*Article 3*

# ACA Fifty Years Plus and Moving Forward

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*VISTAS–Perspectives on Counseling 2004*, a new publication, signals the American Counseling Association's continuing commitment to find new ways to support the advancement of the counseling profession in its many aspects—credentialing, professional development, professional identity, recognition and support by federal and state policies and legislation, advocacy of counseling, serving as a voice for the needs of those persons with mental health, career, and life style concerns who are underserved. Within such a context, ACA also provides leadership and support to the unique needs of counselors who work with children, youth, or adults, with and without disabilities, in a wide range of settings.

Basic to the above agenda, ACA provides an organizational vehicle and technical support system for identifying, monitoring, and responding to the social, political, and economic trends that spawn individual needs for counseling. These trends wax and wane constantly as they leave their major imprint on different historical periods and the metaphors that describe them. In 2004, counselors and their clients are living in a period when various observers have used metaphors like cybersociety, the information society, post industrial or post modern society, the organizational era, the triumph of meanness, the age of unreason, and the age of Protean careers to capture the dynamics with which we and our clients function on a daily basis. Such trends and the metaphors used to describe them frequently appear in the proposed presentations submitted for acceptance and delivery at the ACA annual convention. In that sense, the proposals submitted by ACA members for presentation at the

convention are a snapshot of the influences and trends operating in the lives of clients and the emerging interventions that counselors are constructing to respond to client needs.Thus, *VISTAS–Perspectives on Counseling 2004* is a compilation of some 20 examples of the important ideas, trends, emphases, and influences that characterize the broad field of counseling in 2003–2004.

## Trends and Influences on Counseling in 2004

Before summarizing the ideas, influences, trends, and intervention strategies that make up the content of the articles selected for inclusion in this first editing of *VISTAS–Perspectives on Counseling 2004*, it is important to acknowledge that such trends and perspectives do not arise in a vacuum. The twentieth century, and now the early years of the twenty-first century, are replete with multiple theories that provide different vantage points on human behavior; a growing and comprehensive research base that has validated the importance and the contributions of counseling to a growing range of problems in living; the ongoing development of new and refined intervention strategies to respond to client needs; the inclusion of new populations of persons who can and should be served by counselors; and to the need, in a culturally diverse world, for all counselors to possess multicultural competencies.

Certainly, during the fifty-two years of the existence of the American Counseling Association and its predecessor organizations, the American Personnel and Guidance Association and the American Association for Counseling and Development, there has been a continuous emphasis on strengthening the professionalizing and skills of counselors. This has been reflected in 1) the commitment to ethical standards and the increased rigor of their training 2) nurturing the development of new organizations to accredit counselor preparation (e.g., CACREP) and credential individual counselors (e.g., NBCC) 3) advocating for state statutes that license professional counselors (now available in varying forms in 47 states) and 4) seeking national and state policies and legislation that acknowledge the importance of counselors in achieving a variety of societal goals. Examples

include identifying and dealing with child abuse; rehabilitating those persons on the margins of society; helping children, youth, and adults to find purpose and to be productive; preparing persons to choose, prepare for, and enter the workforce effectively and successfully; and motivating persons to choose lifestyles that emphasize wellness rather than addiction and chemical dependence.

As the latter half of the twentieth century unfolded, the professionalization of counselors brought them increased legislative and statutory parity with other professional groups in contributing to the mental health of the nation in using available resources efficiently; and in seeking social equity for all citizens as they pursue educational, occupational, and interpersonal opportunities. Furthermore, the American Counseling Association, in collaboration with other international counseling organizations, has spurred the rise of counseling as a worldwide phenomenon, not just a Eurocentric or North American activity.

One of the realities of counseling is that the content, which clients bring to counselors is dynamic. As the nations of the world experience social, political, and economic flux, their citizens experience changing anxieties, life narratives, information needs, desires for support and nurturance by others, freedom from stress and from violence, as well as opportunities to maximize their achievement and quality of life. In many nations, citizens are immersed in contexts shaped by major social, economic, and political issues that spawn a psychology of change and of uncertainty as the effects of these external forces radiate through communities, schools, workplaces and families. Such changes in the contexts in which persons negotiate their identity and their personal meaning create challenges to counselor knowledge, skills, and preparation.

