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ENHANCING  
THE ROLE OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

by

Lee Cassels

B.G.S., Simon Fraser University, 1983

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS  
in the Faculty  
of  
Education

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MARCH 1993

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ISBN 0-315-91186-7

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## ABSTRACT

Since the 1960's attempts have been made to expand the role of the elementary school counsellor to include counselling, consulting, coordinating, and educating. Counselling, which is the traditional role, involves working directly with students, facilitating discussion about personal issues and problems. Consulting refers to working with other personnel to adjust the educational environment to meet students' social, emotional, and intellectual development (e.g., setting up modification programs for students with behaviour disorders). Coordinating means arranging the provision of services to students, teachers, and parents by school district and community personnel in order to meet elementary students' learning, emotional, and social needs (e.g., referral to mental health agencies for family counselling). Educating involves providing inservice to teachers, parents, small student groups, or full class guidance programs (e.g., teaching students' personal safety programs).

Despite broad-based support for an enhanced role, elementary school counselling has remained largely unchanged across North America. This study investigated British Columbian educators' attitudes towards and recommendations for enhancing the counsellor's role in elementary schools. More specifically, the investigation addressed four issues: (i) whether elementary educators in B.C. supported the idea of enhancing the counsellor's role; (ii) if they did, whether educators felt enhancing the role was feasible; (iii) what impediments stood in the way of successful implementation of an enhanced role; and (iv) what strategies they recommended for implementing this role in B.C.'s elementary schools.

Data were collected in three B.C. school districts through focus group interviews with the following primary stakeholder groups: classroom

teachers, elementary school counsellors, elementary school administrators, and British Columbia School Counsellors' Association executive members.

The findings from the focus group interviews concur closely with counselling and educational change literature. Although informants were supportive in principle of the idea of an enhanced role, committed moral and financial support for implementing the enhanced role was not evident. In addition, a number of other factors were seen to impede implementation of the role in B.C. schools. The major impediments were lack of time (teachers and counsellors do not have time to plan collegially), excessive demands (large caseloads resulting in crisis intervention), and high pupil-counsellor ratios.

Five sets of recommendations are suggested to deal with the impediments and the problem of "soft" stakeholder support. The first set of recommendations relates to lowering the pupil/counsellor ratio, the second to educating all stakeholders about the role enhancement, the third to evaluating school counselling programs, and the fourth to advocating stronger leadership and direction at all levels of elementary education. The final set of recommendations involves promoting time-management strategies for counsellors in their work with staff and students.

In addition to the specific recommendations, an overall implementation "tack" or approach is recommended. It is suggested that efforts to enhance the elementary counsellor's role proceed slowly, starting on a small scale within a supportive collegial climate.

## DEDICATION

with love to  
my husband, Rick,  
and our children, Ryan and Courtney,  
for their patience and support;  
and to my parents, Russ and Eileen,  
for teaching me the value of education.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the members of my committee for their guidance and encouragement. I am especially grateful to Dr. Roland Case and Dr. Anne Corbishley for their collaborative support, giving me many hours of their time, volumes of constructive feedback, and confidence in my ability to complete this thesis. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. David Bell for his technical assistance throughout this study. My thanks goes also to the British Columbia School Counsellors' Association Executive for their cooperation in recommending school districts for this research, and to the three districts and their educators for volunteering to take to part in the three focus group interviews. Finally, my thanks goes to my family and friends for their understanding and encouragement during my years as a graduate student.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Problem Statement and Rationale**

Enhancing the elementary school counsellor's role -- that is, expanding the role to include the functions of counselling, coordinating, consulting, and educating -- has been discussed for many years. The literature has long supported this enhancement, yet little change has occurred (Allan, Doi, & Reid, 1979; Altmann & Herman, 1971; Carreiro & Schulz, 1988; Ginter, Scalise, & Presse, 1990; Merchant & Zingle, 1977; Miller, 1989; Morse & Russell, 1988; Oksanen & Hoose, 1972; Wilgus & Shelley, 1988). Enhancing the elementary school counsellor's role seems to be justified philosophically. The problem apparently lies in its implementation.

Looking at the issues surrounding the elementary school counsellor's role enhancement has led me to four important questions. First, do British Columbian educators support the idea of enhancing the role of the elementary school counsellor? Second, if they support the idea, do British Columbian educators feel role enhancement is feasible? Third, what factors or impediments do British Columbian educators see standing in the way of successful implementation? More specifically, could inadequate training or excessive demands be the reasons, as cited in counselling literature, or are there other reasons not yet considered? For example, do the following impediments to educational change in general, cited in Fullan's (1991) work, interfere with enhancing the elementary school counsellor's role:

1. the "teacher is primary change agent" factor -- since the ultimate

decision whether a change occurs as intended lies not with the policy makers but in the hands of teachers, then teachers must understand and support the enhanced role;

2. the "isolation" factor -- school systems may not support the collaborative work required of the enhanced role;

3. the "maintaining status quo" factor -- the preference may be to maintain the status quo at all costs, particularly when changes in role are being suggested;

4. the "timing and perception" factor -- there may be too many other changes taking place or other crises to handle at the same time or, educators in the field may view the change as too difficult to implement;

5. the "lack of public support" factor -- changes involving programs related to social-emotional development of students may not receive the same public support as academic programs; or

6. the "practicality" issue -- teachers, counsellors, and administrators may not see the practical merits of the change?

And the fourth question, what can be done to overcome impediments to the successful implementation of an enhanced elementary school counsellor role? Are there some specific steps that can be taken? What will those steps involve?

In this introductory chapter, following the statement of the problem and rationale for this study, I present issues concerning the elementary school counsellor's role, discuss major influences on the elementary school counsellor's role, and summarize studies that have investigated the differences between the actual and ideal enhanced role, highlighting implications for enhancing the role. In addition, the significance and specific objectives of this study are provided. The chapter concludes with an

outline of the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

### **Issues in the Role of the Elementary School Counsellor**

The desired role for elementary school counsellors has been discussed in counselling journals for the past 30 years (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1989). The literature centers around two main issues: how the role should be enhanced and, discrepancies between the actual and ideal elementary school counsellor's role.

#### How the Elementary School Counsellor's Role Should Be Enhanced

The first issue deals with how the elementary school counsellor's role should be enhanced. Originally, the school counsellor's job was to counsel students individually. In this role, the counsellor was expected to provide students with a trusting, empathetic environment and to facilitate student discussion about personal issues and problems. Beginning in the 1960's the idea was introduced to expand the counsellor's role to include consulting and coordinating (British Columbia's School Counsellors' Association, 1990; Furlong, Atkinson, & Janoff, 1979; Kameen, Robinson, & Rotter, 1985; Miller, 1989; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1989; Umansky & Holloway, 1984). Consulting and coordinating involve working indirectly with students through other personnel such as teachers, administrators, parents, and community agency staff.

The purpose of consulting is to work with other personnel to structure effectively the elementary school environment to aid in students' social, emotional, and career development. Consulting may involve working with a teacher to set up a classroom management program to meet the needs of a specific student or initiating guidance programs in classrooms (British Columbia School Counsellors' Association, 1990;

Miller, 1989; Morse & Russell, 1988; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1989). Guidance programs are social-emotional or healthful living programs designed to teach students about careers, child abuse, family life, mental well-being, safety and accident prevention, substance abuse prevention, social interaction, and interpersonal communication.

Coordinating means arranging the provision of services to students, teachers, and parents by school, district, and community personnel in order to meet elementary students' learning, emotional, and social needs. Coordinating includes duties such as liaison among home, school, and interministerial programs, as well as maintaining contact with secondary schools. Over the years counselling literature has continued to support the notion of enhancing the role by including consulting and coordinating (British Columbia's School Counsellors' Association, 1990; Deck, 1992; Dustin & Ehly, 1992; Erchul & Conoley, 1991; Forrest, 1984; Furlong *et al.*, 1979; Kameen *et al.*, 1985; Kurpius & Rozecki, 1992; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1989; Schmidt, 1984; Stickel, Satchwell, & Meyer, 1991).

In 1990 the British Columbia School Counsellors' Association (BCSCA) produced a new role description adding educating to the elementary school counsellors' job (British Columbia's School Counsellors' Association, 1990). Acting as an educator of school counselling and guidance programs involves teaching students directly in small groups or as a full class. Social skills or problem solving strategies are two examples of skills a counsellor might teach to a class of students.

Counselling, coordinating, consulting, and educating are all important functions of the elementary school counsellor's job. Counselling helps young children fulfill their needs, solve personal problems, and recognize their own strengths and limitations. Since young children's

verbal skills are just developing, elementary school counselling sessions, using art or play therapy, help children find ways, other than exclusively verbal means, to express personal reactions to specific events and situations.

Coordinating eliminates duplication of work by others and, therefore, results in more effective use of the limited time and resources available. For example, special education teams, involving counsellor, administrator, special education teacher, school nurse, and classroom teacher, play a crucial part in coordination. Meetings of the special education team delegate responsibilities for specific cases, and ensure that follow-through on decisions occurs and policies are established.

Consultation with the counsellor involves teachers, administrators, and parents in the counselling process in a time-efficient way. By consulting with teachers to set up guidance programs within schools or individual classrooms, the potential for reaching more students is increased. For example, an elementary teacher can directly affect 25 to 30 students per year, and a thousand during a teaching career. Similarly, in the role of the educator, the counsellor can reach more students through teaching in individual teachers' classrooms or by inservicing groups of teachers and parents, who in turn pass on the learning to their students and children.

#### Discrepancies between the Actual and Ideal Role

A second theme raised in the literature is that, despite the desire to enhance the counsellors' role by including consulting, coordinating, and educating, there are discrepancies between elementary counsellors' views of their ideal and actual roles (Allan *et al.*, 1979; Carreiro & Schulz, 1988; Howard, 1989; Kameen *et al.*, 1985; Morse & Russell, 1988; Rotter, 1990;



Wilgus & Shelley, 1988). Counsellors find their role undermined when they are expected to do unrelated duties such as clerical tasks or act as disciplinarians in schools (Brown, 1989; Hruba, 1989). Many counsellors find it difficult to establish a warm, trusting relationship with students they have disciplined. Although the counsellor's role seems to be defined clearly in theory, it is not defined clearly in practice. Lack of clarity about the elementary school counsellor role may be related partly to the fact that the enhanced role definition remains unclear to other educators or, at least, many educators differ as to what counsellors' priorities should be (Kaplan, Geoffroy, Pare, & Wolf, 1992; Miller, 1989). While there appears to be grassroots support for the general functions of the counsellor's role, uncertainty is raised about the more specific duties (Boser, Poppen, & Thompson, 1988; Miller, 1989). For example, teachers indicate that there is a duplication of service for special needs students when, on the one hand, counsellors help students with learning problems and assist teachers with setting up individualized instructional program for these students, and on the other hand, other special education personnel are available to perform these duties. This confusion over who does what for special needs students indicates need for greater clarity in role definition.

### **Influences and Studies on the Elementary School Counsellor's Role**

This section reviews two aspects related to enhancing the role of the elementary school counsellor. First, the historical trends in elementary school counselling are outlined. Reasons for the changes are given. Second, studies that have investigated the changing role of the elementary school counsellor are presented and implications for those studies are highlighted.

## Trends in Elementary School Counselling

Elementary school counselling is broadening its roles to include students' psychological and emotional development (Kapel & Paradise, 1990). According to Kapel and Paradise (1990), school counselling in the United States initially involved career counselling (from 1900 to the 1920s). The psychological testing movement of the 1920s and 1930s eventually impacted on the schools, adding testing to the repertoire of the school counsellor. By the 1940s and 1950s personnel work and rehabilitation were added. Carl Rogers' work moved school counselling from a group delivered guidance program to individual counselling. During the 1950s and the 1960s, guidance became part of the personnel service delivered to students. By the 1960s and 1970s occupational and developmental counselling emerged. In Canada during the late 1960s and early 1970s, elementary school counselling was in the infancy stage (Altmann & Herman, 1971; Oksanen & Van Hoose, 1972). Counsellors were being hired in Canadian schools without specific qualifications and school programs were "hit and miss" (Allan *et al.* , 1979; Merchant & Zingle, 1977; Oksanen & Van Hoose, 1972).

At first, outside factors such as home, school community, and social issues did not influence the role of the elementary school counsellor in a major way. Because of changing lifestyles, increasing social stresses and anxieties, social disorganization, and a host of economic and cultural factors, the role of elementary school counsellor has expanded from exclusively school guidance services to mental health and adjustment issues (Kapel & Paradise, 1990).

## Studies Investigating the Elementary School Counsellor's Role

Most of the limited research conducted on the role of elementary

school counsellor involves questionnaire surveys. Repeatedly, researchers have investigated the congruence between counsellors' ideal role (what counsellors, administrators, teachers, and parents view as the valued tasks performed by school counsellors) and the actual role (the tasks actually performed by school counsellors). In most studies, differences have been found between the activities counsellors actually perform and the activities they value (Howard, 1989). The research has not established why these differences exist, although researchers have suggested three plausible explanations: (i) counsellors do not have the training they require to fulfill what is expected of them; (ii) counsellors, administrators, teachers, and parents have unrealistic expectations of school counselling (Carreiro & Schulz, 1988; Kameen et al., 1985; Morse & Russell, 1988); and (iii) role ambiguity exists, people in different roles have differing expectations of the counsellor's job (Ginter, Scalise & Presse, 1990). Further examination is needed both of factors accounting for the discrepancies between the ideal and the actual, and of possible solutions to this gap.

Merchant and Zingle (1977) found in their study, which investigated the functions counsellors typically performed in Canadian urban elementary schools, that most counsellors had dual roles (e.g., administrator-counsellor), worked with student/counsellor ratios in excess of 750:1, and did mainly crisis intervention work. Allan, Doi, and Reid's (1979) study of primary and intermediate teachers' perceptions of the school counsellor's role in B.C.'s elementary schools found that, despite teachers expressing that they did not know how counsellors spent their time, teachers perceived counsellors as doing mostly crisis intervention work. Teachers said they would prefer counsellors to do more preventative work (e.g., educating students in areas such as social skills training and social

problem solving). In addition, teachers wanted a school-based teacher-counsellor, trained in developmental, preventative, and remedial counselling to service schools two or three days a week. Allan, Doi and Reid offered practical ways to enhance the elementary school counsellor's role including focusing on public relations (being available to staff, setting up counselling bulletin boards, informing teachers of the parts of the counsellor's role, and addressing staff meetings), conducting school needs assessments periodically, demonstrating counselling competency with teachers by working with teachers to bring about change in students, and trying "new" counselling approaches (offering short 2-4 developmental counselling sessions to all classes and working full-time on one school in dual roles, such as learning assistance teacher and counsellor). Many of these ideas continue to appear in the current literature in school counselling.

Furlong, Atkinson, and Janoff's (1979) study, surveying counsellors working in 54 California elementary schools, found that counsellors see congruence between their actual and ideal role in the area of individual and group counselling, and helping parents. Other parts of their actual role were seen to conflict with what they felt they should ideally be doing. More specifically, counsellors indicated that they wanted to spend more time in developmental programs (e.g., career development) and less time in roles associated with school discipline, student appraisal, and student referral.

Kameen, Robinson, and Rotter's (1985) study in the Southeastern United States considered the degree of consensus among elementary (i.e., K-grade 6 or K-grade 8) and middle school (i.e., grades 6-8) counsellors regarding the coordination activities they actually perform and those they believe they should ideally perform. Their conclusion was that many

counsellors see a conflict between the actual and the ideal. Age and employment level of the counsellors seemed to affect how the counsellors viewed their job functions. For example, young, presumably recently trained counsellors, tend to rank enhanced role functions higher than do other counsellors. Furthermore, young counsellors generally lacked the skills and support to carry out the duties expected. It was suggested that although training programs emphasize the importance of enhancing the role, perhaps they did not teach the required skills. Another concern raised by this survey was counsellors' lack of attention to many functions considered to be essential in effective counselling programs such as organizing parent groups, providing inservice training for teachers, serving on guidance committees, participating in public relations activities, and conducting needs assessments and follow-up. The authors of this study felt it was important that elementary school counsellors systematically plan a counselling program for the whole school. The authors expressed fear that without greater emphasis on all the functions of the enhanced role, elementary school counselling would become primarily crisis intervention work.

