

Invited Article 4

Reflections on VISTAS on its 10th Anniversary

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VISTAS was first published in 2004 but it began soliciting manuscripts in 2003. Thus, it is now 10 years old. Over 700 manuscripts have been published in VISTAS during this period on a multitude of topics such as humor, counselor supervision, ethics, theories, abuse, addiction, CACREP, school counseling, mental health counseling, veterans, stress, depression, wellness, social justice, bullying, groups, spirituality, and a host of other topics relevant to the work of 21st century counselors. Literally hundreds of practicing counselors, graduate students, and academics have contributed to this diverse and unique publication.

Yet, even given the topics and numbers above, the significance of VISTAS is hard to evaluate. The difficulty is due to the relatively brief history of this publication in the world of counseling scholarship. With all of the journal outlets in the profession, it is tough to say where VISTAS ranks among publications in the field of counseling. After all, developmentally, it is a pre-adolescent and as such is still emerging, forming, and growing in ways that are sometimes unpredictable. There has yet to be thorough studies on VISTAS—such as a study of authors who have contributed to it, or how often VISTAS articles have been cited in the professional literature.

However, what is becoming clearer every year is that this online and formerly hard copy publication has made (and is making) a significant difference in counseling in regard to individual lives and the profession as a whole. The reason is that aspiring and established professionals with ideas, observations, and research, regardless of their background or status, have found VISTAS to be a receptive outlet. *It has not just given contributors a by-line but a voice—a way of alerting others to their thoughts, insights, and concepts that would not have occurred in other ways.* Initially, and still today, VISTAS is a welcoming, encouraging, and accepting outlet for those who are developing

themselves. VISTAS continues to actively solicit and invite submissions from the depth and breadth of the counseling field. Thus potential submitters do not have to hone their manuscripts to a specific specialty. They are free to address the profession of counseling as a whole as well as target a group or an area of interest.

My Involvement With VISTAS as a Contributor

My evaluation of the impact of VISTAS has come in working with Drs. Garry Walz and Jeanne Bleuer over a number of years both before and after they created VISTAS. The Walz and Bleuer team has always been powerful with Garry taking the “out front” lead and Jeanne taking the role of the competent and collegial backup. The couple is a perfect gestalt.

Regardless of their roles, the team has achieved phenomenal success. The remarkable harmony and productivity of this duo can be seen in their previous work with ERIC from its beginning when it focused on guidance and counseling until its consolidation and disappearance as relevant resource in counseling at the start of the 21st century. Over their decades with ERIC, Garry and Jeanne engaged counselors and counselor educators to produce articles and monographs relevant to practitioners. I remember editing and then writing two monographs on groups for them when they were with ERIC at the University of Michigan and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro respectively. Their helpful reminder of deadlines, their pinpoint focus on topics, and their ability to judiciously edit are qualities they carried over to VISTAS which they created as visionaries. They saw that with the basic demise of ERIC as a viable outlet for counselors something needed to take its place. After all, nature, and counselors, abhor a vacuum.

My first experience with VISTAS that comes immediately to mind is the request from Garry to submit a manuscript to the inaugural launching of the publication during my year as president-elect of the American Counseling Association. With all of the other duties and responsibilities that piled up during 2003-2004 the last thing I thought I needed was to turn out one more manuscript. Yet Garry insisted and I acquiesced. I am glad that happened for what I wrote was a piece on why creativity is important in counseling and why I had chosen to have the American Counseling Association conference theme be *Creativity: A Creative Force in the Fabric of Life*. Far from being a burden, the piece I penned gave me clarity and invigorated my focus on why creativity and counseling belong together.

The next year as ACA president, Garry approached me again and though I tried to explain I had much to do, I found myself like the young woman in the musical *Oklahoma* who could not say “no.” The personality of Garry was simply too great to overcome and he assured me the ever present Jeanne would help me, if needed. (I sometimes think of Garry as Aladdin because of the magical way he operates and because of the presence of Jeanne who in her own right is a genie). Thus for the 2005 VISTAS I wrote an article entitled *On the Roads of Life: Becoming a Competent Counselor and Person of Integrity*. It was about developing as a person and a professional. I later fleshed the topic out more and it became the basis for a speech I made before the faculty of the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara, Turkey, when I was a Fulbright Specialist.

After these first submissions I was hesitant to submit again. I already had more publications than I needed for favorable evaluations at my university. Besides I was no longer ACA president and I did not feel pressure to lead in the same way. Besides the books I had previously written needed revision. However, I had a graduate student who needed help in launching from her master's degree program into becoming a practicing professional. Therefore, I decided to write with her and help her gain confidence by becoming a published author. VISTAS was a perfect outlet for our work. The manuscript we wrote that was published in VISTAS 2010 compared the requirements for completing a master's in counselor education and completing a master's in counseling psychology. We found uniformity in the counselor education programs as opposed to the counseling psychology programs. The manuscript was peer reviewed with constructive comments giving both my student and I insights into how our writing could be improved. We followed the reviewers' recommendations, the piece was published, and my graduate student moved on. Everyone won.