While these challenges can be classified in many ways, one frame of reference (Herr, 1989, 1999) uses four major themes. They include, first, the transition of the United States to an information-based global economy. Such a theme emphasizes the ripple effects of a shifting occupational structure in association with organizational changes, downsizing, the pervasive effects of advanced technology, less linear career paths, rising educational requirements in emerging occupations,

growth in part-time workers, expectations of workers to be able to do multitasking, a global labor surplus, and international economic competition.

A second major challenge to counselors is the changing family. Included are the wide range of family patterns in the United States, the decrease in the number of nuclear and intact traditional families, the revolution in gender roles, alterations in child-rearing practices, and shifts in the gender demographics of the workforce and higher education.

A third challenge is the growing pluralism of cultural traditions, languages, and ethnic and racial backgrounds of Americans that is the rule, not the exception, in this nation. Group definitions, such as "majority" and "minority," are undergoing rapid change as are the emerging profiles of the United States that forecast a nation of very different racial composition by the mid-twenty-first century. Within such contexts, it has become a professional imperative to train counselors who more fully represent these demographic patterns and to ensure that all counselors have the competencies to respond with sensitivity and skill to cross-cultural issues.

A fourth challenge to counselors is the changing definition and the increasing magnitude of those persons—children, youth, adult —identified as at risk, potentially vulnerable to social, academic, and occupational failure. These are persons *at risk* of being physically ill or abused, experiencing mental disorders, manifesting antisocial behavior, engaging in violence, being economically disadvantaged, or experiencing other forms of negative psychological, social, or economic life events. The knowledge base about psychological vulnerability and the etiology of such vulnerability is increasingly seen through the lenses of stress, anger, abuse, crisis, trauma, and transition, not primarily psychopathology.

## Influences on Interventions in 2004

Embedded in such challenges to counselors are both recurring challenges (e.g., counselor roles, the uses of testing and assessments, professional identification of counselors in different settings) and

emerging challenges (e.g., the roles of counselors in fostering character, personal responsibility, self-esteem, spirituality, optimization of behavior, and self-renewal). In essence, both the recurring and the emerging challenges refine and initiate new approaches to counselor knowledge, skills, credibility, and professional identification. One can argue that the trends that have been underway for the past several decades continue to motivate refinements as well as new ways to conceptualize and synthesize who counselors are, what they do, with whom, for what purposes, and under what conditions. These trends also express the evolving language and interventions that are constantly emerging to increase the strategies and insights available to counselors in different settings and with different populations. Some examples of recent trends of major importance to the profession include

- Greater attention in counseling research to evidence-based, outcome-based or results-based practices that can be directly linked to different presenting problems and to the "fit" of specific practices with different populations. Evidence-based practices are in contrast to earlier approaches that focused on process-based or function-based counseling programs. The latter emphasized checklists of counselor roles and functions, which if undertaken were assumed to be appropriate for all counselees and would yield successful outcomes. Evidence-based practices do not accept such assumptions; instead the intent is to identify counseling interventions that empirically demonstrate successful outcomes for particular types of client problems under specific conditions;
- Increased emphases on the factors that place children, youth, and adults at risk of social, academic, and career failure and the comprehensive and early interventions likely to improve these conditions;
- The effects of both limited resources and pressures for accountability of counseling outcomes that have

increased attention to the systematic planning of counselor-designed programs tailored to specific client needs (e.g., anger management, stress management, conflict resolution, job search strategies, interpersonal skill or career development);

• Efforts to deploy counselors of all specializations most effectively, the greater integration at community levels of all mental health resources, and the collaboration of credentialed counselors across settings—schools, community agencies, workplaces—to meet major community-based needs;

• Methods of augmenting and extending counselor skills, with particular emphasis on greater utilization in counseling of various types of technologies—the Internet, computer-mediated assessment and interactive counseling systems, digital and virtual reality information resources, video conferencing and online counseling, the use of electronic bulletin boards, and simulations of work and educational environments;

• As responses to the needs to maximize the effects of too few counselors and limited fiscal resources, increased utilization of intentional, goal-directed, and time-limited interventions;

• As a function of cognizance that perceptions of counseling practices and roles can be frozen in time and rigidly stereotyped, the beginning of initiatives to encourage counselors to rethink the constraints of the 50-minute hour, to move from passive to more active roles, to use the counseling process more creatively to spur more client activity and participation with the counselor;