In a similar study conducted by Morse and Russell (1988), rural and urban elementary school counsellors (i.e., K-grade 5) in the Pacific Northwest were surveyed to determine congruence between counsellors' actual and ideal roles. By incorporating questions from previous studies and using a more comprehensive questionnaire and research design these researchers hoped to improve on earlier studies. Although rate of questionnaire return was low, this study's findings agreed with earlier findings that a conflict continues to exist between actual and ideal counsellor functions. The highest ideal roles included helping teachers to

understand individual students' behaviours, attitudes, and progress, and working with students in groups to enhance self-concept, understand feelings, and learn problem solving and social skills. Group counselling was ranked highest on the ideal role list yet appeared third on the actual role list. The findings indicate that three of the five highest ranking ideal roles focused on consulting rather than on individual counselling. In fact only one role, out of the total number of roles discussed, involved individual counselling. The authors supported Umansky and Holloway's (1984) view that consulting is a more cost-efficient way of working with students than individual counselling. The authors concluded that perhaps lack of training was the reason that counsellors did not use group counselling as much as they would like ideally. The study suggested that counsellors need more "time and administrative support" to organize group counselling sessions. In addition, the findings suggest that counsellors may be setting expectations that are too high for themselves, perhaps in an effort to maintain self-esteem. In other words, although counsellors admit they are not living up to the ideal role, they do know what should be done.

Wilgus and Shelley (1988) investigated teachers' perceptions of counsellors' ideal and actual functions. More specifically, this study investigated teachers' perceptions both of how school counsellors spend their time and ideally how they should spend their time. Teachers rank-ordered 15 functions into either actual perceptions of time spent or ideal expectations of how the time should be spent. In addition, counsellors kept a daily log, recording in 15 minute intervals how they actually spent their time.

The study concluded that there is general agreement between teachers' perceptions and expectations, and actual use of time for

individual counselling. However, conflict continues to exist in specific areas. For example, discrepancies arose when group counselling was considered. Teachers see it as a very important function (rated second among fifteen) but the actual time counsellors used for group counselling did not reflect this priority. In addition, discrepancies were found in other areas. Teachers wanted counsellors to be more involved in classroom programs and in referrals, to place higher priority on parent education, and to spend less time at counselling and guidance meetings. Overall, teachers viewed the three most important or ideal functions of counsellors to be direct service to all students (e.g., counsellors involved directly in classroom programs), staff consultation, and parent consultation (e.g., parent education). In addition, Wilgus and Shelley stressed the need for counsellors to foster interpersonal relationships with teachers. Because of teachers' close relationships with students and parents, teachers are in a position to articulate the counsellor's role to others. The authors' concluded that the responsibility for defining the counselling role lies with each individual counsellor in each school.

A number of Canadian studies have examined elementary school counselling, but have found that many counsellor's activities and functions have changed little over the years (Allan *et al.*, 1979; Altmann & Herman, 1971; Merchant & Zingle, 1977; Oksanen & Hoose, 1972). In Carreiro and Schulz's (1988) national questionnaire survey, following-up Merchant and Zingle's study in 1977, elementary school counsellors were asked to rank time spent on 25 activities. Although all 10 provinces were contacted only five participated with a 67% return rate. Elementary school counsellors indicated that they wished they could do more consulting with teachers, administrators, and parents. Specific activities that showed the greatest

difference (in a negative direction) between time spent and perceived value were making presentations to staff (e.g., child abuse), meeting with parents, children, and other school workers jointly, organizing and supervising programs such as peer tutoring, observing children in classrooms, and presenting special topics to children (e.g., drug abuse). The questionnaire did not find out why counsellors were not doing what they valued most, namely consulting with adults. The researchers guessed that lack of support could be related to unrealistic expectations by others with whom they worked and an incongruence between counsellors and administrators with respect to which part of the counsellor's role was most important.

More recent American research by Ginter, Scalise, and Presse (1990) offers different results than Carreiro and Schulz's findings in the Canadian context. Unlike the majority of other studies, Ginter et al. concluded that there is not a big difference between what teachers value in school counsellors' role and what counsellors value. Over 300 Louisiana teachers answered a questionnaire surveying their perceptions of the functions of elementary school counsellors. Unfortunately, the sample was restricted to teachers working with full-time counsellors. This may have impacted greatly on the findings since these teachers and counsellors may work together extensively and the teachers would have considerable opportunities to learn about the school counsellor's role. Teachers working with full-time counsellors would be expected to be clearer about the counsellor's role. The study did agree with Wilgus and Shelley (1988), who found that teachers increasingly view counsellors in a consultant role, helping teachers learn the skills they need to provide direct services to students.



As can be seen by all but one of the studies reviewed here, elementary school counsellors have not been able to put the enhanced role into practice. The single study which found congruence between what teachers and counsellors perceive the ideal role to be and what they actually see in counsellors' practice may have been the direct effect of having a full-time counsellor in the school, resulting in more time for collaboration, understanding, and role enhancement.

### **Significance of the Study**

Today elementary school counsellors must consider all elementary students in relation to the world beyond the school environment. Schools reflect the growing problems and stresses of society. Changing family structures, increasing violence in society, and mainstreaming of special needs students are putting greater strain on the school system. As a result, there is a greater need for counsellors in the elementary school.

Attention in the form of crisis intervention is being directed towards high-risk students to curtail human loss and public costs resulting from student failure and drop-out (Miller, 1989). Researchers argue that promoting early positive development in all children is important (Bloom, 1964 and Kohlberg, La Crosse, & Ricks, 1972, cited in Miller, 1989). Developmental prevention programs seem to make more sense than waiting to remediate the problems of high-risk students which are often difficult and costly behaviours to change (Miller, 1989). Implementing the enhanced role of the elementary counsellor is seen as an important step in dealing effectively with these growing social problems.

Although counsellors' services are available in elementary schools, there is an indication that the needs of students are not being met as

effectively as educators would like. As stated earlier, much literature indicates that people seem supportive of the idea of enhancing the elementary school counsellors' role, yet implementation has not happened. If enhancing the role is important in meeting the changing needs of the school system, it is crucial that we look at ways to implement the enhanced role.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of this research are:

- (i) to ascertain whether or not there is reason to believe that B.C. educators support a proposed, expanded role for the elementary school counsellor;
- (ii) to explore whether or not it is realistic to expect an expanded elementary school counsellor's role; if so,
- (iii) to identify possible impediments to the implementation of an expanded elementary school counsellor's role; and
- (iv) to provide a set of recommendations for educators to begin implementing an enhanced elementary school counsellors' role.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The thesis is organized into four chapters: Introduction, Methodology, Presentation of Data, and Discussion and Conclusions.

This introductory chapter has explained the rationale for enhancing the role of the elementary school counsellor and examined specific issues concerning the enhanced role. Major influences on the elementary school counsellor's role were discussed, and studies that have investigated the differences between the actual and ideal enhanced role were summarized. In addition, the significance and objectives of the study were presented.

Chapter 2, "Methodology," looks at three features of the methodology used in the study. First, the rationale for using focus group interviews is explained. Second, methodological procedures are outlined, including the development of questions asked during the focus group interviews, procedures used to administer the focus group interviews, and procedures used to code the data. Finally, the process for selecting the key informants and the characteristics of the key informants is described.

Chapter 3, "Presentation of Data," summarizes the findings collected during the three focus group interviews. Support for the idea of enhancing the elementary school counsellor is presented. Qualifications and limitations to the support are explained. Impediments to implementing an enhanced role are listed. Informants' specific recommendations for enhancement are cited.

Chapter 4, "Discussion and Conclusions," discusses whether enhancing the role of the elementary school counsellor is a sound educational initiative based on the findings of this study and on the educational change and counselling literature. More specifically, the discussion analyzes why implementation of the enhanced elementary school counsellor's role is problematic, assesses whether or not the role can be implemented in light of the problems raised by informants in the study and by the literature, and makes specific recommendations for successful implementation. Five main sets of specific recommendations are suggested to deal with the impediments and the problem of limited stakeholder support. The first set of recommendations relates to lowering the pupil/counsellor ratio, the second to educating all stakeholders, the third to evaluating school counselling programs, and the fourth to advocating stronger leadership and direction at all levels of elementary education. The

final set of recommendations involves promoting time-management strategies for counsellors in their work with staff and students.

In addition to the specific recommendations, an overall implementation "tack" or approach is recommended. It is suggested that efforts to enhance the elementary counsellor's role proceed slowly, starting on a small scale within a supportive collegial climate. The chapter concludes with reporting limitations of the study and concluding remarks.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter looks at the methodology employed in the study. More specifically, three features of the methodology are explained under the following headings:

1. Focus Group Interviews;
2. Selection Process and Characteristics of Key Informants; and
3. Question Development, Administration, and Coding Procedures.

#### **Focus Group Interviews**

In this study, which was conducted in three B.C. school districts, focus group interviews were the principal data gathering device used. Borrowed from marketing research, the focus group interview is a relatively new method for gathering qualitative data in the social science field. In this section I explain the features of the focus group interview as a qualitative research method and outline the rationale for choosing this method.

#### The Nature of Focus Group Interviews

As the name suggests, a focus group interview is an interview of a group of informants with a particular focus or discussion topic. The group interview is facilitated by a moderator. Focus groups are skillful tools for discovering what informants think and the rationale behind informants' ideas (Morgan, 1988). The goal of focus group interviews is to get closer to the informants' understanding of the research topic -- not only informants' attitudes and opinions but also their personal experiences and perspectives. Personal experiences or self-reported behaviours are particularly important

because they ground the informants' remarks in discussions about actual behaviour. This interview format elicits a very rich body of data expressed in the informants' own words and context. The responses are less artificial and limited than responses obtained through survey questionnaires. Informants can elaborate upon and qualify their responses (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

Focus group interviews allow the researcher to hear the issues on which informants are prepared to challenge others, and how the challenges are received (Levy, cited in Morgan, 1988). The group interaction makes the data more easily available than through other qualitative methods because the interaction increases informant participation levels and spontaneity (Bellenger *et al.*, cited in Morgan, 1988).

Focus groups are well suited to research on attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, the research topic of this study, looking at people 's perspectives on the feasibility and support for proposed changes to the elementary school counsellor's role suggested by role enhancement, is particularly suited to this form of data collection. Participant observation and individual interviews are superior for other kinds of research. Because the researcher defines the discussion topics, focus groups are more controlled than participant observation, yet less controlled than individual interviewing because the focus group setting encourages group interaction.

#### Rationale for Focus Group Interviews

Besides being useful for seeking information about attitudes and beliefs as explained above, there are two additional reasons for using the focus group interview in educational change research:

- a) the dynamics of the group generate more information; and
- b) a lot of data can be gathered in short a time.

Both reasons provide support for choosing the focus group for this particular study.

a) Group dynamics generates more information

Focus group interviews provide opportunities for informants to react to other informants' thinking. In contrast to individual interviews and surveys, which result in collecting data from informants reflecting a single perspective, the focus group interview results in more reactive and interactive collection of data.

To understand educational change it is important to consider the perspectives of the many individuals in different roles involved (Fullan, 1991). Educational change is very complex, involving many levels from the individual in schools to the Ministries of Education and Higher Education. This study does not attempt to look at all of these levels: it focuses on the school level (through the eyes of teachers, counsellors, and administrators) and offers some inclusion of the provincial level through the BCSCA informants' perspectives. The focus group interview provides an opportunity to gather simple and concrete explanations based on the personal experiences of people in the field, which is seen as helpful in understanding educational change (Fullan, 1991). Also, the focus group interview allows informants from various levels and in various roles to have a voice and interact as a group.

(b) Much data in a short time

The focus group interview is time efficient. It provides a means to collect a great deal of data within a very short time. In the case of this study 15 informants were interviewed in three sessions of two hours each. Conducting individual interviews with 15 informants would take considerably longer. The group interview avoids duplication of responses.

Every remark need not be said individually. One informant may make a detailed comment and others can simply agree.

### **Selection Process and Characteristics of Key Informants**

In this section, three areas in the selection process will be discussed:

- a) number of focus groups;
- b) composition of the focus groups; and
- c) criteria for selecting key informants.

The following explanation of the key informants' selection process provides a picture of the key informants in the study.

#### **a) Number of focus groups**

In April, 1992 the BCSCA was asked to support a study examining the role of the elementary school counsellor. The association was interested in the project and agreed to help select and recruit school districts to take part in the study. Eventually they recommended three districts that employed BCSCA executive members. The three sites (referred to as District A, District B, and District C) are public school districts in British Columbia. Two of the sites are urban districts (Districts B and C) and one is rural (District A). District A has had elementary school counsellors for the past six years and District B and C for about 20 years. In the 1991-2 school year the pupil counsellor ratios for the three districts were between 1:1100 and 1:900, all being lower than the Ministry funded ratio of 1:1500. These three districts were chosen partly for convenience. They each employed a BCSCA executive member which was an important criterion for the study, because having informants who could provide a provincial perspective was desired. However, as their relatively low pupil/counsellor ratios indicate, these three districts are probably representative of the more supportive districts in the



province when considering issues relevant to elementary school counselling.

b) Composition of the focus groups

The superintendent or assistant superintendent of each school district was contacted by mail and informed about the nature of the study and requirements. Each district determined who within the district would select the key informants. Key informants were selected in each host district by knowledgeable people: a district counselling coordinator selected the informants in one district, a district principal of student services made the selection in another, and a member of the BCSCA executive in another.

The most important factor in deciding the composition of the focus groups was to find informants drawn from the different stakeholder populations likely to provide the most thoughtful comments on the topic. Although many people are stakeholders in elementary school education, the limited focus of my research restricted informants to those seen as primary stakeholders: elementary school teachers, school-level administrators, and counsellors. These people are best able to provide information about the possible effects of an enhanced counsellor's role on the elementary education system. Originally, my study was to include five informants at each focus group interview. It was felt that five informants would represent the roles and experiences needed to reflect the varied perspectives on the topic. The five stakeholder groups to be represented in each focus group were: elementary school teachers, novice elementary school counsellors, experienced elementary school counsellors, provincial leaders in elementary school counselling, and elementary school administrators. However, the initial focus group interview seemed unbalanced because of a relatively large ratio of counsellors to classroom

teachers. Having three counsellors represented and only one classroom teacher meant that the teachers' perspective was under represented. Thus, in the two subsequent focus group interviews an additional classroom teacher was present. I anticipated that counselling issues might differ depending on whether the teacher worked at the primary or intermediate level. Therefore, in the two remaining focus group interviews, an intermediate (teaching grades 4-7) and a primary teacher participated.

The make-up of each focus interview group is summarized as follows:

Group A: five informants -- an intermediate teacher, a novice counsellor, an experienced counsellor, a school administrator, a BCSCA executive member;

Group B: six informants -- a primary teacher, an intermediate teacher, a novice counsellor, an experienced counsellor, a school administrator, a BCSCA executive member;

Group C: five informants -- a primary teacher, an intermediate teacher, a novice counsellor, a school administrator, a BCSCA executive member (Note: the novice counsellor in this group left the focus group interview early and the experienced counsellor was not able to attend due to a job-related scheduling conflict).

The size of the focus groups in my study fell within the accepted range. The generally accepted size of a focus group is between six to ten people, but can range from a minimum size of four to a maximum size of 12 (Morgan, 1988). Smaller groups require that the informants participate more. The larger the group the more likely that "social loafing" will occur where some informants sit back quietly while the rest of the group members participate (Morgan, 1988, p. 43).

As indicated earlier, of the 17 informants who originally agreed to be part of the study, two were not able to make the scheduled interviews.

c) Criteria for selecting key informants

As previously stated, the most important selection criterion was to find informants who would provide thoughtful comments about the topic. The informants needed only to be "a good approximation of the population of interest" because generalizations about the data cannot go much beyond the focus group interviews' informants (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 20). Key informants were selected by each district on the basis of their expertise in B.C. elementary education. The following is a profile of these informants' credentials in this regard.

