
Chapter 8

Professional Growth and Awareness

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Professional Growth and Awareness

In this chapter:

- Professional growth as a school counsellor
 - The importance of self-care
 - Cultural and personal history awareness
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Professional Growth

Vibrant, robust services that meet the ongoing needs of the students and school community typically require planning, monitoring, and sustaining. It is important for school counsellors to know how to identify the various requirements of their position, based on the specifics of the services in their particular school, what areas to reflect upon, and how to acquire relevant professional learning that can be used to enhance their self-efficacy, professionalism, and personal satisfaction. A sample chart of common school counsellor activities is located in Appendix C.

The Importance of Self-Care

School counsellors, like all school team members, are role models for young people. Professional growth, self-care, and maintaining a balanced lifestyle are all part of embodying the principles of a well-rounded guidance and counselling program.

Stress Management

Rational detachment and non-violent crisis management skills are helpful strategies to support professional, objective responses to stressful situations. Working collaboratively and making appropriate referrals help to manage stress levels.



Additional information on issues related to stress and self-care may be found at the Manitoba Teachers' Society website at <www.mbteach.org/eap.htm> and through their Educator Assistance Program. Information on rational detachment and non-violent crisis management may be found at <www.crisisprevention.com>

The student services team approach provides ongoing support, multiple viewpoints for problem solving, and collegiality in addressing complex issues. When guidance education is infused into regular classroom instruction, all educators and students benefit. For the students, the consultative/collaborative model of service delivery contributes to a safe and caring environment that reduces stress and increases opportunities for success from a variety of different educators in daily school life. For the educators, team teaching, resource sharing, and professional consultations provide timely information to assist in the learning and teaching process.

Time Management

Often, issues related to time management are solved by planning for peak activity seasons. As student services team members, school counsellors recognize the spring and fall periods as particularly busy times for individual student planning in the school year.

Additionally, school counsellors are generally busiest with academic counselling during peak periods of enrolment, graduation, and course selection or change, as well as immediately prior to examination periods and following the distribution of report cards. (See Chapter 6 for time management and caseload management.)

There are no generalized patterns for peak periods of guidance education, prevention, and counselling, although any time the school population or society in general has elevated stress, the number of referrals and requests for service is likely to increase. Many counsellors notice an increase in mental health and personal issues immediately prior to school breaks and holiday seasons. Recognizing the potentially peak periods of student need assists in scheduling events with sensitivity and managing time effectively.

The Importance of Cultural and Personal History Awareness

Manitoba is a culturally diverse province. In education and in counselling, as in other facets of life, it is helpful to be knowledgeable of cultural differences that may be impeding students' progress. By recognizing the potential impact of cultural, ethnic, religious, socio-economic, experiential, and language factors on a student's daily life and the counselling process, the school counsellor is better able to work with the student to find positive solutions.



Additional information on ethical considerations related to culture and personal history are located in Appendix B, CCA Code of Ethics, D10.

Counselling professor Paul Pedersen recommends that counsellors develop the following traits to assist them in cultural awareness:

- ability to recognize direct and indirect communication styles
- sensitivity to nonverbal cues
- awareness of cultural and linguistic differences
- interest in the culture
- sensitivity to the myths and stereotypes of the culture
- concern for the welfare of persons from another culture
- ability to articulate elements of his or her own culture
- appreciation of the importance of multicultural teaching
- awareness of the relationships between cultural groups
- familiarity with accurate criteria for objectively judging “goodness” and “badness” in the other culture (cited in Gibson and Mitchell, 212)



Additional information on issues related to supporting students with cultural and linguistic sensitivities may be found in

- Helping Your Child Succeed: A Guide for Parents and Families of Aboriginal Students
<www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/parents/ab_guide/ab_guide.pdf>
- Incorporating Aboriginal Perspectives
<www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/abedu/perspectives/>
- English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Literacy, Academics and Language (LAL)
<www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/diversity/eal/framework/eal.pdf>

It is equally important for school counsellors to be aware of cultural biases that their own backgrounds and personal histories may bring to the education and counselling process, and to recognize when these factors may help or hinder the student.

Culture and personal history colour all aspects of life and are the threads from which people weave their personal view of the world. While no one can ever fully understand the worldview of another, one can convey an attitude of acceptance and respect. Often, when counsellors reflect on sessions that seem to have stalled, or when there is an impasse, they find a misalignment between the student’s view of the situation and their own view. The task of the counsellor is to realign her or his viewpoint, particularly when working with younger students who are developmentally in early stages of cultural awareness and may not understand that others see the world differently.

In self-appraisal related to education and counselling, it is important to keep in mind that the work of school counsellors is based on building relationships that support the best interests of the student; that relationships involve, at a minimum, two individuals; and that from time to time there will be resistance to change and to growth, there will be regression, and there will be setbacks that are caused by persons and events beyond the control of the school counsellor.

In Manitoba, the philosophy of inclusion extends beyond exceptional learning needs. All students are welcomed into the school community and included as fully as possible in daily school life. For those students whose backgrounds and histories include experiences, languages, and cultural attributes that may sometimes have an impact on their ability to build relationships, to feel a sense of belonging, safety, or success at school, access to the unconditional positive regard of the school counsellor is often a key step to a happy, healthy life.

Chapter Summary

- School counsellors work with colleagues to provide appropriate programming and positive role models for students.
- There are patterns to heightened stress. Recognizing the patterns in a particular school aids in sensitive planning and effective service management.
- The consultative/collaborative process used by student support teams contributes to effective time and stress management for staff and students.
- Cultural and personal history have an impact on effective guidance and counselling services. Recognizing the potential effect of history on personal/social, educational, and career development is important. Knowing how history affects the counselling relationship helps to determine the most effective strategies for assisting students.

Supportive Resources

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth. Free regional professional learning opportunities: <www2.edu.gov.mb.ca/yag/>

Manitoba Teachers' Society. Teacher Action Cohort and Educator Assistance Program: <www.mbteach.org/>

---. Special Area Group professional development activities: <www.mbteach.org/sag.htm>

Manitoba School Counsellors' Association. Regularly updated professional learning opportunities: <www.msca.mb.ca>

Rosin, Daniel. *I can have fun on a school night!* Winnipeg, MB: Harris Printing, 2002.