• Acknowledgment that emerging career paths are less linear and predictable than was true in the twentieth century, causing counselors to begin to examine the implications of new career paradigms and their emphases on personal flexibility, personal career management, and proactive responsibility for one's employability;

- Recognition that cultural diversity is not confined to racial and ethnic differences, but includes sexual orientation, persons with specific disabilities, socioeconomic status, and the frail elderly;
- Growing emphases in counseling on optimization of behavior, in which counselors are developing programs to promote self-renewal, emotional intelligence, resilient behavior, optimism, wellness by which the clients' capacity to self-manage and cope with stressors and problems in living are strengthened;
- In the midst of shifting values on the centrality of work and its lack of security for many persons as well as attention to emphases on family values, the realization that counselors are increasingly important in helping persons clarify their commitment to family-work role integration, personal fulfillment, and career paths that allow accommodation of parenting and family achievement;
- In a world dominated by daily media analyses of natural and political turmoil, terrorism, failing institutions, and internal conflicts among subgroups of the population, affirmations that counselors have important roles in providing a safe haven in which to help clients identify the sources of the ambivalence, ennui, and uncertainty they experience, the steps they can take to create a more manageable environment, and the areas in which they can exert personal control;
- Acceptance of the reality that the rapidity of change, overwhelming personal problems in living, unemployment and underemployment, and cross-cultural and cross-national mobility will create more conditions in which individuals will experience grief and mourning related to lost opportunities, lost aspirations, and lost cultural identity about which counselors must be sensitive and therapeutic;
- Given the growing recognition of counseling as a world-

wide phenomenon, the development of indigenous theory and practice by more nations who are tailoring them to their particular client needs and diversity in populations. Such theories and practices are modifying the earlier Eurocentric origins of counseling and beginning to make counseling theory and practice more non-Western, more feminist, more holistic, and more multicultural;

- More emphases on cost-benefit issues. Over the last decade or so, all helping professions have been under increased scrutiny about their costs and about their benefits. Policy makers, legislators, and administrators in schools, universities, corporations, and communities are increasingly raising questions about what their constituents receive when they invest in counseling programs or other social services. In the last decades of the twentieth century, the counseling profession was encouraged to emphasize research focused on results-based or evidence-based outcomes that demonstrates that particular practices work effectively with particular populations in specific settings under particular conditions. But, from an accountability standpoint, the next step is to translate research results on the efficacy of counseling into cost-benefit analyses. Even though one could make the oversimplified observation that every positive or negative correlation between a particular counseling technique and a desired outcome—attitudes, knowledge, behavior—carries with it economic costs and economic benefits, we have not systematically focused on the cost effectiveness of what we do and how successful we are with different problems and with different practices. In sum, we have not yet fully addressed the *added value* of counseling in a world of limited resources.

While not exhaustive, these ideas and trends are among those that are in various stages of development or implementation in the

broad field of counseling in 2003–2004. They also represent the ongoing legacy of the field, which the papers that follow advance or refine.

## Overview of the Articles Selected for
### *VISTAS–Perspectives on Counseling 2004*

It is not easy to classify the papers selected to be included here, in part because most of them have multiple dimensions. In some cases, they have become the voices of populations at risk or culturally diverse, which the professional literature has not addressed as fully as the authors advocate. In several papers, the emphases are on techniques designed to resolve a particular client problem or issue. Still other papers use a case study or client problem as the context for applying a particular intervention. Each of the papers tends to include a contemporary literature review related to their exploration of the underlying issues of individual behavior to which the paper is addressed. I have learned from reading them; I hope you, the reader, will find them interesting and useful as well.

## Selected Implications for Counseling, Counselors, and Counselor Education

As suggested by the trends identified in this article as well as those in the articles included as the major content of this publication, counselors and counselor educators must constantly create, test, and apply new counseling paradigms. Given the interaction of political, social, and economic events and individual behavior, the content and practice of counseling are dynamic. Theories of behavior, approaches to educating counselors, and counseling interventions are in some sense always open and in need of refinement as counselees experience new and different anxieties, problems in living, or information deficits. In such a situation, counselors are always confronting new effects of individual encounters with changing environments in which they negotiate and act out their personal identity and aspirations.