The two experienced counsellors in the study had an average of five years of counselling experience. One had worked as a classroom teacher for 19 years, the other had worked five years as a learning assistance teacher. One had a Master's degree in counselling psychology. The educational background of the other was unreported.

The three novice counsellors' experience in the study range from just completing their first year in the role to having completed two-and-a-half years. Of the two that were finishing their first year in the role, one had previous experience working as a counsellor in a counselling agency with minimal classroom teaching experience as a teacher-on-call; the other first-year counsellor had nine years teaching before entering elementary school counselling. The third informant had two-and-a-half years experience as an elementary school counsellor and about 20 years of teaching experience. Two had Master's degrees in counselling psychology. The third had a Master's degree in education.

The three administrators each had many years of teaching

experience and several years' administration experience. Two had been administrators for the past five years and the third for more than ten years.

The three BCSCA executive members all had Master's degrees in counselling psychology. All were currently counselling in elementary schools either on a full-time or part-time basis. Their counselling experience ranged from six to 25 years. One was working currently part-time in two roles, as a district counsellor coordinator and elementary school counsellor. Two of the BCSCA executive members had experience working as counsellors, both at the elementary and secondary levels. Two reported that they had private family counselling practices. Their teaching experiences were not reported. As leaders in the field, they all had served on the executive of the BCSCA as either president, secretary, or member-at-large. One had served for one year, another for two, and the third for five years. Their BCSCA executive level involvement has given them the opportunity to gain both a local and a provincial perspective about counselling.

Of the three intermediate regular classroom teachers in the study, one had five years of teaching experience, one had 18 years experience, and one had 20 years of experience. The intermediate teacher with 20 years teaching experience currently worked as a head teacher.

The two primary regular classroom teachers' experience ranged from 18 years to 21 years of teaching. The primary teacher with 18 years of experience currently worked as a head teacher for two years in addition to teaching.

Of the 16 informants who were present at the interviews, five were male and 12 were female. Although females dominated the study in numbers, they were evenly distributed across all the stakeholder groups

represented.

### **Question Development, Administration, and Coding Procedures**

A discussion guide consisting of questions for the focus group interviews was developed, piloted, and refined (See Appendix A: Discussion Guide Questions for a list of the questions used. Note -- Appendix B: Handout of Enhanced Role was handed out to informants to ease discussion of interview question 2). The guide provided a semi-structured agenda that was followed at each interview. The agenda, outlining the major questions, organized each interview to be conducted in the same way. In other words, the order of presenting questions remained the same for the three interviews.

#### Developing the Questions

Development of the questions for the discussion guide involved several steps. First, as the researcher, I brainstormed a list of 10 to 12 questions that I hoped my research would answer. These were based on previous counselling research (Carreiro & Schulz, 1988; Morse & Russell, 1988) and Fullan's (1991) educational change work. Then, the questions were organized into five categories:

- a) current role of the elementary school counsellor;
- b) feasibility and support for an expanded role;
- c) impediments to expanding the role;
- d) recommendations for enhancing the role; and
- e) general comments.

Next, my thesis committee members and I refined the questions. An open-ended format was agreed upon. Ten open-ended questions were selected. Probes were developed under selected questions to help informants

elaborate their responses. In some cases the probe was a simple re-wording of the question. In other cases, clarifying answers were anticipated and used as prompts to ensure that informants had not overlooked important ideas. Finally, the time required for discussing each question was estimated so the total interview time did not exceed one-and-a-half hours. The length of time generally recommended for focus group discussions is between one to two hours (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990; Morgan, 1988).

The next step, which involved two stages, was to pilot the questions. Draft questions were sent initially to the BCSCA executive for approval and comment. Once approved, the questions were piloted by the researcher with two elementary school teachers -- a special education teacher with considerable experience in intermediate teaching and a head teacher with extensive teaching experience at the primary level. The pilot meeting with the two teachers allowed the researcher to practice linking and summarizing comments made by informants, and refocussing or bringing informants back on topic when necessary. It also allowed the researcher to estimate the time needed for each question. Minor changes were made to the discussion guide. The changes included asking that responses made to the initial question be briefer and adding an additional probe to one of the questions.

### Administration Procedures

The focus group interview administration procedures fell into three sequential phases:

- a) pre-interview;
- b) interview; and
- c) post-interview.

The administration procedures followed for each phase will be

explained. Issues such as written confirmation of informants' agreement to participate in the study, the time and setting of the interviews, the role of the moderator in the interviews, a comparison of the amount of data collected from each focus group, and the structure of the follow-up individual telephone interviews will be discussed.

a) Before the focus group interviews

Prior to the focus group interviews, informants were selected by their district and asked to participate voluntarily in this study. I contacted the informants by mail, thanking them for agreeing to participate, reminding them in writing of where and when the interview was scheduled, and providing a summary of the questions to be discussed. The informants were given informed consent forms authorizing audio-taping of the focus group interview and agreeing to a follow-up individual telephone interview. Written confirmations were used as their formality implies an obligation which increases the commitment on the part of the selected informant to take part in the study (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). It should be noted that although the interviews were estimated to last a maximum of one-and-a-half hours, informants were asked to attend a two-hour meeting to compensate for delays in starting.

b) The focus group interviews

Three focus group interviews were held, one in each of the three districts. The research goal was to find out primary stakeholders' perspectives. If the interview format has structure imposed by the moderator, as few as three or four interviews are enough to find the range of possible informant responses. Once the informants' answers can be anticipated in advance by the moderator, the research is complete (Morgan, 1988).

All interviews were conducted in the informants' districts. Two focus group interviews were conducted at district teacher resource centers and the third at an elementary school. The interviews were held in late May and early June of 1992. The interviews were scheduled mid-week, shortly after regular school hours. Light refreshments were provided.

To maintain consistency among the interviews, I acted as the moderator in all three focus group interviews. The informants and I were seated around a table; name tags were worn to help establish initial rapport and increase group identity and cohesiveness (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990); informants were provided with a written agenda for the focus group interview (See Appendix C: Agenda).

The focus group interviews were audio-taped using individual microphones, a microphone mixer, and a tape recorder. Informants' initial participation with the interview and audio equipment was eased by asking informants to indicate their name, their current role, and a little about their background experiences in education.

The meetings followed the discussion guide questions previously outlined in this chapter. At the outset of each interview I outlined the importance of hearing each informant's perspectives backed up with personal experiences. My primary role, as moderator, was to link and summarize informants' responses, clarify whether or not there was consensus on topics, and refocus only if informants strayed too far from the discussion guide questions. In addition, I kept a written record of the points made by informants that related to the discussion guide but happened to be raised out of order. Later, at an appropriate time in the interview, I raised the points again for further discussion.

The length of the focus group interviews fell within the accepted



range. The first interview was one-and-three-quarters of an hour, the second lasted two hours, and the third was one-and-a-quarter hours. The third meeting was substantially shorter than the first for several reasons: (i) the meeting had to be rescheduled; (ii) the rescheduled meeting started late due to previous commitments of some informants; (iii) one person was not able to attend the rescheduled meeting; (iv) one person had to leave early; and (iv) some people at the meeting expressed being tired.

c) After the focus group interviews

Once the focus group interviews were completed individual follow-up interviews were conducted by the moderator. A short follow-up individual interview via the telephone within two-to-four weeks of the focus group discussion was used to counteract the potential reluctance of some informants to disclose personal opinions in a group setting and to allow the researcher to pursue subsequent questions after completing a preliminary analysis of the data.

In the follow-up individual interviews conducted via the telephone, I thanked the informants for participating in the study and asked if they had given further thought to the focus group interview. Asking the same open-ended question of all informants allowed them to respond either in terms of the topics raised by the discussion or the conditions of the interview itself. For example, they could either add thoughts they had about expanding the role of the elementary school counsellor, reiterate ideas they felt were most important, or comment on the level of personal comfort they felt in the group interview.

The data collected in the individual follow-up telephone interviews were incorporated into the results only if they added to or changed the results gathered at the focus group interview. In some cases, for example,

comments made in the focus group interview were elaborated upon and clarified in the individual interview. That additional information was combined with the rest of the results.

Eleven out of the 16 informants were contacted for an individual interview within the preferred two-week period following the focus group interview. Three informants were contacted within three weeks of their interviews. One informant could not be reached until after the school year ended. The informant who left mid-interview was not contacted because he had missed the important later parts of the discussion.

### Coding and Transcribing of Data

#### a) Transcribing data

The focus group interviews were transcribed and coded for analysis. The transcribing was completed by a former court recorder, skilled at transcribing tapes, and who also was familiar with the educational language used in the taped interviews. Forty-one pages of transcribed data were collected from the first focus group interview, 50 pages were collected from the second focus group, and 26 pages from the third. The second group interview produced the most data because, unlike the other two interviews, six informants were present for the entire interview. Hand-written notes were made of the telephone interviews.

#### b) Coding of transcribed data

The original transcripts were coded first by district. This was done by photocopying the original transcripts on different coloured paper. The next step was to organize the results according to codes that reflected the four main topics in the discussion guide. The codes were C (current role), O (opinions about the idea of the expanded role), I (impediments to an expanded role), and R (recommendations for implementation of an

expanded role). In addition, S was used as a code to identify responses related to the anticipated support for the expanded role. Each comment or talking turn was coded in the margin with C, O, I, R, or S. On occasion, comments deserved several codes, in which case all codes were recorded in the margin beside the comment. Additional copies of the multi-coded comments were made. The coded sections of the transcripts, falling into the various categories, were cut out and sorted on long sheets of paper, each one representing one of the five codes (C, O, I, R or S). This was done separately for each district's data.

At this point both double-coding by the researcher and an inter-rater reliability check was done. The researcher double-coded the transcripts as a reliability check for internal consistency. Ten pages, randomly selected from the transcripts, were coded and then checked by recoding and comparing results. Code-recode consistencies of over 90% were expected and obtained before analysis was continued (Miles & Huberman, 1984). In addition, an inter-rater reliability check was made. Ten percent of the transcribed data was coded by another rater. This was done by asking a graduate student to assign the codes C, O, I, R, or S to six pages from each district's transcribed data. The rater was instructed to use more than one code to represent comments if the comments seemed to fit more than one category. Inter-rater reliability of 84% was achieved after this single attempt at coding. Unfortunately, due to researcher inexperience, the second rater was not provided with clear criteria for categorizing the data. This resulted in a reliability percentage that is slightly below the expected levels. The literature suggests that for the initial rating, a 70% inter-rater reliability is acceptable (Miles & Huberman, 1984). However, after repeated tries, 90% reliability should be attained.

Coding was done on the naturally occurring responses that informants made or talking turns. Sometimes talking turns were single words; at other times, they were paragraphs. Only the parts of the transcripts relevant to the research questions were coded.

Further analysis was done to find themes within the initial codes of C, O, I, R or S. Marginal remarks, made while the first coding was done, helped determine additional codes. For example, "putting out fires" was a metaphor repeatedly used to describe the current role of the elementary school counsellor. The metaphor was noted and used as a theme later. Under the category of impediments, "time" was identified as a dominant recurring theme. Marginal notes were made beside the comments. All comments related to time were sorted together, then pasted on large sheets of paper. This was done with other dominant themes. Reorganizing the data in this way allowed dominant themes to be more apparent. In effect, the sorting created a bar graph of each district's important issues. Comparisons among districts were made to see if any profound differences existed. If no differences were found among districts, the findings were amalgamated.

More subtle themes were found by looking through the sorted transcripts a third time. This was done by looking at the themes raised and clustering them into sub-groups. For instance, "Support" was used as an initial code. Once coded, other sub-codes or sub-themes emerged. "Support" was further clustered into "support in principle", "limited support," and "qualifications that limited support." "Qualifications that limited support" was broken into finer sub-themes such as "valuing counsellors," "perceived quality of counsellors," and "teacher and counsellor resistance and insecurity." Once the sub-themes were found another scan was made of

transcripts to see if any comments had been overlooked that might fit into the new sub-themes.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **PRESENTATION OF DATA**

This chapter summarizes the data collected during the three focus group interviews. The major findings are discussed under the headings:

1. Elementary School Counsellor's Current Role;
2. Support for the Enhanced Role;
3. Impediments to Enhancing the Role; and
4. Recommendations for Implementing an Enhanced Role.

Verbatim statements have been used to illustrate informants' perspectives, but the informants', districts', and schools' names have been deleted to preserve the anonymity of the informants.

The interviews seemed to digress naturally at times from one topic to another in spite of the discussion guide and topic questions that were followed. Therefore, although the summaries of the informants' comments have been coded under one heading, the comments may have occurred at various times throughout the interviews. Reference is made to the timing of the comments within the context of the interview only where I felt such an explanation was warranted. Few differences were found among opinions expressed by the *focus groups*. Differences are noted when significant, otherwise agreement among district groups, stakeholder groups, or both may be assumed.

Major or dominant themes, emerging under the above mentioned headings, were determined based either on the number of stakeholders who offered similar comments or on the emphatic tone of the stakeholders. In other words, if an idea recurred throughout an interview or among groups, it was viewed as a dominant theme. If stakeholders intensely supported

each others' comments, the theme was also categorized as dominant.

### **Elementary School Counsellor's Current Role**

Although it is difficult to summarize the complete range of perspectives represented by the informants' remarks, the comments dealing with the counsellor's current role highlight three major themes: (i) proactive ideal of the enhanced role, (ii) reactive reality of the current role, and (iii) evidence of some attempts to bridge the gap between ideal role and actual current role.

Two dominant themes center on the proactive enhanced role of elementary school counsellors as opposed to the reactive reality of the current role. The ideal of an enhanced role characterized elementary school counsellors as proactive and balancing their time between counselling, consulting, coordinating, and educational duties. However, all informants described the reality of elementary school counselling today as an extremely reactive job, where counsellors constantly react to crises and seldom, if ever, have time for the consulting and educational parts of their role.

On one hand, the proactive enhanced view portrayed the elementary school counsellor's job as multifaceted. The duties that should be performed by elementary school counsellors in schools were reported to include:

- establishing rapport with teachers, students, and parents to build a close working relationship;
- providing support to the school staff;
- counselling individuals and groups;
- acting as a liaison among the school, parents, and community agencies to inter-connect the services;
- prioritizing school needs to help determine a school focus (i.e.,

- improving school climate);
- educating teachers about guidance programs; and
- leading parent groups.

The second theme was the reactive reality of the school counsellor's current role. All informants reported throughout the interviews that the counsellor's major duty was to do remedial crisis work. The key image that typified the elementary school counsellor's job was "putting out flash fires" and "crisis intervention."

A final theme surfaced. Although a large proportion of an elementary school counsellor's time is taken up with crisis intervention, at least some counsellors attempt to work in the proactive enhanced role:

In our school I can see that this concept [the enhanced role] is actually being implemented. (administrator)

I am able to address some of each of these three areas [counselling, consulting and co-ordinating, and educating]. (experienced counsellor)

They [my staff] want counselling, they want consulting and coordinating and they want education. This is what I strive for. (novice counsellor)

A lot of people at my school think -- [the counsellor] is just exceptional and she does all these things [enhanced role duties] and she is exceptional. (administrator)

The difference between the proactive enhanced role and the counsellors' attempts to work in the enhanced role seemed to be the amount of time that counsellors devoted to each of the four areas: counselling, consulting, coordinating, and educating. Although the proactive, preventative work was listed as important by all informants, minimal time was devoted to it.

It should be noted that in several cases counsellors reported all three



perspectives as true for them. These counsellors seemed to contradict themselves. At one point in the interview these counsellors stated they did all the duties associated with the enhanced role. Later in the interview the same counsellors stated they were basically remedial crisis workers and, later still, they said they "attempted" to follow the duties outlined in the enhanced role. Throughout the interviews experienced counsellors said they did "bits and pieces" of the enhanced role. One said counsellors were "doing a lot of it [the enhanced role]." One experienced counsellor expressed concern about the term "expanded or enhanced" role. She said, "It [the expanded/enhanced role] is what exists." A feeling of being criticized for not doing enough and feeling other educators lacked understanding or knowledge about what she does was conveyed through her remarks. The BCSCA executive member reminded the experienced counsellor that for many counsellors the role would be an expansion, "an extreme expansion." It appeared that counsellors differ in their abilities to perform the services outlined in the enhanced role. There are some who try very hard to cover all the bases and others who do not. More about the quality of counsellors will be addressed later in the chapter.

