a profession. The website would allow SPsS to update the information on a more timely and regular basis.

SPsS encourages school teachers and administrators to join the society and to be familiar with the contributions of psychology and the roles of psychologists in education. In particular SPsS invites school teachers who are involved in providing pastoral care and career guidance (PCCG) in schools and who are working with educational psychologists in the Learning Support Programme in primary schools to join the SPsS. School teachers who may not be eligible to join as full or affiliate members (i.e., have a bachelor degree in psychology and/or postgraduate qualifications in psychology) are encouraged to join as associate members. In the new millennium, the Singapore Psychological Society will work to stimulate the growth and interest of psychology as a science and as a profession in Singapore. The contributions of school teachers and educators will play a significant role toward the achievement of this vision.

References

- Singapore Psychological Society (1997/1998). *Directory*. Singapore.
- Nanyang Technological University/National Institute of Education (1999). *Master of Arts in Applied Psychology* (Handbook). Singapore.