
The CGCA Position Paper for the Provision of Counselling Services: A Reaction

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The authors of this paper were asked to evaluate and give a critique of the position paper. In order to do this we read the document and reacted to it from two perspectives. The first perspective concerns the content and organization of the document as a statement of the profession of counselling in Canada. The second perspective concerns the relationship of the document to the goals or mission of counsellor education. We should also mention that our reactions are influenced by our recent experience of being evaluated for AACD accreditation.

THE DOCUMENT: CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

The position paper lays out the philosophical foundation that the profession's primary responsibility is to help clients meet their needs. The authors of this critique concur with characterizing counselling within a developmental orientation in which needs give rise to attitudes and behaviours. Within this orientation there is a place for developmental, preventive and remedial activities on the part of the counsellor. The main focus of intervention is on provision of knowledge and skills, via a learning/educational model, so that clients can be helped to meet these identified needs. It is also noted that all of what counsellors do with clients occurs within a social-political context, and that the forces which shape individuals are continually shifting. Recognition of the ecological nature of counselling is essential for professionals to be effective in a changing world.

We recognize that the task of constructing an official position paper requires a great deal of effort. It is evident that much work has been put into it. It is within the context of this recognition that the present authors make their comments about the position paper. What follows is a summary of these suggested additions and revisions.

Recommended Additions

- a) There needs to be a definition of counselling—what is counselling? The definition of counselling could be the same as those found in the CGCA Guidelines For Counsellor Education. (See “Definition & Working Principles” section p. 3 of CGCA Counsellor Education Guidelines). A brief description of the type of activities that describe what a counsellor does would be helpful. In addition, the document

would be enhanced with a general discussion of the skills needed by counsellors to carry out these roles and activities presented in the definition.

- b) A description of the common characteristics of the populations served by counsellors could be added as one way to assist the reader in distinguishing the profession of counselling from other related professions; such as psychologists or social workers. This description would indicate that the typical counselling client is a normal functioning individual; not someone with severe psychological difficulties. A statement about the role of referral by counsellors who are part of a team of mental health professionals (social workers, psychologists & doctors) would further sharpen the definition.
- c) A section outlining the professional qualifications of a professional counsellor is recommended. CGCA has adopted the Masters degree as the acceptable level for counsellor competence. Following from this, CGCA could, as a next step of their certification, consider recognizing students who graduate from counselling programs which meet the minimum requirements as described in the Guidelines for Counsellor Education. The public needs to know, as consumers, what they can expect and what professional backgrounds typify such competent professionals.
- d) Ethical Guidelines should be referred to in the document. It isn't suggested that the CGCA official book of Ethical Guidelines be included; rather a reference to them should be made.

Recommended Revisions

- a) A major revision is recommended around the lengthy section outlining the developmental basis of counselling. The rationale for using a "needs"-based model is presented clearly; but it is recommended that the summary of all the developmental needs could be effectively reduced and summarized.
- b) Given the acceptance of a needs-based model and the identification of the role of environment, it would be valuable to spell out how the counsellor can effect a better fit between the needs of the individual and the environmental factors which shape the development and/or choices of that individual.
- c) The document describes the three levels of practice; remedial (crisis intervention), preventive (environmental programs) and individual development (education and learning). The skills needed by counsellors to carry out these functions could be identified as crisis intervention — counselling; preventive actions — consultation, and development — program preparation and delivery.

II. REACTIONS FROM A COUNSELLOR EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

The challenge for counsellor educators is to ensure that the role of the professional is congruent with that of the profession (as stated in its position paper) by providing the types of training knowledge, skills and experiences for the practitioner at the preservice level. In examining the position paper, the following reactions are provided for consideration:

- a) Counsellor education programs must have the minimum number of courses, clinical experience, and practica to ensure that graduates are able to provide services at an acceptable level across the personal, career and educational needs of clients. Counselling must integrate practice with the carrying out of research in the discipline. As an applied field of psychology—wherein practice is based upon a specific theory and research studies in critical areas—examination of practice should be an ongoing part of the work in counsellor education. Counsellor educators are in an ideal position to conduct relevant research studies as they are typically competent in both practice/supervision and appropriate research methodologies.
- b) The position paper has identified the “special needs” populations which require some specialized courses and field experience in order to meet this mandate of the profession. The specifics of this should be presented.
- c) Selection of candidates into programs requires a balance of personal, academic and life/work experiences in order to ensure that graduates can meet the diverse needs of their clients at the professionally accepted level.
- d) The position paper correctly acknowledges (although minimally so) the key role of groups in counselling. Both from an economical perspective of attending to multiple clients and for the reason that group counselling is a unique type of intervention, the training institution must ensure competence is well developed in both of the individual and group counselling areas.
- e) The position paper defines the counsellor in terms of what he/she can and should be doing; this means that counsellors must know when certain client needs are not in the professional sphere of the counsellor. The professional counsellor needs to be trained to recognize those clients who they can not effectively assist and know how and where to refer such individuals.
- f) In order to meet the many human needs defined in the document, it should be reiterated that counsellors may help clients meet their needs through “direct service” or in assisting other professionals in a supportive role, that is, a team intervention approach.

- g) The position paper indicates ways in which counselling must keep abreast of the continually changing events and needs in the society. This suggests that counsellor education has a critical role to play in “on going” professional development. By continually upgrading their knowledge and skills, counsellors can be more flexible in their approach to changing needs of clients.
- h) Counselling immigrants and refugees is a special area of counselling which is distinct from counselling special needs groups or mainstream clients. Cross cultural counselling requires knowledge not only about the individual and about counselling approaches but also about the unique aspects of culture and ethnicity as critical issues. For professionals to work effectively within a multicultural society like Canada this is a special challenge which needs to be addressed.

CONCLUSION

Finally, the authors of this critique recognize the importance of a clearly laid out position paper for the profession to serve as a guide for counsellor preparation. We also see that the position paper must be integrated and related to the Guidelines for Training (CGCA) and to the professional needs of the graduates of the program. Does a position paper also indicate the commitment and need for inservice or post service training for our professionals? We think it should acknowledge this as a priority for any profession.

Any position paper which defines a profession, has by definition, implications for the training and development of the people who deliver the professional service. For this reason, the authors of this critique have appreciated the opportunity to react to the position paper and to relate it to minimum standards of competence for the professionally trained counsellor.

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