Three of the teachers viewed counsellors as currently doing strictly remedial crisis work. Two saw some counsellors attempting to perform the enhanced role. For administrators, the same was true. All three saw their own counsellors attempting the enhanced role. One administrator expressed doubt that many other counsellors were as successful as her counsellor is in performing the enhanced role.

### **Support for the Enhanced Role**

When asked to consider the idea of enhancing the elementary school

counsellor's role, opinions revealed two contradictory themes. On one level, almost all informants were optimistic and expressed enthusiastic support for the idea in principle; on a second level, many informants expressed pragmatic doubts about enhancing the role.

On the first level, all but one informant overwhelmingly expressed support for the idea of enhancing the role of the elementary school counsellor. The idea is a hard one to "knock," as it is almost a Utopian description of what elementary counsellors should do. The following quotes indicate the high level of enthusiasm for an enhanced role:

I love the idea of an expanded role. (administrator)

Yes, I think we, as counsellors, would really like that [an enhanced role]. (novice counsellor)

I think it [an enhanced role] would be wonderful. (intermediate teacher)

I think if every counsellor in the province did these things [referring to the role description, Appendix B], it would be wonderful. (BCSCA executive member)

Experienced counsellors expressed their support in nods of agreement when the question of personal support was asked. The informants representing other roles tended to speak in favour of enhancing the role.

Informants provided additional information in several cases to elaborate on their positive responses. Several teachers' rationale for supporting role enhancement was explained as a way to deal with the increasing number of children who are "having difficulties" in schools. There was a recognition of current needs in schools not being met and seeing the enhanced role as a way to meet those needs. A BCSCA executive member wholeheartedly agreed with the idea of an enhanced role for

elementary school counsellors, yet, she qualified her response by saying that the enhanced role in action would likely have a different look in different schools. In addition, a novice counsellor reported that this enhanced role was what she thought she was currently supposed to do. What was expected of her, as an elementary school counsellor, seemed to be clearly laid out for her by the district counselling coordinator and other experienced counsellors. An experienced counsellor in another focus group voiced the same expectation of herself.

The following comments reflect the general support perspective:

From my experience the teachers on staff and the administrators on our staff have always cried out that we haven't got enough counsellors because their services are so valuable. (primary teacher)

I think they [district administration staff] would like to expand counselling time. They are in the realities of the budgets and the many demands there are for budget allocations. I think there is a feeling that they would expand the time if they could. (BCSCA executive member)

We've spent a lot of time writing up this job description, so I think everybody [counsellors] is supportive of it. The counsellors that I've worked with were certainly supportive of it. (BCSCA executive member)

Counsellors unanimously adopted the expanded role at our general meeting, the BCTF endorsed it. (BCSCA executive member)

Although informants were very supportive in principle when asked in general terms about the elementary school counsellor's enhanced role, they were less positive when asked directly, "Are we asking too much of counsellors to expect this ideal role out of counsellors?" In this latter case the general feeling was that too much was being expected of counsellors. At this second level, pragmatism was evident in the informants' responses. A vast number of impediments were viewed as standing in the way of implementing the enhanced role. As one intermediate teacher said in

conclusion, "I think it's a terrific proposal, whether it can work or not, I'm not sure." The comment is illustrative of the qualified endorsement given by most of the informants.

#### Limits to Stakeholders' Support

Informants were asked to speculate on how other educational stakeholders generally might react to the proposed enhanced role. General stakeholders, who were identified as people directly affected by the proposal policy to change the elementary school counsellor's role, were seen to represent two groups: (i) primary stakeholders, such as elementary school counsellors, teachers, administrators; and (ii) secondary stakeholders such as students, parents, school boards, district administration staff, university training programs, and the Ministry of Education. It should be noted that, with the exception of students, direct reference was made to all general stakeholder groups by the informants during the interviews. The impact that elected school boards could have on expanding the counsellor's role was mentioned by only one informant.

Several themes emerged suggesting that general stakeholder support for an enhanced role was limited. The overall impression was a "Yes, but" tone to the discussion. Most comments could be separated into two clearly defined categories: (i) general support and (ii) qualified or limited support.

Informants anticipated general, across-the-board support for the enhanced counsellor's role from people working directly in the schools such as teachers, counsellors, and administrators. Support was anticipated also from most parents, some district administration staffs, and some elected school boards. The explanation offered as to why some groups would support and others would not support the enhanced role hinged on whether the group valued counselling. More will be said about this later in the

chapter. The help from university training programs was anticipated to be limited. At best, support in principle was what the informants expected from the Ministry of Education.

### Qualifications that Limit Support

Eight factors were reported as tempering or qualifying stakeholders' support for the enhanced role. They included the following:

- a) perceived value of counsellors;
- b) perceived quality of counsellors;
- c) teacher and counsellor insecurity;
- d) parents' cultural values;
- e) funding variations from district to district;
- f) low district priority;
- g) confusion about the Ministry's position regarding the role; and
- h) eroded university support.

Each of the qualification factors will be discussed. (Sub-themes that emerged will also be presented.)

#### a) Perceived value of counsellors

Individual stakeholders' valuing of elementary school counselling was reported to be a determining factor in their support for the enhanced role. People who do not support the current work of counsellors are unlikely to support the notion of an enhanced role:

The counsellor's service has to be valued and given the full support necessary to implement expanded the programs.  
(administrator)

I was talking to an assistant superintendent in another district and, I mean, his view is you don't need counsellors in school. It is a real frill. (administrator)

The resource is not always seen as valuable. (experienced

counsellor)

Lack of knowledge about what counsellors actually do or are supposed to do, personal disagreement with what counsellors do in their work (e.g., disagreement about whether personal growth counselling has a place in schools), and previous experiences with inadequate counselling services are least three factors that appear to contribute to stakeholders' lack of valuing counsellors' work.

b) Perceived quality of counsellors

Another factor is the perceived quality of counsellors. If stakeholders perceive counsellors to be incompetent or lazy, then support for an enhanced role is likely to be limited:

Well, I don't know, I really think it depends on your counsellor. Before I went to -- School I didn't have much use for counsellors at all. (administrator)

Again, I think it's the quality of the counsellor. You know, our parents would certainly support the increase because they see the value and the worth. (BCSCA executive member)

[Support depends on] whether families you're dealing with have had a series of bad experiences with counselling people. (primary teacher)

One experienced counsellor referred to a perception, held by some teachers and administrators, that counsellors are lazy:

If during class time I don't have students with me, I'm not doing what's expected. There's the thought I'm not working. (experienced counsellor)

Several informants in one group reported that many districts have some counsellors who were resistant to making changes in their role because they are afraid:

I think some people [counsellors] don't [keep up with changes], some people are just looking forward to retirement and they do as little

as possible and they shuffle paper and they don't see kids and they don't see parents and they are terrified of teachers, so, that's the reality. (BCSCA executive member)

c) Teacher and counsellor insecurity

A third qualifying factor was insecurity. One informant reported a counsellor competence issue that is somewhat related to the insecurity factor. According to the informant, counsellors frequently report feeling incompetent. Counsellors work independently, isolated from other colleagues. Counsellors seldom receive direct feedback about the job they are doing. As a result, they are "never quite sure that they are meeting the needs of the school" (BCSCA executive member). Encouragement to work in the enhanced role is lacking because of the isolation of the job. Counsellors are left not knowing what to enhance or how to evaluate whether what they are enhancing is working. This insecurity and self-doubt limits the support they can give to the enhanced role themselves.

A couple of counsellors mentioned insecurity with respect to some teachers. Teachers prefer to "work [alone] behind closed doors" because "it is a reflection on their ability to deal with their class if they seek help." Thus, classroom teachers insecurity may impact on their support for an enhanced role because of its implications for their collaboration with others in ways they may find threatening.

d) Parents' cultural values

A factor viewed as limiting parental support for the enhanced role by one focus group was parents' cultural values. Two counsellors in one focus group emphasized how difficult it was for some new Canadian families to take advantage of school counselling services. Two counsellors in one focus group explained this view. They felt that some new Canadians' cultural

values inhibited them from working with counsellors due to strong feelings that family matters should be kept within the family.

e) Funding variations from district to district

A "some or none" factor surfaced when district administration staff's support was considered. It appeared that the BCSCA executive felt that lowering the pupil/counsellor ratio was very important in determining the success of implementing an enhanced counsellor's role. BCSCA executive members in all groups reported that districts showed either some financial support or none at all for lowering the pupil/counsellor ratio. In districts who showed funding support to reduce the ratio, the support was not viewed as being enough to make a significant difference in counselling services. The BCSCA executive members reported that, although their districts staffed counsellors beyond what the Ministry provided funds for, the additional staffing was not enough to make a significant difference in the level of counselling in their districts. BCSCA executive members also indicated that district administration support was not consistent across the province. Many districts used Ministry funds allocated for counselling for other purposes, resulting in high pupil-counsellor ratios.

f) Low district priority

Related to high pupil-counsellor ratios was lack of understanding about how staffing formulas are made at the district level. One teacher expressed her frustration that counselling was not given the same priority in her district as other support services:

I think it is astounding that we have a full-time SLD [severe learning disabled resource] person, a three day a week LA [learning assistance teacher], and two full-time ESL [English as a second language teachers] people, and we have a counsellor for just two days a week. I can't understand why the priorities are not there. It drives me crazy! (intermediate teacher)



#### g) Confusion about the Ministry's position

Another factor that became apparent was confusion about where the Ministry of Education stands with respect to support for the enhanced role. A couple of BCSCA executive members reported two differing perspectives about Ministry support. One member reported that the Ministry was generally supportive of enhancing the role. However, the major reasons for the Ministry withholding full support was lack of Ministerial leadership and anticipated administration problems associated with implementing the policy change. The other informant reported that the Ministry was not supportive of enhancing the counsellor's role at all. The evidence for the second perspective lay in the fact that the Ministry did not insist on a province-wide policy with respect to school counsellor credentials or strictly enforce minimum pupil-counsellor ratios.

#### h) Eroded university support

A final sub-theme that emerged from the interviews was one of eroded support. Erosion was related directly to university training programs. Three aspects of the university programs raised in the interviews related to the specific course content, course availability problems in rural districts, and the general direction of university programs.

Although the universities provide training programs for school counsellors, a couple of informants (a novice counsellor and a BCSCA executive member) reported that the programs do not adequately support the new proposed role description with appropriate course content.

Course availability was raised as a problem by a BCSCA executive member in one of the urban focus groups. Having universities send professors to rural districts to teach counselling psychology courses was

one specific suggestion made. Informants in the rural district did not express as strong a concern for lack of course availability. They said increasing the availability of courses would be wonderful. However, they admitted that they have already seen gradual improvement. For example, both Knowledge Network and Open Learning Agency (the correspondence courses) now offer more courses to rural district teachers interested in counselling.

In addition, one BCSCA executive member reported that university training programs were moving away from training school counsellors and towards training general community therapists. Lack of joint leadership from the relevant ministries was given as the reason for the erosion of university training programs. It seems that the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education do not collaborate effectively in developing a program addressing the needs of elementary school counselling in the province. For example, universities are not preparing the number of school counsellors needed for the enhanced role. The lack of sufficient numbers of trained school counsellors is one of the reasons the Ministry of Education is reluctant to adopt a policy in support of the enhanced role.

### **Impediments to Enhancing the Role**

There were two levels of support for enhancing the elementary school counsellor's role: (i) glowing support in principle and (ii) soft support for implementation in actual practice. It is particularly important to consider the impact of soft support in light of impediments described by the informants. Although people were overwhelmingly in favour of the idea of enhancing the role, the "Yes, but" attitude, which was accompanied by a litany of impediments to implementation, makes one wonder if enhancing

the role is realistic.

Although the list of impediments was extensive, major impeding themes became evident (by the frequency with which they were mentioned throughout the interviews and the level of frustration with which informants spoke about them). When the topic of "Impediments" was raised, three themes were mentioned first and most emphatically by the informants. As well, these impediments were alluded to throughout the interviews by many informants in each of the represented districts:

- a) lack of time;
- b) excessive demands; and
- c) high pupil-counsellor ratios.

Other impediments were reported with less frequency and generally with lower levels of frustration. Occasionally, a high level of frustration was expressed about other impediments but these other impediments were not expressed frequently. For example, low district priority and high counsellor turn-over was reported with great frustration but by only a couple of informants in two of the interviews. Among the less widely-held impediments reported were:

- d) inequitable distribution of counsellors;
- e) counsellor assignment;
- f) high counsellor turn-over;
- g) lack of knowledge;
- h) unresolved implementation issues; and
- i) inadequate facilities.

The findings related to each of the major and lesser impediments will be reported separately. At times it was difficult to separate the impediments. For example, although informants spoke most fervently

about the lack of time, excessive demands, and poor pupil-counsellor ratios, all three problems directly impact on each other.

a) Lack of time

Lack of time was clearly one of the major impediments expressed by the informants. When asked about impediments to enhancing the elementary school counsellor's role, the first factor that informants mentioned was the lack of time. The following sequence of short, rapid responses typified the unanimous feeling about this factor. When asked about impediments, a BCSCA executive member responded immediately with, "Time!" A novice counsellor repeated quickly, "Time!" An administrator chimed in, "Absolutely!" And the BCSCA executive member finished with, "Probably the most important one."

I think the biggest impediment to do my job is time. (novice counsellor)

I think we're [administrators are] always asking for more time, demanding more time [for counselling]. (administrator)

The focus group interviews showed that lack of time meant more than just not enough counsellor time in schools. A number of sub-themes became apparent.

Informants reported that lack of time affected the quality of consultation with staff members. Consultation time was limited by the excessive demands on teachers and counsellors, and by restraints of timetabling and staffing procedures. The only times that teachers and counsellors can meet are during recess and lunch breaks, and before and after school on the days when the counsellor is at that school. Often that time is interrupted and rushed.

When you catch them [teachers], a minute here, five minutes there and it's very difficult. Teachers are busy and overwhelmed at times. As a counsellor you are reluctant to ask more of them. (experienced counsellor)

Staffing of counsellors often interfered with consultation time.

Informants in all the focus groups reported that it was not uncommon for counsellors to work in as many as three schools, sometimes even more:

A counsellor in three schools... Lunch time is often travel time. You lose time you might be collaborating or consulting with teachers just to get from school A to school B. (BCSCA executive member)

Additional fall-out from the lack of time was a theme of resentment and a desire to hoard a counsellor's time in a school:

If you leave one of your schools before lunch time they are likely to feel they've been gypped from some of your time. That in itself is an impediment. (BCSCA executive member)

One administrator admitted a reluctance to allow her counsellor to leave her school to attend professional development meetings because the time the counsellor spent in the school was so valuable. Being placed at several schools raised questions about how professional development time should be spent -- with school staffs or with the district counsellors' group? This impacts on another sub-theme, that of rapport, which will be considered later when discussing counsellor turn-over.

#### b) Excessive demands

As stated previously, one informant was initially skeptical about the reality of enhancing the elementary school counsellor's role. He said that current demands on educators are so great that to ask more of teachers and counsellors, as the enhanced role proposal suggests, seemed "absolutely onerous." Excessive demands on the counsellor was a recurring theme echoed by many other informants at different points during the interviews. The fear of counsellor burnout was mentioned frequently by all informants.

The following phrases were used to express concern for counsellor burnout: "overburdened," "responsible for too many things," "problems are getting more complex," "counselling's an overwhelming problem," "it's impossible," "a tremendously large job," "so frustrating," "I'm swamped," "extremely frustrating," "the demands are so great," and "stretched-to-the-limit." These phrases illustrate how counsellors' day-to-day tasks are viewed by school personnel and why the idea of adding more to an already impossible task seems overwhelming.