As new forms of at-risk behavior unfold or environments in which counselees act out their daily lives change, counselors must constantly function as applied behavioral scientists, if not in name certainly in practice, as they try to understand shifts in their counselee's behavior, the influences on their behavior, the nature of the problems experienced, and the interventions likely to address the concerns counselees present. In such circumstances, counselors must at once be aware of evidence-based practices that may be relevant to the counselee concerns at hand and creative in considering interventions that might be useful in a given instance.

In this publication, we read of using a martial arts program as a self-esteem intervention for at-risk elementary and middle-school students; strategies useful in assessing the potentially dangerous student; the common threads that can be found in the lives of teenage killers; the psychological responses that can be included in counseling practices to help young people and adults find alternative behaviors to violence, eating disorders, and to a revitalization of a socially constructive emotional life; the use of group processes for persons experiencing addictions or sex offenses; the application of "directed reflections" to affirm self-worth and character. Some of these interventions can be found in various synopses of evidence-based practice that have been adapted to particular counselee concerns; however, others have not been a typical part of counselor education or behavioral theory or counseling practice. The latter interventions suggest that counseling theory likely lags behind many emerging problems. Thus, counselors must be taught to be confident enough and sufficiently grounded in theory and practice that they can integrate existing theories and pull from other knowledge bases to construct structured programs, new interventions, and new perspectives that hold promise for addressing emerging counselee concerns. Such freedom of counselor action and creativity requires that counselors be firmly grounded in ethical guidelines and in the ethos, "Do no harm." It also means that counselors must constantly be lifelong learners, continuously seeking professional excellence. Such perspectives are an antidote to counselors allowing themselves to be "frozen in time," steeped in theory and practices that were current

twenty or thirty years ago but not aware of more current and scientifically based approaches.

Being a counselor in the contemporary world of rapid change and psychological uncertainty is being a part of a consuming and vital profession. It requires a counselor who has had rigorous preparation that constantly emphasizes strengthening the skills and the professional identity of the counselor. In the culturally diverse world of the present, counseling is not simply a matter of mastering techniques, it also encompasses awareness, consciousness if you will, of the many different belief systems and traditions that counselees bring to the counseling relationship and that shape what they expect to experience in that relationship. Within such multicultural relationships, counselors must first maximize the dignity of their counselees, whatever their background.

Whatever theoretical allegiance the counselor embraces, they must see counseling as a gift of time and focus, which is intended to provide the counselee a safe, caring, and significant relationship in which the counselee can rehearse possible actions and be helped to weigh and value them as potential directions for change. Given the pluralism of the persons potentially likely to need counseling, counselor education must continually recruit and educate new generations of counselors who are, themselves, persons of color, of diverse cultural traditions, and of multiple religious traditions. While there is evidence that persons of different racial, cultural, and religious traditions can work together in counseling in successful ways, it is also true that many counselees are more comfortable working with counselors who share their racial and cultural backgrounds, and who, they believe, understand more fully the particular burdens that specific culturally different populations have experienced—prejudice, poverty, stigma, and barriers to educational, occupational, or social access.

In many ways, the current transformations occurring in the United States in the increasing pluralism of traditions, languages, ethnicity, race, gender roles, sexual orientation, aging populations, and persons experiencing disabilities is causing significant change in the language and in the perceptions of the needs for counseling. For example, group definitions of "majority" and "minority" in many areas of the nation

are undergoing such dramatic change that they no longer are useful. In many areas of the United States, persons of Hispanic background, historically considered a minority group, now outnumber those considered to be the majority group. Such a situation also is true of African American populations in many cities and rural areas of the nation. Therefore, as the United States continues its movement toward becoming a nation of substantially different racial, social, and ethnic composition than was true of earlier demographic profiles, multicultural competencies can no longer be considered a unique set of skills counselors must acquire. Such competencies must be considered a central core of counseling skills that requires more than an isolated course devoted to their acquisition and importance. Such perspectives must weave throughout the instructional and experiential preparation of counselors and be seen as a central mission, not a peripheral issue, of counselor preparation. Certainly, professional organizations in counseling must continue to advocate for public policy that includes pluralism in the national agenda devoted to the planning for the provision of counseling and other social services.