My Involvement with VISTAS as a Reviewer

In addition to contributing to VISTAS as a writer, I have been a reviewer of VISTAS articles for 7 of its 10 years of existence. The job has been one that has increased my appreciation for VISTAS and for the hard work that Garry Walz, Jeanne Bleuer, Jillian Joncas, and others have put into it. Each time I have reviewed for VISTAS I have received 10 to 12 manuscripts along with a Likert-scale rating sheet. I have served on a dozen editorial boards over my career and the VISTAS rating sheet is the easiest to use and most direct of any of them. It is a model of what reviewers should look for in critiquing professional writing.

The quality and sophistication of VISTAS manuscripts I have received over the years have varied. Some have been excellent; a few have needed major rewrites. However, most have been in between. In other words, they have been good, solid, or promising. With some revisions most have become very good, more solid, and have lived up to their potential. In other words, these manuscripts that are now VISTAS articles have added to the literature in counseling—empirically, philosophically, and historically. I have been pleased to read VISTAS because of the overall quality of its articles and the fact that they have all been about counseling. It has been a pleasure to contribute to the work of others and I know Garry and Jeanne have taken great pleasure in this task as well.

Changes in VISTAS Over the Years

When VISTAS started it was in line with other publications in that it was published in a hard copy paper volume. Like many annual reviews, VISTAS was published one time a year. Submissions were solicited in the fall, reviews were carried out in December, and the bound volume was ready for sale at the American Counseling Association conference in March. The format worked well.

However, time and publications have changed as has VISTAS. Many periodicals are now published online and VISTAS has joined the paperless ranks as well. This move has allowed VISTAS to invite, review, accept, and publish submissions quarterly instead of yearly. That has meant that potential authors do not have to wait for a yearly

submission deadline and review. They can get their scholarship into circulation much faster. It has also meant that reviewers can review 2-3 papers once every quarter. This has allowed them to take more time in providing useful feedback to the authors on how they can improve or enhance their papers. In addition, by putting VISTAS online the cost and hassle of producing of articles has gone down and the circulation of VISTAS has gone up because it can be accessed more easily.

VISTAS' Future

There are some questions most people do not ask past childhood such as: "How old are you?" With the Internet we can find that information out without having to ask. However, I have never looked it up in regard to Garry and Jeanne. Because they have been around longer than I have been in the profession of counseling, and because they have been more prolific than me, I consider them "experienced leaders and mentors."

When the ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services closed at the end of 2003, Garry and Jeanne established Counseling Outfitters, LLC (<http://counselingoutfitters.com/>) as an entity through which they could continue the development of some of the services and resources that would no longer have been available to the counseling profession. Early in 2003, Garry met with Richard Yep and introduced the idea of ACA and Counseling Outfitters collaborating to create a "mini ERIC" for counselors. Richard was enthusiastic about the concept, and wasted no time in getting the ball rolling to create VISTAS. Initially, the goal of VISTAS was simply to provide a means to capture the valuable knowledge and resources that were exchanged during the annual ACA Conferences. However, the early success of the project stimulated rapid growth, and VISTAS quickly became a dynamic entity that has continued to expand and improve each year. Today it is a key component of ACA's online Knowledge Center (<http://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/vistas>).

Conclusion

In 1972 a little known popular musician by the name of Johnny Nash recorded a song entitled *I Can See Clearly Now*. The lyrics were about overcoming obstacles, and the final line of the tune stated "it's going to be a bright, bright, sun-shiny day." Garry Walz and Jeanne Bleuer could have written that song. Their perseverance and vision resulted in their starting a new publication after, through no fault of their own, another (ERIC) folded in regard to its relevance for counselors. Instead of becoming despondent and depressed they started over ... and with much enthusiasm. As an alternative to seeing rain, they envisioned rainbows and a way to contribute to the good of others. The VISTAS story is an amazing saga of success. It is directly connected with the individuals who established it.

Where VISTAS will go from here is yet to be determined. However, the power of the story will definitely continue. In that story, the profession of counseling and counselors can rejoice. Transformation is not just an individual process. It is a professional one as well. Though VISTAS will continue to be evaluated, it has stood the test of time, been inspirational, changed lives, and has made possible the making of a bright future for the counseling profession.

References

- Evans, C. C., & Gladding, S. T. (2010). A comparison of counselor education and counseling psychology master's degree programs: Are they really different? In G. R. Walz, J. C. Bleuer, & R. K. Yep (Eds.), *Ideas and research you can use: VISTAS 2010*. Retrieved from http://www.counseling.org/docs/vistas/vistas_2010_article_24.pdf

Note: This paper is part of the annual VISTAS project sponsored by the American Counseling Association. Find more information on the project at: http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/VISTAS_Home.htm