A sense of "being robbed" was another sub-theme related to the excessive demands of remedial crisis work in schools. A number of informants in various roles expressed concern that the excessive demands of the crisis work was "robbing time" or taking time away from performance of the enhanced role's other responsibilities:

The problems seem to be becoming more severe and there seem to be a larger number of children who have troubling lives. Eighteen years ago we did a lot more prevention. I was in the classroom doing a lot of classroom meetings, doing fun things with kids. (BCSCA executive member)

Informants reported that remedial crisis work posed two problems: (i) it took time away from the enhanced role duties that counsellors were already skilled at, and (b) it limits counsellors' time to acquire and practice additional skills needed for the enhanced role.

c) High pupil-counsellor ratio

A third, important major impediment centered on pupil-counsellor ratios. The ratios were viewed definitely as being too high and the source of many problems associated with enhancing the counsellor's role.

Informants stated that what counsellors are able to accomplish depends on how large their pupil/counsellor ratio is. The more students that the

counsellor has to service, the more restriction on the counsellor's ability to enhance the role. The impact of high pupil/counsellor ratios on enhancing the role of the elementary school counsellor will be discussed at length later.

d) Inequitable distribution of counsellors

Another impediment mentioned was that counsellor resources are not always equally distributed across districts. Informants in a two of the focus groups reported that sometimes several "high needs" schools are serviced by the same counsellor. The result is excessive demand for the counsellor. In one group there was debate surrounding the definition of a "high needs" school. The definition was not as clear for one administrator as it was for counsellors in the same district. In fact, the administrator sounded resentful that administrators had to make cases for their schools to be designated a "high needs" school in order to get adequate support staff.

e) Counsellor assignment

Associated with inequitable distribution of counsellors was the theme of counsellor assignment. One group of informants debated about this issue for some time in their interview. The overall impression was that counsellors often are not assigned to schools to meet specific needs. In other words, a counsellor's strengths are not matched to a school's needs. The result is that some schools end up with counsellors who are not able to meet their school's needs as well as other counsellors in the district.

f) Counsellor turn-over

A fourth impediment was the practice of counsellors changing schools from year-to-year. Informants stressed the importance of having counsellors stay at one school for several years in order to build good working relationships with students, staff, and parents. Unless a

counsellor has a rapport with the school community, support will be limited:

We've had three counsellors in three years. That affects the role ... because it's been different personalities. I haven't got very involved with the counsellor in the last two years. (intermediate teacher)

[Without counsellors being in a school for some time] you just don't form a relationship or at least a really good working relationship, the way it could be. (primary teacher)

g) Lack of knowledge

In a variety of forms, lack of knowledge was raised as an impediment theme. The most troubling form was lack of counsellors' knowledge. Several informants expressed concern that some counsellors did not have the skills required to work in the enhanced role. The predominant emphasis on crisis intervention results in counsellors' skill practice being mostly in that area. As well, an administrator alluded to lack of knowledge on the part of colleagues. Some administrators tend to use counsellors one way because they do not know of more appropriate ways. Administrators may use reactive counselling rather than a more proactive counselling merely because they do not know of the available options. For example, administrators may choose to resolve conflicts between a couple of students through one or two group counselling sessions with the counsellor rather than having the counsellor teach conflict resolution strategies to all teachers and students, despite the fact that the latter strategy is more time-efficient and builds greater student independence in the long run.

h) Unresolved implementation issues

Another impediment was lack of direction for implementation, both at the individual counsellor level and at school, district, and Ministry levels. Some counsellors in this study admitted that they often lacked direction at



the individual level. In their current role a couple of counsellors expressed that competing demands by so many different people made it hard to prioritize them:

I find myself in a sea of "Where do I go from here?" (experienced counsellor)

I try to cope with all the different demands that everybody else seems to have. (novice counsellor)

It seems that even when a counsellor wants to implement the enhanced role, the competing demands cloud the counsellor's vision about how to go about it.

A lack of clarity about how to proceed with implementation of the enhanced role at the school and district level was also apparent. All informants debated amongst themselves questions such as "How are schools and districts going to implement the new role with respect to curriculum questions and time scheduling questions?", "What about specific skills that need upgrading or additional practice?", and "How about taking a new look at how staffing is done in schools?"

Related to the lack of direction theme and unresolved implementation issues was discussion about the implications of the enhanced role on teachers and counsellors in terms of learning new skills to meet the changing curriculum, specifically the Year 2000's Learning for Living (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 1990b). There was some controversy as how best to address the challenge of acquiring new skills. Some informants expressed it as an "all or none" venture. In other words, some informants felt total school commitment was essential. If everyone in a school was not "on board" the changes could not possibly occur:

We have to be willing to either take the time to learn about it (the enhanced role) ... if we are not willing to support it, then it is, you

know, going to break down. (intermediate teacher)

At a simpler level, commitment could mean having a common school counselling focus:

[We need to teach] a common language throughout the school so that if the teacher, as you say, is doing a lot of the counselling in the classroom, but there is a common language so that, whether it be social skills or conflict resolution or whatever, it's happening throughout the school. (novice counsellor)

Another informant felt the change process could be more gradual. By successfully implementing it with a few teachers at a time, the change would "catch on."

I think this whole issue even for the whole province doesn't have to necessarily have to start with the whole province... I don't always think we have to have everyone involved... I think you can start in certain areas in the school and work it almost like, you know, like pilot projects. (primary teacher)

#### j) Inadequate facilities

Inadequate facilities was one final area of concern reported by informants. Informants reported that it was not uncommon for elementary school counsellors to work in "the boiler room," "book rooms," "nurses' rooms," "staffrooms," "a cubby hole," or "on stages behind curtains from P.E." The lack of adequate facilities limits what counsellors can do. For instance, informants reported that the size of the allocated counselling space often determined whether or not group counselling services could be provided in a school. Not only was space a problem, but so was not having a private place to have a telephone conversation and lack of essential equipment, such as locking filing cabinets to store confidential materials.

Counsellors' frustration with having to put their time and energy towards obtaining essential equipment and adequate facilities was voiced by one informant who said, "When you are trying to help the sexually abused

child, it's hard to be also fighting for a filing cabinet."

Four reasons were cited for the inadequate facilities: (i) support staff have to compete for work space because of more itinerant teachers in schools due to mainstreaming; (ii) schools are generally overcrowded; (iii) most schools were built before counselling services were part of the school system; and (iv) difficulty in determining whether the school or the district is responsible for purchasing equipment.

### **Recommendations for Implementing an Enhanced Role**

A number of solutions were offered to deal with the impediments to role enhancement. Among the solutions recommended were:

- a) lower the pupil-counsellor ratio;
- b) educate general stakeholders;
- c) evaluate school counselling programs;
- d) provide stronger leadership and direction; and
- e) promote time management by counsellors, teachers and administrators.

Collectively, the recommendations covered all levels of the education system from the individual teacher, administrator, and counsellor to the Ministry. The general feeling was that changes at all the levels at the same time would be the best way for the implementation process to work.

#### **a) Lower the pupil-counsellor ratio**

The single dominant theme that presented itself throughout the interviews was the need for full-time counsellors. All three focus groups insisted repeatedly that counsellors would have to be staffed at elementary schools on a full-time basis for the enhanced role to become a reality.

The current pupil-counsellor ratio funded by the Ministry is one

elementary school counsellor for every 1500 students. Some informants felt that, even if the goal of full-time counsellors in every elementary school was not immediately feasible, reducing the ratio significantly would help to enhance the role. All three districts represented by this study staff counsellors at reduced ratios (between the 1:1100 and 1:900 range). As previously stated, although these ratios were below the Ministry level, these levels were not regarded as significant enough to make a real difference in counselling services. Informants felt the reduction in the ratios must be much greater. Informants from two different focus groups suggested either lowering the ratios to 1:500 or 1:250, or sharing counsellors in at most two schools. (The population of an average elementary school is between 250 and 350 students.)

Despite the advantages, one experienced counsellor suggested a possible detrimental side effect arising from single school placements for counsellors. The informant felt that some counsellors are leery of being assigned to one school because of a fear of counsellor burnout. Assignment to one school traps the counsellor into facing the same on-going crises day-after-day. By going to another school on alternating days counsellors get a bit of a reprieve in that they face new crises and have a break from the old ones.

Support for full-time counsellors in elementary schools was found in a pilot program reported by counsellors in one district. The pilot, involving staffing full-time counsellors in several elementary schools within the district, is being tried out in the fall of 1992.

b) Educate general stakeholders

Informants felt education about counselling would need to occur at all levels in the B.C. public school system. Specific suggestions were made

to meet the educational needs of each stakeholder group. The specific suggestions are made regarding the education of the following stakeholders: teachers, counsellors, school-based administrators, students, parents, school boards, and taxpayers.

Informants felt teachers would need to learn classroom management strategies that fit philosophically with the new curriculum. Two teachers in two different focus groups recommended that teachers learn counselling techniques for use in classrooms. One teacher said that the Year 2000 implicitly advocated counselling in the classroom through curricula like "Learning for Living" (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 1990b). The other teacher suggested that regular classroom teachers who showed special "counselling" skills take mini-counselling or diploma courses. They would become additional "counselling" support people in schools.

Counsellors would need to educate staffs about the four parts of their role (counselling, coordinating, consulting, and educating) to overcome the perception of "I'm not working if I don't have kids with me." Educating staffs could include being on staff meeting agendas and speaking briefly to staffs several times throughout the school year about counselling in the school.

One teacher raised a side issue about problems with inservice for classroom teachers. He cautioned that too much inservice is a danger because it puts the responsibility for change into the hands of experts. In his experience, he has seen teachers view costly inservice as "worthless." Teachers feel obligated to attend the workshops but do not apply the skills or information they learn.

Counsellors who had been primarily doing remedial crisis work may need upgrading in skills they have not used in quite some time if they were

to work in an enhanced capacity. For example, several informants discussed a new skill or demand that involved counsellors' and teachers' working closely together as "co-therapists." The counsellor explained that acting in a co-therapist role involves teacher and counsellor co-counselling students. With permission of the students, the teacher would be present during the students' counselling session. The counsellor would lead the session. This kind of counselling allows the counsellor to demonstrate counselling skills to teachers.

Specific areas needing many teachers' and counsellors' attention would be additional training and knowledge about integrating special needs children into regular classrooms and staying current with societal problems reflected in schools.

Some administrators would need to learn to use counsellors in new, more effective ways. An example of administrators using counsellors in a different way was suggested by one of the administrator informants. As explained earlier, some administrators traditionally solve conflicts with students by using individual counselling. However, as pointed out in the previous reference, conflict resolution need not only be an individual counselling goal but could be a whole school focus.

Educating students about the service counsellors provide was also seen as important. For example, one primary teacher valued her counsellor making a classroom visit to explain to her students the counsellor role.

The informants recommended education in the form of public relations to promote public support for the elementary school counsellor's enhanced role. The public relations would need to address family values that currently inhibit families from seeking counselling and would mean a "real selling job" for parents who have had previous bad experiences with

counsellors. Specific suggestions for parent public relations were:

- educate the parent community about the preventative focus of elementary school counselling to defray possible public misconceptions that counselling is strictly for personal self growth and has no place in schools;
- send home school newsletters with notes from the school counsellor (e.g., common parenting problems addressed by the counsellor);
- have school counsellors attend parent advisory meetings to speak about the role;
- arrange public forums to talk about counselling in schools (Note: informants admitted these have been tried before and have not always been well attended); and
- send letters home with new students introducing the counsellor to parents (translated into the languages of the new Canadian parents).

For school boards and taxpayers, the informants recommended a different kind of education and public relations program. One suggestion was to prepare video presentations where the realities of an elementary school counsellor's caseload are shown and then ask school boards to decide who on the case load should be cut. In other words, ask school boards to prioritize the counsellor's work. A BCSCA executive member reported that this pilot suggestion has been tried with some success in one district when the budget was being cut.

c) Evaluate counselling programs

Evaluation of counselling related issues was recommended individually and with pilot projects. Individually, elementary school staff members would need to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses. One focus group likened the self evaluation to individual professional growth

plans. These self evaluations would become the basis upon which their own professional growth was determined. Pilot projects within districts were suggested as one means of evaluating the implementation of alternate ways of using counsellors in schools. Pilot projects, using full-time counsellors in schools with follow-up evaluation, was one suggestion.

d) Provide stronger leadership and direction

Informants stressed stronger leadership at all levels. However, the theme of "decentralization" was common throughout the interviews. Because schools differ so much in terms of staff, students and parents, a number of informants stressed that more decisions regarding staffing and use of counselling needed to be made at the school level. Collaborative leadership at the school level was recommended. In other words, schools need to value counsellors and include them as part of the administrative team. School-based teams need to be fully functioning, not just a token committee making decisions of limited importance. Although the recommendation was that counselling decisions be primarily school-based, there was a request that each district hire a district counselling coordinator. One teacher suggested that the district counselling coordinator stay in touch with school staffs to get a more complete picture of the individual needs of the district's schools.

Conducting a needs assessment was raised as an important way for school counsellors and staffs to give direction for school counselling. Besides needs assessments, increasing counsellor accessibility to staff, students, and parents was expressed as important. As previously mentioned, more counsellor time in schools was thought to be of some help in this regard. More specifically, counsellors need to approach all students, not just the ones receiving individual counselling. Counsellors will need to



be seen as an integral part of the staff not just as itinerant support personnel in the school for two days a week.

Informants recommended that the BCSCA be more proactive with the counsellors, the community, the universities, and the Ministry. Informants felt it important that the BCSCA provide inservice training to counsellors in all the areas of the enhanced role. For example, the BCSCA could give sessions in setting up peer counselling programs in elementary schools and teaching conflict resolution in classes. Informants felt inservice provided by the BCSCA would serve two purposes: it would help educate counsellors to meet the needs of their schools, and the inservice would lead counsellors in the direction of the enhanced role advocated by the BCSCA.

BCSCA informants emphasized the importance of the Ministry adopting the enhanced role as outlined in the BCSCA's role description. Making the role description a provincial policy would provide the provincial leadership that is lacking at present. This would lead to the ultimate goal of having standardized school counselling throughout the province. The push for Ministry adoption of the enhanced role would need also to come from the districts and parent groups. As one BCSCA executive member said, "Parents can be some of our strongest advocates."

It was felt that the BCSCA needs to "get universities back on track." The BCSCA is the professional body that governs school counselling, so it stands to reason that it be concerned about the training of its members. The informants recognized the complexities of changing programming at the university level and suggested that both the ministries of Education and Higher Education would need to be approached. The general feeling of the BCSCA representatives was that changing the university programs would

produce more counsellors trained for the enhanced role. The Ministry stumbling block -- that of not enough trained counsellors for role adoption -- would be overcome. Informants recommended that the BCSCA encourage more universities to set up regional training programs. Regional programs and courses would allow mature students, who are currently working as classroom teachers, to obtain the credentials they need for school counselling, without leaving their current employment.

d) Promote time management

Informants recommended more effective use of the limited time counsellors have in schools, and allowing counsellors' time in schools to be more flexible. These specific time management strategies go hand-in-hand with the enhanced role. The enhanced role encourages more consulting and collaborating. Counsellors in the interviews admitted that using outside agencies, teachers, and parents would result in more effective collaboration. One counsellor called collaboration, "working smarter." It takes time to save time, but all teacher informants and a few counsellors felt it might be worth the investment.

Conducting needs assessments, even in the form of simple checklists for staffs, would help to use counsellors' time more effectively. One novice counsellor reported success, both in terms of saving time and getting direction for a school's counselling program, through using such a checklist.

Counsellors expressed a strong desire to do preventative work. Teachers stressed the value of the educating part of the enhanced role. Instead of concentrating on isolated cases as "pull-out" counselling of individuals and groups, teachers recommended more counsellor time in the classroom "to work with teachers or groom teachers in counselling

techniques." Teachers felt that working more in the "educating" part of the role might reduce some individual and group counselling. A final time management recommendation included timetabling blocks of time expressly for counsellor and teacher collaboration. However, counsellors shared a deep concern that the other parts of the enhanced role might become more extensively used "at the expense of individual and group counselling."