Furthermore, and not independent of pluralism, counselors, in their educational preparation and in their lifelong learning, must be continuously sensitive to the emergence of at-risk children, adolescents, and adults, and the characteristics of such groups. Some at-risk groups are identified through research and particular symptoms. Learning disabled persons with Aspergers syndrome, persons with body image or eating disorders, persons who have experienced sexual abuse or different types of trauma may be examples. Some at-risk groups are identified because society has become more cognizant of or open to such persons and their particular needs that historically have been hidden and unserved. As suggested in the articles in this publication, these groups might include lesbian widows, survivors of suicide, sex offenders, teenage killers, and those under intense stress in their work or family life. However they are defined, persons at risk of social, economic, or academic failure seem to be increasing in number and in complexity of the issues that affect them.

In an overly simplified way, persons at risk are seen as members

of populations who are more vulnerable to psychological, interpersonal, academic, and economic difficulties than people outside that population. Sometimes, such populations are defined by legislative fiat, classification systems, or risk factors. In any case, the definitions of persons at risk are dynamic, not absolute. People move into and out of at-risk populations as their family, health, or economic conditions, resource and support systems, or age changes. To an increasing degree, at-risk factors are seen not as symptoms of pathology *per se*, but as problems of family attachment, physical or mental abuse, violence, anger, stress, crisis, and transition. Persons at risk are frequently seen as experiencing multiple problems that interact. Within these populations are persons who are seen as potential or actual problems to themselves or to others. They also are frequently seen as persons who are underserved, with limited access to counseling or other mental health. For many such persons, the services they receive are not provided early enough, are not multidimensional, and are not relevant, in social or cultural terms, to what they need. As a result, many at-risk persons reject or do not continue the counseling services they do receive. The extent to which at-risk populations exist and differ in their characteristics reinforces the needs for systems of early identification and treatment, the tailoring of counseling services to different categories and presentations of risk, and the awareness that many persons classified as at-risk of academic, social, or economic failure are also people who are grieving for the loss of opportunities, friendships, cultural identity, health, or other factors. Such grief must be addressed in counseling, public policy, the preparation of counselors committed to professional excellence, and the creation of new paradigms of prevention of risk factors in families, schools, and communities.

As societal norms change, economic structures are modified, family units take on new and expanded forms, cultural pluralism in the population increases, immigration patterns change their nations of origin, and at-risk behavior is found earlier and more profoundly in the lives of many children, youth, and adolescents, awareness of new and different problems of living characterize the counseling process. Such factors require the rethinking of deploying and

preparing counselors to serve where the needs are most pressing. Such circumstances raise such questions as How can boundaries between counselors who specialize in particular settings or populations be breeched so that all counselors in a particular community can come together in more integrated ways to address the major problems of living in that community? How can new approaches to counseling (e.g., online counseling) be validated, modified, and made more accessible? How can counselors-in-training be helped to learn about the use of advanced technology (e.g., computer-mediated systems, the Internet) as integral to counselor program development or as adjuncts to the counseling process? Under what conditions should group counseling be used rather then individual counseling as a way of reaching more clients and being more cost effective in the use of counseling resources? What are the most effective counselee self-directed processes that can supplement individual or group counseling processes? How can counselors participate more actively in public policy debates about the underserved populations of the nation and their needs for counseling services? Should counselor education provide greater attention to educating counselors-in-training about the significance of public policy as an instrument by which to advocate for increased counseling resources? In response to increased pressures for accountability in all social services, including counseling, how does the counseling profession begin to translate its growing evidence-based body of research about the effectiveness of specific interventions for particular presenting problems into cost-benefit analyses?

It is clear from *VISTAS–Perspectives on Counseling 2004* that the counseling profession is in a state of continuing professional maturity and stability as an important instrument in behalf of individual development, meaning, and productivity. However, such continuing progress rests upon ongoing commitment to aligning counseling theories and practices with the dynamics of change in individual environments and behavior, with public policy, and with the education of counselors.

## Summary

Each of the articles discussed here is published in the remaining sections of *VISTAS –Perspectives on Counseling 2004*. The American Counseling Association and Counseling Outfitters/CAPS Press, who have initiated and sponsored this new approach to sharing selected convention submissions in article form, hope that this dissemination process will allow the readers to intensify the professional development they achieve. Furthermore, it is hoped that placing these articles in the context of trends and influences in 2004 accents the importance of the insights and interventions they propose. Both organizations will value your feedback about the utility of this approach.

## References

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