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HELP — please

First, let me take the opportunity to thank the Editor of the *Canadian Counsellor* for again offering us the opportunity to talk to each other about the kinds of things that concern us most. In this paper I plan to address myself to what counselors will be doing five years from now. However, it seems to me very significant to note at the outset that what we are doing five years from now will depend very much on how we view and react to situations across Canada right now.

It would be easy to say that five years from now there will be more and better trained counselors in this country than ever before. Data to back up this statement could indeed be found in terms of higher university enrollments in counseling programs, higher memberships in professional associations, increases in number of workshops, professional meetings, etc. Recently in Chicago the American Personnel and Guidance Association fought back from a decline in national registrations at conferences and came close to setting a record in attendance for counselors' conventions. There are positive signs to pin our hopes to five years from now, but there are not too many of them.

In my view in the last twelve months overwhelmingly our profession has been beset by negative kinds of forces operating almost independently of regional differences or level of counseling service. Budget cuts in education are but one of the trends which seem to be jeopardizing the future of the counseling profession. What worries the writer more than the financial difficulties besetting us is our reaction to them. Four trends have emerged and almost all of the leaders in our profession are subscribing to one or more of them at the present time. It occurs to me that each of these trends or directions could have a negative effect on our profession if carried too far.

Perhaps the most popular term in education today is "learning disabilities." There is no question in my mind that generally this is a useful and a helpful concept and many children will benefit from the interest in this area. However, one of the problems in the past that counselors have faced has been that our services have been oversold, and it is my firm opinion that the recent interest in learning disabilities will create false hope in the minds of educators and parents beyond what can reasonably be expected to be accomplished. The debate on validity and reliability with individual I.Q. tests has been welcomed by counselors who have for years been concerned about misuse of test data. But it must seem surprising to many people

that in the wake of this healthy debate on use of data, we are following up with more and more diagnosis with tests which are, at this time anyway, unproven. Counselors will not solve problems of children or our profession by embarking on another bout of clinical diagnosis.

The next popular term in use at every school-board meeting across the country is, of course, "accountability." This word should be a positive one and counselors in schools and agencies should welcome the opportunity to become accountable and show that what we are doing is meaningful and important. The drawback here again is that the best way to prove accountability is through the use of standardized tests, checking calendars for daily activities, etc. The fact of the matter is that these kinds of measuring devices have little or no relevance to the work a counselor does with children and parents within a school or agency type of setting. Many of the same people promoting accountability now are those same people who in the past have belittled human service to children as being of minor importance. If we are to evaluate ourselves, then let's evaluate ourselves on real and important objectives, such as helping children meet real and individual needs in their daily lives.

Another positive force which has negative implications is a trend towards changing the role of a counselor to one of a teacher or agency consultant. The advantages of such a trend are well documented in the literature and I have no quarrel with them. Obviously if we can work with teachers rather than individual students, our sphere is widened and correspondingly our influence spreads to more people. But the fact of the matter is that good counselors have always worked with significant others in the life of a child, and whereas in some areas counselor activities are confined to a school or an office, surely this is not generally the case. In discussing budget cuts one can argue rather sensibly that we can do without the teacher consultant, while the school trustee would not accept the same level of thinking if it concerned children needing help with vocational, educational, or personal problems. Of course consultation is a job for counseling, but it is not the job which our profession has as a sole commitment.

Finally, some of us are again retreating into a specialization type of pattern, particularly at the university level. The public will not now tolerate more narrow specialists in a human resources field. We must be able to show and demonstrate that what we are doing and the people we are training are in fact capable of working with many kinds of different and important human situations. When money is tight there is no room for a research specialist, a learning consultant, a diagnostician, a home-visitor, or any kind of narrow individual. If the schools and agencies are looking for people with broad perspectives who are flexible enough to change with changing times and meet differing needs, then our artificial barriers between people and between disciplines must go and go quickly. In my view counselors will be using more and more lay help as we strive to meet the needs of all children in all schools. We must welcome rather than fight assistance, while at the same time maintaining proper control over standards of our own professionals.

I suppose then the real question about five years from now is: Will there be any counseling as we know it today? The answer is yes, of course, but the extent to which our services survive will depend on how we react now to basic issues which are facing us very squarely. Counseling has to do with the relationship between two people or a group of people and counselors must make their major contribution through counseling. In my view our efforts have been commendable, our case is strong, and our results in many instances can speak for themselves. It is time, though, to regroup our forces and stand united in this country to those overriding objectives which affect us all.

So the picture is positive, particularly if we can now stand together making those changes in our profession which are needed to benefit our clients, rather than those which may help us as individuals. If we can do this I see a few major trends developing which should become fact rather than fiction five years from now.

1. Counselors will have helped other educators and the public recognize the futility of constant educational upgrading, so that across Canada our standards for entrance into educational programs at all levels will be realistic.
2. The profession of counseling will remain a person-centred profession concerned basically with human and community needs.
3. Practitioners in the field will have resumed a position of leadership in our profession and will be in a dominant position with respect to communication among members in our profession.
4. There will be continued growth in cooperation among counselors across this country and the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association will have doubled its membership following successful conventions in both Eastern and Western Canada.
5. There will be continued experimental work so that special issues like this one of the *Canadian Counsellor* will continue to let us communicate with each other and speak our minds.

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FUTURE PACTS

Yes, your invitation is tempting, especially to a veteran teacher and now novice counselor who is challenged to practice many dreams of a counselor's chief role. Although frustrations are common, the effort is rewarding, while dreams of future enterprises continue to beckon, as tantalizing as the sirens to sailors of ancient legends.