The staffing of counsellors was discussed by two focus groups. Several informants representing all roles suggested matching counsellors to schools. Counsellors' skills and preferences matched to school's needs and foci could help implement the enhanced role in that counsellors would be placed in a school based on the service or support they could best offer. For example, a counsellor who was particularly skilled at parent programs might meet the need of a school where the parent community had made requests for more school-based parenting courses or support groups. Conducting a needs assessment of staff, students, and parents would help determine which counsellors would be best suited to which school communities.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, informants complained that inequitable distribution of counselling services was a problem. For example, in some cases one counsellor is assigned to two "high needs" schools, resulting in excessive demands. Several suggestions were offered about the inequitable distribution of counselling services. Pairing of counsellors was one suggestion. Although each counsellor would be assigned different schools, the pair could help each other if the case load of one counsellor became too heavy. Another suggestion was to assign each counsellor to schools in the "same zone" or in close proximity so that travel

time was reduced. An experienced counsellor also suggested pairing elementary counsellors with secondary school counsellors. The purpose for the pairing in this case is to increase cooperation with secondary schools. For example, in the fall, elementary school counsellors could help settle in new grade eight students who have been identified as being "at risk," while secondary counsellors face horrendous timetabling duties.

A fourth suggestion made by a number of informants in two of the groups was to allow for more flexibility in the daily scheduling so that counsellors would be free to move among their assigned schools as needs dictated. Informants felt that evening commitments with the parent community warranted allowing counsellors to work different hours than the traditional nine-to-three schedule of classroom teachers. One informant likened the flexible hours to the schedules that community school coordinators work.

It should be noted that most informants appeared to be in favour of the underlying principles of these recommendations. However, two issues were raised: concerns about lack of trust of counsellors and lack of commitment to the changes.

Lack of trust of counsellors was raised as a concern that schools would be short changed of counselling time if counsellors determined where their time should be spent. One administrator, who had sounded completely in favour of counsellors and the enhanced role, hesitated about flexible hours. The issue for her was accountability. She wondered if all counsellors would be professional in their use of the time.

The second concern had to do with the level of commitment of various people to the proposed role change. An administrator said that it was up to administrators to "be creative" in providing additional collaboration time,

yet when suggesting how she would give more time she said only that she could find "a few minutes here or there" to give to her counsellor and a teacher for consulting. Another teacher said the change will work only if time for consulting is built into the system (e.g., one day a month). Because of concern about voluntary commitment of stakeholders, it was suggested that counsellors seek time for consultation and collaboration through changes in their collective agreements.

### **Summary of Findings**

The informants viewed the enhanced elementary school counsellor's role as a proactive ideal which some counsellors were currently working toward. However, the actual role for most elementary school counsellors was viewed as reactive crisis work. Informants expressed enthusiastic support for the idea of the enhanced role of the elementary school counsellor. They also felt that there was support in principle for the enhanced role by other stakeholders.

Informants identified many factors that limited stakeholder support: whether people value counsellors; the perceived quality of counsellors by district superintendents, teachers, administrators, and parents; teacher and counsellor insecurity; parents' cultural values; funding variations from district to district; counselling viewed as a low district priority; confusion about the Ministry's position regarding the role; and eroded university support. Additional impediments to enhancing the counsellor's role were raised by informants. The impediments included lack of time, excessive demands, high pupil-counsellor ratios, counselling viewed as a low district priority by teachers, inequitable distribution of counsellors, counsellor assignment not meeting schools' needs, high counsellor turn-

over affecting rapport, lack of knowledge, unresolved implementation issues, and inadequate facilities.

Five main sets of recommendations were made by the informants to overcome the impediments and the problem of limited stakeholder support. The first set related to lowering the pupil-counsellor ratio. The second set related to education of all stakeholders. The third set suggested evaluating school counselling programs. The fourth set advocated stronger leadership and direction at all levels of elementary education. The general feeling was that implementation should occur simultaneously at all levels. The final set of recommendations involved promoting time management strategies for counsellors.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The final chapter discusses whether enhancing the role of the elementary school counsellor is a sound educational initiative based on the findings of this study and on the educational change and counselling literature. More specifically, the discussion analyzes why implementation of the enhanced elementary school counsellor's role is problematic, assesses whether or not the role can be implemented in light of the identified problems, and makes specific recommendations for successful implementation. In addition to the specific recommendations, a general approach or "tack" to implementation is suggested. That implementation tack is outlined. Limitations of the study are reported and concluding remarks are made.

Both stakeholder support for a proposal and feasibility of the proposal are central to the success of an educational innovation. On the one hand, informants in this study are supportive of the idea of enhancing the elementary school counsellor's role, and the counselling literature has recommended enhancement for the past thirty years. Role enhancement seems to be justified in principle. On the other hand, the results of this study suggest that feasibility of the idea may be a major stumbling bloc. Based on the "soft" support and large number of impediments cited by the informants, it appears that enhancing the role of the elementary school counsellor continues to be a tall order. Nonetheless, there are lessons to be learned from this study. By looking at the major problem areas identified by informants in this study and relating these findings to theoretical research on educational change, a more complete appraisal of the likelihood of

successful implementation can be made. In addition, specific recommendations can be advanced about steps towards enhancing the elementary school counsellor's role that would likely work under the present circumstances in British Columbia.

### **Problem Areas**

Both the informants and the literature support the idea, in principle, of enhancing the role of the elementary school counsellor. The practical issue of how to do it successfully seems to be the crux of the problem. The informants' comments revealed three major problem areas: (a) soft support, (b) excessive demands, and (c) lack of time. The discussion in this section will concentrate on the dimensions within these areas of concern that relate to the practicality and feasibility of implementation. In addition, specific strategies for overcoming the problem areas will be presented.

#### Soft Support

The most notable finding about informants' support for an enhanced role indicates two contradictory perspectives: support in principle for the idea, and very soft or limited support for putting the idea into practice. In other words, although educators would like the elementary school counsellor's role to be enhanced, they have great difficulty envisioning how schools could support the enhancement in reality. As stated earlier, the practicality of the change seems to be at the root of the problem. Research on educational change tells us that support in principle, or verbal support, is not enough to initiate a widespread change in educational practice (Fullan, 1991; Fullan & Miles, 1992). As Fullan (1991, p. 28) writes, "Even good ideas may represent poor investments on a large scale if the ideas have not been well developed or if the resources to support implementation are



unavailable." Both underdeveloped ideas and lack of resources are major impediments to making role enhancement a success, and impact negatively on support. As a result, soft support makes the prognosis for successful implementation uncertain.

In this study, specific issues related to lack of support revealed a very complex problem. Informants talked about soft support at many levels of the educational system. From the grassroots level, they spoke of teachers', administrators', and counsellors' resistance to and insecurity about change. Informants seemed concerned about community support issues such as those posed by the growing multi-cultural population and families' disappointing experiences with counsellors. At the administrative level, issues of funding and competing priority problems were raised as the source of struggles within district and Ministry offices. In addition, educators' perceptions of counsellors in general and the degree to which counsellors are valued by stakeholders influence levels of support.

One of the specific indications of soft support was counsellor and teacher insecurity about change. Some informants admitted that the resistance and insecurity were partly due to lack of technical skill on the part of teachers and counsellors. Other informants said these attitudes arose because people are overburdened -- they do not know how or where to begin. Others reported that, because of laziness, some counsellors and teachers staunchly refused to change.

Some research agrees that "people don't resist change as much as they don't know how to cope with it" (Fullan, 1991, p. xiv). Other research says that it is not so much resistance as it is a way to escape blame for a personal failure to change (Corbett, Firestone, & Rossman, 1987; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Tye, 1992). Placing blame on other people or issues deflects

blame from oneself or from the real issues or impediments (Fullan & Miles, 1992). In other words, resistance occurs when teachers are not given sufficient time or resources to deal with the additional demands required by a change initiative (Corbett, Firestone, & Rossman, 1987; Tye, 1992).

Dealing with lack of skill, lack of knowledge, and lack of time of educators is fairly straightforward. (More research may be needed to understand other sources of resistance, such as people refusing to change due to laziness, and what to do to overcome that kind of resistance.) Providing educators with concrete examples of effective implementation would support those people who do not know where to begin. Concrete examples would give educators at all levels ideas and options of how to implement the enhanced role. Teachers, and presumably counsellors and administrators, need to see how it might look in their school (Crandall, Eiseman, & Louis, 1986; Fullan, 1991). In addition, change must fit with the teachers' needs (Mortimer *et al.*, 1988, cited in Fullan, 1991) and with administrators' and counsellors' needs and skills. As informants in this study expressed, an enhanced role when implemented should look differently in each school, depending on local conditions. For example, in a school with a high student population of new Canadians, the emphasis might be on educating immigrant parents about the value of counselling services through their children; whereas a school community having a large population of pre-teens experimenting with drugs and alcohol may focus on a substance abuse prevention program with the grade seven students. Many different practical ideas for implementation should be presented as options.

Also it is important to recognize that resistance is a natural occurrence as people give up old ways to begin trying new ways (Fullan &

Miles, 1992). Supporting people facing the conflict and discomfort associated with transition is more helpful than treating resisters with impatience. Acceptance and support may even help the people who seem to resist change because of laziness. Laziness may mask the conflict and discomfort people feel. School counsellors are skilled at supporting students; they would be well-advised to support each other and other staff and community members. During change, teachers, and presumably counsellors, need moral support in the form of empathetic listening (Crandall *et al.*, 1986).

Research on educational change warns against the danger of self-preoccupation caused by strong commitment to a change. The desire to bring about the change can blind innovators to the realities of others affected by the proposed changes (Fullan, 1991). One BCSCA informant in this study stated there was unanimous support for the BCSCA's proposed role description. However, other informants indicated that a few counsellors were not in favour of role change. This example illustrates that advocates-for-change must be careful not to get caught up in their own agendas. Characterizing reluctant teachers and counsellors as too lazy to change may be a way of deflecting the blame from other impediments, or may reveal blindness to the difficulties that the change implies for some people, or the existence of bona fide reasons to resist the change.

Additional reasons cited for resistance included funding variations from district to district, counselling viewed as a low district priority, and confusion about the Ministry's plans for implementing an enhanced role. The lack of outside support or resources compounds the problem of soft support. People are less prepared to try something new if the needed resources are not in place. Many educational reforms have come and gone; people have become skeptical about ideas for educational change, even good

ones (Fullan, 1991; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Lieberman & Miller, 1990; Murphy, Evertson, & Radnofsky, 1991). It is essential that the practical concerns be addressed for educators, both teachers and counsellors, so they are reassured that the change will be supported. In addition to specific recommendations about the type of support required, this also suggests a "go slow" approach to implementation of the enhanced role. More will be said about this "tack" later in the chapter.

A second issue relates to educators' perceptions of counsellors. Perceptual issues center on such questions as "Do people value counsellors?," "Do people (district superintendents, teachers, administrators, and parents) perceive counsellors to be qualified, competent professionals?," "Are counsellors viewed as lazy or untrustworthy?," "Do teachers resent the fact that the counsellors' workload seems lighter than their own?" (Parr, 1991). Informants in this study indicated that each of these perception issues was problematic. However, informants also reported instances where perceptions improved -- counselling became more valued by school personnel -- in schools where individual counsellors showed initiative and commitment. For example, one principal said that she did not value counsellors until she worked with the current school counsellor. It appears that individual counsellors have a lot to do with changing the perception people have of their profession. By looking at specific changes "valued" counsellors have made, others can learn more about changes that are critical to success. Informants' responses in this study suggest that establishing rapport and setting school-wide priorities with staff are very important. As one informant suggested, using a simple checklist to assess school needs serves two purposes: it shows the staff that the counsellor desires to address issues of importance to them, and it helps

the counsellor set program priorities. Counsellor availability has also been identified as a key factor in changing educators' and students' perceptions of counsellor effectiveness (Boser, Poppen, & Thompson, 1988).

Additional suggestions to improve educators' perceptions of counsellors include distributing current information on counselling material or on classroom management strategies that fit with new curricula (e.g., behaviour management ideas). These ideas fit with research indicating that teachers want the counsellor to take on more of a helper-consultant role by working directly with teachers (Ginter *et al.*, 1990; Wilgus & Shelley, 1988). Other ideas, both made by informants and found in counselling research, include publicizing the counsellor's role and function on bulletin boards, at staff meetings, and during class visits (Brown, 1989; Parr, 1991; Ritchie, 1989; Tennyson, Miller, Skovholt, & Williams, 1989; Wilgus & Shelley, 1988).

In addition, successful change projects always involve pressure and support (Crandall *et al.*, 1986; Huberman & Miles, 1984, cited in Fullan, 1991). A delicate balance of the two is necessary. Pressure without support often results in resistance and alienation. Forcing people to change without resources will not work. On the other hand, support without pressure may result in the additional resources being wasted. Providing support in terms of additional resources but without direction may lead to mismanaged resources. For example, placing a full-time counsellor in each school is a sign of resource support, but if the extra counsellor's time is used for duties other than outlined in the enhanced role, the resource may be wasted. Pressure is needed to ensure that the added resource is used in the intended way.

Although individual counsellors are able in some cases to enhance

their role it is unlikely to become widespread without administrator, district, and Ministry support. The role will not be universally implemented as intended without broad district and Ministry support (Levine, 1991). "When good ideas are initiated by one or more teachers, it requires the support of others if the ideas are to go anywhere" (Crandall *et al.*, 1982, cited in Fullan, 1991, p. 55).

One indicator of pressure and support for activating change is whether the school administrator attends workshop training sessions (Fullan, 1991). School administrators' presence at workshops shows their understanding of teachers' and counsellors' concerns. Although school administrator's support does not ensure implementation success, it helps since the school administrator is the person most able to orchestrate the organizational conditions for success (Corbett & Rossman, 1989; Crandall *et al.*, 1986). For example, the administrator is the one most able to arrange time for consulting and collaborating.

Some counsellors' early success with implementing the role change may encourage other counsellors and schools. Fullan (1991) suggests that publicizing successes may be a way to put leverage on the system. Other research agrees that publicizing success will also increase general support (Brown, 1989; Ritchie, 1989; Tennyson *et al.*, 1989; Wilgus & Shelley, 1988).

District superintendents and other senior district officials need to show support by actively praising new proposals, visiting schools to see what is happening, and following through on decisions (Fullan, 1991; Fullan & Miles, 1992). District superintendents signal whether teachers should take the change project seriously or not (Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984). Changes by individual teachers and counsellors in schools do not automatically translate into district-wide changes because many of the

other schools remain unchanged. District inertia may inhibit an innovation in one school from catching on. It is up to district staff to ensure that an innovation survives and grows. Counsellors have typically worked independently; they need district support. Ministry support is equally important. The BCSCA should continue to push for adoption of the role at the Ministry level, as this would stress the importance of the enhanced role of the elementary school counsellor throughout the province and, as reported in chapter three, provide direction and lead to standardized counselling practices within B.C. In addition, the BCSCA must encourage university programs to produce the counsellors needed for the enhanced role so the Ministry is more receptive to the idea of making the enhanced role provincial policy. As it currently stands, the Ministry is concerned that the lack of adequate counsellor training will lead to an inability to staff "enhanced" positions with qualified counsellors.

A difficult problem arises in districts where the district superintendents, school administrators, and teachers do not value counselling. As stated earlier, counsellors can start making changes alone but district-wide change cannot happen without administrator or district support. The lack of support should be addressed at two levels: encourage others at the grassroots level to follow the enhanced role models that counsellors have used successfully and, simultaneously, provide top-down support in the form of a clear Ministry policy. I believe district and school administrator support would be likely to follow.

Besides adopting the role enhancement policy, the Ministry would need to find ways to provide additional funding. This funding must be sufficient to be viewed as significant support for change, otherwise it fuels cynicism. Restructuring the way counselling is funded is one possible

approach to secure more money. Instead of basing funding on a per student basis it could be done on a per school basis. Schools could decide how they would like to allocate the spending of special education funds. For example, a school could opt to staff a full-time counsellor to work with teachers in classrooms. Giving school-level educators more options in deciding how to implement an enhanced role, could increase their commitment to the endeavour (Crandall *et al.*, 1986).

District and administrator support might come in the form of mentoring projects suggested both in the counselling literature (Poidevant, 1991; Van Zandt & Perry, 1992) and by informants in this study. Mentoring, where an experienced counsellor helps a less experienced one, has built-in pay-offs for both counsellors. A novice counsellor remarked throughout the interviews that her perception of her counselling role was determined by the expectations of the other district counsellors. Literature on educational change makes a similar point: we become the teachers we work beside (Fullan, 1991), and teachers learn best from other teachers (Clark *et al.*, 1984). Little research has been done on mentoring for counsellors, but it would be worth further investigation (Poidevant, 1991). Setting up such a project might benefit districts in two ways: increase counsellors' professional growth and publicize the counsellor's role at the district and administration levels.

A final dimension of the "soft support" problem was parental support. Most informants saw parents as generally supportive of the enhanced role of the elementary school counsellor. This was characterized as parents' quiet acceptance of the idea, not as active involvement in pressuring for more funding for counselling in schools. As research on educational change indicates, most communities do not actively participate



in change decisions that involve the personal/social development of students (Fullan, 1991; Wise, 1988). Most educational changes have centered on goals related to academic course work rather than personal/social development. In fact, reform researchers call this "neglect" (Cuban, 1990; Fullan, 1991; Wise, 1988). For the most part personal/social development changes have not been viewed as important as academic ones. Only when the "elite" groups want societal change do schools become more empowered and supported to set personal/social development goals (Cuban, 1990, p. 8).

However, major demographic changes in schools' can cause communities to exert pressure (Cuban, 1990; Fullan, 1991). Mainstreaming or integration of special needs students could be a catalyst for increasing pressure for non-academic services. For example, parents may be concerned with the adequacy of the education system to accommodate the needs of these special students and worry that the "normal" stream of students will be adversely affected by adding these special students to an already overburdened system. Although educational change literature states that the public is not usually active in educational change initiatives, it is worthwhile to keep the public informed otherwise it could act against the change (Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984). Information could be provided through public relations campaigns informing parents about the preventative aspects of school counselling.

The teachers in this study also expressed interest in having counsellors work with them in promoting the personal/social development of their students. Although teachers appear focussed on teaching the more academic aspects of the curriculum, mainstreaming of special needs children into neighbourhood schools, and other societal pressures on schools, are changing teachers' attitudes towards the importance of

students' personal/social development. In addition, North American society is clearly at a point where greater attention to personal and social development goals is needed (Payzant, 1992). Last summer's riot in Los Angeles offers clear evidence that more attention needs to be paid to the social problems in North American society. This growing social unrest could increase community and teacher support for overcoming practical issues impeding implementation of the counsellor's enhanced role. However, people need to remember that, the goal is not to correct the ills of society: "educational reform is no substitute for societal reform " (Fullan, 1991, p. 15).

Finally, as informants in this study and the general counselling literature point out, some immigrant parents' cultural values discourage them from seeking counselling services (Carter, 1991; Esquivel & Keitel, 1990). The growing number of new Canadians could lead parents to reject the very idea of having counsellors in schools. Informants suggested that districts must make an effort to explain the counselling service through district newsletters or school bulletins written in the languages of new Canadians. Although this is a small step, literature in counselling agrees that difficulties with the language create a tremendous hurdle for immigrant people. Talking about feelings and problems is much easier in one's native language (Marcos & Alpert, 1976, cited in Esquivel & Keitel, 1990). Research also has indicated that minority groups tend to rely on family support systems or "folk therapies." One reason cited in the counselling literature is that counselling does not meet their needs (Midgette & Meggert, 1991). When new Canadians do seek counselling it is often through a mandated referral or as the result of a crisis (Esquivel & Keitel, 1990).

However, some research also seems to indicate that counselling provided in the school setting is more accepted by immigrant parents (Esquivel & Keitel, 1990). One possible reason for this is the respect that many immigrant families have for schools in general. This acceptance of school counselling by immigrant families puts school counsellors in a positive position for educating new Canadian children and their families about the nature of counselling and the various related community services (Esquivel & Keitel, 1990).

Recent work in multicultural counselling stresses the importance of counsellors looking at their own cultural values and biases towards ethnic minority groups, learning more about minority populations and their cultural heritages, and acquiring more cross-cultural communication skills (D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991; Midgette & Meggert, 1991; Speight, Myers, Cox, & Higlen, 1991). In addition, counsellors must be aware of within-group variability, otherwise, stereotyping is likely to occur (Carter, 1991).

### Excessive Demands

The excessive demands, posed by both the Year 2000 curriculum changes and the day-to-day crises B.C. teachers and counsellors face with students, make considering an additional change -- that of enhancing the counsellor's role -- overwhelming. Research on educational change indicates that excessive demands prove to be major impediments for even seemingly good ideas (Corbett & Rossman, 1989; Fullan, 1991; Tye, 1992). Teachers can face only so many changes at a time. "Too many competing demands or overload" result in failed implementation (Fullan, 1991, p. 130). Given the current demands on B.C. teachers and counsellors, we are left with the realization that, once again, the prognosis is not good for

successfully implementing an enhanced role for the elementary school counsellor. In addition, as mentioned in the discussion of soft support, research on educational change indicates that the proposed counselling role changes may not have a high priority in competition with more widely accepted changes related to teaching of academic subjects.

What can be done to address the problems of excessive demands? The changes proposed in the Year 2000 can be viewed either as an impediment or as a means to enhancing the elementary school counsellor's role. As an impediment, people could view the enhanced role as one more worry, over and above the Year 2000 initiatives. On the other hand, the enhanced role could be a means by which Year 2000 changes are integrated into the education system. The Year 2000 and the enhanced role are compatible and should be integrated together. Incorporating the new ideas proposed by the enhanced role into existing knowledge about the Year 2000 seen in current teaching practice is one way of lessening the burden on educators (Crandall *et al.*, 1986). Some teachers in this study saw a relation between the enhanced role of counsellor and the Year 2000. They, like teachers in the counselling literature, wanted counsellors to support them more by teaching their students about guidance (Lehmanowsky, 1991). This suggests that some teachers are looking at the "whole child" as the Year 2000 document stresses.

Encouraging people to view the changes as "complementary demands" rather than "competing demands" is key. For example, aspects of the Learning for Living curriculum (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 1990b) could be the focus of a school-based initiative. Counsellors could help teachers and administrators implement the new curriculum through joint planning and teaching. One informant suggested this

approach when she explained how the counsellor in her school introduced conflict resolution to the staff, and supported the staff in teaching these skills to students. Social problems in a school could be addressed through a peer counselling program, where students are trained to help with social conflicts in classrooms and on the playground. As educators and parents begin to see the value of this helping role, their support for the enhanced role of the counsellor may increase. Literature also reports that parents find information about school initiatives most meaningful and become more supportive if changes are explained in terms of the direct impact on their children (Fullan, 1991).

However, at the same time, informants recommended that counsellors proceed cautiously in advocating the Year 2000. As many teachers are overloaded, they need support in coming to terms with, never mind implementing, the suggested changes. Therefore, counsellors must read their staffs carefully and not initiate change that is unwelcome or premature. Literature in counselling views counsellors as school change agents (Carlson, 1989; Ginter *et al.*, 1990; Kaplan & Geoffroy, 1990; Pasco, 1989). However, the informants in this study cautioned that the function of "acting as an advocate for change" as outlined in the BCSCA's proposed counsellor role description be acted upon carefully.

Another problem with enhancement is uncertainty about how to implement the role. Uncertainty and lack of direction add to the excessive demands. Many educators feel they are already doing too much and that even more is expected. How to do that "more" is unclear to many. Some counsellors feel frustrated and helpless: "Even though I would like to implement the enhanced role, I don't know how even to begin to implement it!" Research indicates that often only after trying a change for a while do

people know how to implement it best, although attempts to implement do not guarantee success (Fullan, 1991). In addition, the process used to bring about the change is as important as the end result. People must engage in "frequent, continuous, increasingly concrete talk" about how to change as well as what should change (Clark et al., 1984; Fullan, 1991).

Counselling research and the informants in this study support the view that the isolation of classroom teachers hampers their ability to effect educational changes (Cuban, 1990; Fullan, 1991). The problem is even more exaggerated for itinerant personnel like counsellors (Parr, 1991; Van Zandt & Perry, 1992). Frequent turnover of school counsellors, counsellor assignment to several schools, the confidentiality ethic of the role, and minimal opportunities for developing rapport with other staff members are problems that interfere with counsellors' ability to engage in frequent, continuous, increasingly concrete talk about teaching and counselling. Establishing rapport among the school staff and community was reported earlier as critical to successful implementation of the enhanced role. Yet here, we see that rapport-building is very difficult to achieve because of staff turnover and the itinerant nature of elementary school counselling. Speaking briefly at staff meetings and parent advisory meetings, and sending out newsletters were seen both by informants and in the counselling literature as valuable ways to promote understanding of the enhanced role (Ritchie, 1989).

As discussed earlier under soft support, the school administrator plays a key role in organizing talk-time for teachers. School administrators have first-hand knowledge of what it means to be a teacher. Typically, their own training was first as a teacher. However, administrators often lack experience about the role of the counsellor (Brown, 1989; Campbell, 1990;

Carreiro & Schulz, 1988; Hruby, 1989; Kaplan *et al.*, 1992; Lampe, 1985, cited in Henderson & Lampe, 1992). Without a full understanding of the role, administrators may not value the need for such talk-time for counsellors. It is through individual counsellors and their leaders -- provincial (BCSCA) and district (counselling coordinators and superintendents) -- that administrators learn the importance of structured talk-time for counsellors and teachers.

In addition, the confidential nature of counselling itself limits collegial talk (Varhely & Cowles, 1991). Counsellors are able to reveal only so much about cases and clients, yet they are expected by colleagues to keep staff informed about students. Deciding what is permissible to report and what must be kept confidential may become an ethical dilemma.

Counsellors do not frequently observe each other in professional situations and rarely get together to talk with staff members. Some literature suggests district support groups for counsellors would be worthwhile (Campbell, 1990). As mentioned in the counselling literature, and suggested by informants in this study, teaming two counsellors together as mentors is one way of creating opportunities for valuable interaction between counsellors (Van Zandt & Perry, 1992).

Counsellors and teachers seem to be left in a Catch 22: knowledge comes by trying to change, but many do not know where to begin. Educators agree that there needs to be a change, but how to go about it is the problem. We need to go beyond encouraging adoption of an enhanced role and help educators implement the change.

Informants' comments about implementation procedures ranged from a grassroots approach to high-level Ministry adoption of an enhanced role description such as the BCSCA has proposed. I agree with informants'

suggestions that schools should begin by addressing a prioritized set of local needs. Counsellors and teachers within a school could decide to work with one or more classes or to implement a school-wide program. Establishing priorities, developing a shared vision, and permitting the change to happen gradually are important steps in overcoming the excessive demands educators face (Kanter, 1989 cited in Fullan, 1991). The implementation plan at the school level might include a learning-by-doing approach (Lieberman & Miller, 1992, and Kanter, 1989, cited in Fullan, 1991). Once again, it is clear that proceeding slowly is important.

At the same time, each school must be viewed as having its own unique environment or culture, including different roles, resources, change plans, and processes (Crandall et al., 1986; Tye, 1992; Wise, 1988). Unfortunately, as the informants in this study and other researchers have pointed out, there is a prevalent "interchangeable parts" view of schools that all classrooms, teachers and counsellors are alike, and can be relocated at a district's whim to meet financial needs (Tye, 1992, p. 12). When it comes to change we are not all equally able. People are at different places in the change process. Reassigning of counsellors and administrators must be carefully thought out. Informants raised a number of issues about district staffing: (i) the number of schools assigned to one counsellor must not interfere with rapport building and talk-time between staff and counsellor; (ii) the needs of schools must be met fairly so demands are not more excessive for one counsellor than another; and (iii) proximity of schools must be considered when counsellors are assigned more than one school. In addition, districts need to sort out competing staffing priorities among the various services such as counselling, English as a Second Language, and Learning Assistance. The individual nature of each



school and its community must be kept in mind: staffing is not merely a matter of applying strict formulas based on provincially mandated pupil/teacher ratios.

### Lack of Time

Lack of time is a problem for most educational change initiatives (Fullan, 1991; Fullan & Miles, 1992). Therefore, it is not surprising that it was raised in this study. Lack of time represents a tug-of-war between a number of related issues. Increased expectations of educators already dealing with an overburdened workload cause educators to demand more time to do their current work and to make the proposed changes. The failure to make sufficient amounts of time available is viewed by educators as evidence of lack of district and Ministry support. This tends to undermine commitment to the change. In reality, the dollars to provide more time, either in the form of lower pupil/counsellor ratios or release time for consultation and collaboration, are not available. Although informants in this study expressed the need for full-time counsellors in every school, this on its own will not bring about changes in the role of the elementary school counsellor. Earlier, I mentioned the fear that additional counsellor time may be misused by merely translating it into more crisis intervention work. Misusing time in this way will not mean a change, but merely more of the same. The result likely will be superficial changes, often referred to as first-order changes (Cuban, 1988; Cuban 1990; Fullan, 1991; Fullan & Miles, 1992). There will be a change in the amount of counsellor time, but no change towards enhancing the role. This is another example of why both pressure and support are important for change to occur as intended.

The findings in this study support research on educational change

which says that most teachers, and presumably counsellors, do not have enough information, time, or energy for educational innovations (Fullan, 1991). Coupled with the tremendous demands already discussed, it is unlikely that educators will be able to give this change the time it needs. Although the prognosis for enhancing the role of the elementary school counsellor is not good, a number of specific strategies might help to increase the likelihood that expanding the role of the counsellor will be successful.

One informant suggested allowing counsellors to work different hours than the traditional nine-to-three schedule would support counsellors initiating and attending evening parent meetings. Another suggested negotiating consultation time with classroom teachers about programs and students through collective agreements at the district level. Advocacy from district administration and/or professional associations seems necessary for district changes (Cuban, 1988; Fullan, 1991).

There is a cautionary note, though, as exemplified by a counsellor who admitted she held more of the enhanced role years earlier, but because of drastically increasing problems in schools, "there isn't enough time anymore." Currently her time is taken up mainly with crisis intervention. As stated earlier, merely giving counsellors more time is not a solution in itself. Instead, time must be used in different ways. For example, using more group counselling as opposed to individual counselling has been cited as being time-effective (Morse & Russell, 1988; Ritchie, 1989; Rotter, 1990; Tennyson *et al.*, 1989), or, as one administrator reported in this study, focusing on one issue with the whole school and providing inservice to teachers so that they may service students directly was a valuable time-saving technique. Other counsellors and counselling literature suggest

referring parents to family counselling agencies outside the school (Payzant, 1992; Ritchie, 1989). Surprisingly, this was not raised in the focus group interviews by anyone, despite more outside community counselling agencies being contracted to work in schools.

In order to make effective use of time-saving measures, informants and research claim that counsellors may need to upgrade their training, and administrators may need to allow counsellors more time and freedom to set their daily schedules. In addition, it is important that counsellors themselves continue to assume a leadership role in shaping their professional training. Professional counselling organizations must do more to ensure that university training programs fit the demands counsellors face in schools. It was interesting that the required credentials for elementary school counsellors were not discussed by informants. Some counselling literature advocates no advantages to being trained as a teacher before becoming an elementary school counsellor (Poidevant, 1991; Rotter, 1990). The current trend in some districts to contract-out counselling services and the increased "educational" demands as outlined in the enhanced elementary school counsellor's role, invite the question why discussion did not occur surrounding these issues during the focus group interviews.

In light of the current economy and government budget restraints, it is unlikely that increased funds will be directed to produce more counsellor time. Nonetheless, continued pressing for and establishing union-negotiated time for consulting and working flexible hours are important. If additional time is used by teaching staff for more crisis intervention work, the counsellor must guard against being used exclusively this way. If the goal of the enhanced role is to have a balance among all four areas --

counselling, coordinating, consulting, and educating -- then counsellors must assign their time accordingly. This may mean scheduling time with specific classes on a regular basis. A number of useful ideas for promoting time management suggested by the informants were discussed in chapter three. Counsellors can manage their limited time more effectively by scheduling collaboration time with teachers into the timetable, increasing flexibility of their daily schedule so evening commitments with parents are easier to meet, pairing with other counsellors who work in close proximity to share caseloads, spending more time in classrooms doing preventative work, and modeling counselling techniques to teachers. As stated previously, developing ways to utilize the counsellor's time more effectively can go a long way both to educate people in the system about the role enhancement, and to acquire support for this change.

The greater the number of students that counsellors must service, the less time they have to do other aspects of the enhanced role. All three districts represented in this study had pupil/counsellor ratios that were better than the minimum level funded by the Ministry. Yet, informants felt that their districts were showing only limited support for enhancing the role of the elementary school counsellor. Limited support is viewed as no support if it is not viewed as enough to make a significant difference (Fullan, 1991). Teachers view pupil/counsellor ratios as an indicator of administrative commitment. Unless pupil/counsellor ratios are reduced, teachers are unlikely to perceive the district or the Ministry supportive of the enhanced role. Informants said that at least having one counsellor share two schools, or staffing with a ratio of 1:500 students would be noticeable improvements. Although full-time counsellors seem unrealistic in times of budget restraint, it may mean districts have to look at changing

their priorities. One informant commented on the frustration she feels about the number of English as a Second Language and Learning Assistance Center teachers when compared to counsellors servicing schools in her district. Again, this could be related to priority being given to "academic" rather than social/emotional goals.

It is possible that the presence of BCSCA leadership in the three districts in this study may have encouraged these districts to reduce their pupil/counsellor ratios. It seems that not all districts in B.C. are as fortunate.

Inequitable distribution of counselling staff between schools was raised as an issue. Some counsellors have heavier loads (e.g., one counsellor serviced five schools), indicating that time is not fairly distributed, even within districts. District staff need to be aware that people perceive lack of fair distribution of counselling resources as lack of support for role enhancement. In chapter three, informants suggested matching counsellors' skills to schools' needs, and pairing counsellors to share caseloads. These two suggestions might help counteract the perception that resources are not being fairly dispersed, while at the same time giving counsellors ways to address the lack of time issue.

As mentioned in the discussion about excessive demands, the isolation of counsellors from other educators must be overcome by increasing the time they have to talk and plan together (Corbett & Rossman, 1989; Tye, 1992; Wilgus & Shelley, 1988). This time is best provided by administrators (Fullan, 1991). As one administrator in this study said, administrators must free up counsellors more to meet with teachers. Timetabling consulting time reassures people attempting the change that time will be available, and not just at the whim of an administrator on a

particular day.

In addition, when setting up school-based referral teams, it is important that these teams adopt a collaborative model. It is critical to take time to talk about what collaboration means. According to Payzant (1992), having group consensus about what collaboration means can make the difference between success and failure. One informant made reference to the ineffectiveness of some school-based resource teams -- they were viewed as "figureheads" without any real power. If counsellors advocate the collaborative model and constantly push for it, perhaps change in team-talk will occur.

Both research on educational change and the informants in this study indicate that providing staff development time is necessary for change (Fullan, 1991; Levine, 1991). One informant pointed out that bringing specialists in for one-day inservice workshops is viewed by many teachers as ineffective and breeds contempt for change. Again, districts must balance the economic restraints with meeting the needs of the staff. Doing too little is viewed as not supporting the change. Token inservice by out-of-district specialists is often viewed as an expensive waste of time. On-going, on-site professional development is more valuable. Many ideas for providing time for such inservice are suggested by Levine (1991). They range from early dismissal of students, to providing on-site full-time specialists, such as counsellors in this case. It should be noted that Levine realizes that parents have a deep-rooted belief that school is like a daycare for their children. Shortening the school day may cause parental resistance. Providing alternate day care is one way for districts and schools to gain parental support. It may mean that a school works closely with local community services to set up other supervised activities for students on

early dismissal days.

### **Implementation "Tack"**

The previous discussion suggested a number of specific strategies to address the major problem areas related to role enhancement. Underlying these strategies is a more general "tack" or approach to implementation of an enhanced elementary school counsellor's role. This "tack" has two dimensions: a) start small, go slow, and think big; and b) create a supportive collegial climate.

#### **Start Small, Go Slow, and Think Big**

First, we must look at the importance of approaching implementation of an enhanced role by starting on a small scale and setting realistic goals. When we look at the momentum and confusion created by the Year 2000 as a whole, we can see that big is not necessarily best. New policy takes many years to become fully implemented. Rushing will likely result in failure. The change must be seen to be large enough to warrant the effort, yet not so large to be seen to be out of educators' reach. Achieving the delicate balance between undertaking too much and too little is critical. Trying to change too much is a danger (Crandall *et al.*, 1986; Fullan, 1991; Levine, 1992). It could result in superficial changes, "non-events," or first-order changes, as educators try to implement the role without really understanding what the changes mean and how they should look (Fullan, 1991; Cuban, 1988). Trying too much could result in adoption of the external trappings of change so the innovators are appeased momentarily while the educators soon resume "work-as-usual." On the other hand, trying to change only minor things will be viewed as not worth the effort and possibly

go unnoticed. In addition, early rewards and tangible success are critical at the early implementation stage (Corbett & Rossman, 1989; Fullan, 1991). People must be able to see themselves as making some progress towards meeting their goals. At the same time, the timeline for implementation must be long enough that these goals can be achieved.

There are many possibilities for starting small: starting with just a few key people in a district, providing a range of possibilities for implementation, and having individual counsellors gradually trying out parts of the enhanced role.

Starting with a few key individuals within each district may be a desirable way to proceed. Pressure can be brought to bear on others in the system when success can be reported at the grassroots level. Counsellors could assist by supporting staffs in their efforts to implement the Year 2000, and by helping some teachers gradually integrate the role change with the concept of teaching the "whole child" by working directly in classrooms. Primary classroom teachers may be motivated to try working more closely with the counsellor, particularly if their recent experiences with implementing the Primary Program were positive (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 1990c). Recent prior experiences with change affect educators' motivation to try additional innovations (Fullan, 1991).

It is important to provide opportunities to experiment with a variety of ways of beginning the change. Supporting school-initiated pilot projects is one way small scale implementation can be maximized through district support. Repeatedly, informants in this study cited specific instances where role enhancement was successful. Each case involved an individual counsellor or individual school.

It is best to change a bit at a time (Crandall *et al.*, 1982, cited in



Fullan, 1991; Crandall, 1986, cited in Fullan, 1991; Huberman & Miles, 1984, cited in Fullan, 1991). For the school counsellor that could mean adopting new parts of the role gradually, or trying parts of the enhanced role with one or two staff members, or with a selected group of students. Gradually, more people could be encouraged to try the new role (Louis & Miles, 1990, cited in Fullan, 1991). It would be wise, for example, to devote time to making all teachers aware of how classroom management strategies could be changed to reflect the Year 2000 curriculum, without expecting every teacher to be trained formally to use the strategies (Levine, 1991). The counsellor could make a presentation about the usefulness of class meetings for social problems, but pilot the strategy in only a few teachers' classrooms.

People are motivated by success. Starting small, adapting others' successes to their own environment, and frequently reflecting on progress will help people recognize their successes and build on them.

#### Supportive Collegial Climate

Creating a supportive, collegial climate is critical to the successful implementation of the enhanced role of the elementary school counsellor. As stated earlier, support and pressure must be forthcoming from both the district leaders and the school administrator to provide direction and to signal the importance of enhancing the elementary school counsellor's role. A set of prioritized district goals should provide additional direction. These goals must reflect a supportive district climate. Examples of district support include: showing an understanding of individual schools' needs through minimal staff transfer, particularly in schools attempting to enhance the elementary school counsellor's role, encouraging administrators to make teacher-counsellor interaction time available, and

providing scheduled collaboration time through collective agreements. In addition, supportive collegial climates would include district leaders urging the Ministry to adopt a policy for enhancing the role of the elementary school counsellor, actively working towards negotiating lower pupil/counsellor ratios within their own district, and monitoring how distribution of district counselling services impacts on educators' perceptions of district support for an enhanced role. Variations of the enhanced role could be promoted and modeled throughout the district. Schools might be encouraged to consider the various models, and adapt the one that best suits their needs.

As at the district level, school level staffs would need to decide how to prioritize realistic, doable goals. It is important that the goals are both ambitious enough to be viewed as important, and within reach. Prioritizing and integrating demands where possible help a school set a focus. Having a shared school vision helps staff sort out and integrate competing priorities (Fullan, 1991; Lehmanowsky, 1991).

School counsellors, teachers, and administrators must understand that the process of change takes a long time. Much necessary learning will occur as they implement the change. They must realize that the change process will be one of trial and error. Much support will need to be available for individuals within the school. Everyone will be at different places in the process of change. Being empathetic encourages collaborative talk among staff members. The talk must be on-going and practically focussed. In other words, the talk must be about how the enhanced role will look and sound in that school. Constant re-evaluation of where individuals are in the change process should also occur. Counsellors could be made more available to staff by spending more time in classrooms, explaining the enhanced role at

staff meetings, and publicizing successes.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The findings of this study must be viewed within the context of three limitations: (i) only a small number of informants were consulted; (ii) data collection occurred at a busy time of the school year; and (iii) two informants were absent during one of the interviews.

The findings of this study technically cannot be generalized beyond the actual informants because such a small number of individuals were consulted. However, informants were selected because of their broad knowledge of the topic under discussion. There is no reason to believe that their ideas would not be shared by elementary school educators in general. While there is no way of knowing that the ideas are generalizable, there is no reason to believe they are not. The fact that the informants echoed sentiments that were borne out by the research literature, further reinforces the credibility of their remarks. If there was interest in the future about how generalizable the results of this study are, a survey could be conducted throughout the province on the same subject matter. Such a survey may lend support to the findings of this study, making the findings reported in this study even more plausible.

Unfortunately the data collection took place at the school year-end which is a very busy time for educators. One focus group expressed how busy and tired they were. Tiredness may have affected responses.

The final limitation to the study was the absence of two informants during the interviews. Their absence resulted in collecting fewer responses than intended, and the possible omission of key perspectives and opinions. However, the overlap of comments among the focus groups indicate that it

is unlikely that many perspectives were missed.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Enhancing the role of the elementary school counsellor is a tall order. It has not been widely adopted due to limited support, excessive demands, and lack of time. These seem to be the key areas to address. Having individual counsellors implement the proposed enhanced role on an ad hoc basis may be the best that can be expected under current conditions. There are at least two choices with respect to a desirable educational innovation: either, we can give up, or, we can make use of our knowledge about educational change to modify what we are doing (Fullan, 1991). Because the goal of enhancing the role has been achieved by some elementary school counsellors, the goal can be viewed as attainable (Wise, 1977, cited in Fullan, 1991). Therefore, with some modifications to current attempts to implement the role we might meet with success.

Specifically, implementation probably should follow the five sets of recommendations dealing with the major impediments of excessive demands and lack of time, and the problem of limited stakeholder support. The first set of recommendations relates to lowering the pupil/counsellor ratio, the second to educating all stakeholders, the third to evaluating school counselling programs, and the fourth to advocating stronger leadership and direction at all levels of elementary education. The final set of recommendations involves promoting time-management strategies for counsellors in their work with staff and students.

In addition, by adopting a two part implementation "tack," change might be initiated. It is suggested that implementation start slowly on a small scale so momentum for change is gradual and positive. People must

have concrete evidence of success in order to continue enhancing the role. Second, the change process must involve collegial decision making. Establishing priorities for change should be based on a shared vision, yet one that is responsive to the many varied contexts of each school and community.

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## **Appendix A: Discussion Guide Questions**

### Introductory Comments

What I would like to talk about with you today is what is currently happening with school counselling. There has been talk about expanding the school counsellors' role for a long time and I would like to hear your views on how reasonable and realistic it is to expect the role to be expanded (Handout --- Appendix C). Today I would like to focus our discussion on 4 key questions:

1. What do counsellors do in schools now?
2. What are your opinions about expanding the role of counsellors?
3. What would be impediments to expanding the role?
4. If there is support for the expanded role, what recommendations would you suggest to help the elementary school counsellor's role expand?

It is important that we have an opportunity to hear what everyone has to say. Differences of opinion are welcomed because I am interested in finding out about the different perspectives and beliefs that educators in different roles hold about this issue. When you do give your opinion it is important to back it up with examples. Even if you are in agreement with what another person says I am interested in hearing your other reasons and examples, as well.

Because our meeting is being taped and later transcribed it is very important that you each take turns speaking and I try to mention your name when you speak, either before or after. Your names will not be recorded in the transcriptions. You will be identified by your role as teacher, administrator, counselling-novice/experienced, or BCSCA executive member.

### A. Current Elementary Counsellors' Roles

1. Perhaps we could start with counsellors telling us what a typical day is like for them at a school. Tell us what you do now, not necessarily the new role. What sorts of activities do you find yourself as a counsellor involved in at schools?

Do you think that this is typical of counsellors in the district? If not, in your view, what do elementary school counsellors typically or currently do now? How do they spend their time in schools?

Are these experiences representative/typical of counsellors or your district?

As a teacher, what involvement do you have with the school counsellor? Would others, like you have similar involvement?

How about as a principal? Would others, like you have similar involvement?

(Do any of the major functions include:

Probes (percentage of time)

--individually counselling students either referred by school parent or

- self-referred
- meeting with parents/students/social services/teachers/administrators
- organizing & supervising programs such as peer tutoring
- presenting special topics to students in classrooms
- attending team meetings?)

## B. Feasibility of Expanding the Elementary Counsellors' Role

In the 1960's, when school counselling initially became part of the services education provided, individual counselling of students was the primary function. Since that time much literature has come forth suggesting that the role of the school counsellor is more multifaceted. According to the literature the role should also include consulting and coordinating as well as educating.

- consulting-
- coordinating-
- educating-

2. I would like you to read this brief summary of the expanded role as recently defined by the B.C. School Counsellors' Association (Appendix B). Please take a few moments to read it then we can talk about it. I would like to know what it means to you, what it implies to you.
3. Do you support the expanded role of elementary school counsellor as outlined by the B.C. School Counsellors' Association?  
How realistic is it to expect counsellors to fulfill the role as defined by BCSCA?  
What expectations would be more realistic?
4. Do you see \_\_\_ as being able to support the expanded role? Give reasons to support your view.  
Probes
  - classroom teachers?
  - administrators?
  - new counsellors?
  - experienced counsellors?
  - district staff?
  - university training programs?
  - Ministry?
  - parents/the public?
  - students?

## C. Impediments to Expanding the Role

5. What would be the problems for people being able to support the expanded role?

Which of the problems you have discussed seem to be a priority?  
Which ones seem to be most troubling?

( Remember to list problems here for discussion in PART D)

Probes

- counsellors (novice/experienced)?
- teachers?
- administrators?
- district staff?
- university training programs?
- Ministry?
- parents/the public?
- students?

Probes

- isolation factor; lack of training to collaborate effectively; time does not allow for consultation time with teachers, etc.
- no time; not enough time in schools
- too many more pressing issues of their own, like new curriculum, to give counsellor the support they need
- cut backs in spending at Ministry level
- maintaining status quo-a basic resistance to change by people
- social-emotional programs have traditional low priority in eyes of public
- inadequate training - group counselling, collaboration, teaching are necessary skills
- crises seem to supercede some of the preventative programs-like teaching special topics
- counsellors not placed in schools based on their expertise and needs of schools-no match

additional problems:

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6. What additional skills would be required by the school counsellor to fulfill the expanded role?

7. What changes, if any, do you think schools as a whole will have to make to make the best use of school counsellors in their expanded role?

Probes

- time management skills
- collaborating in schools to do more preventative work like team teaching rather than crisis work
- assessing needs of school first in terms of social emotional climate then placing counsellor

D. Recommendations

8. If you could change the way elementary school counselling was handled in your district, how would you alter it? In other words, what recommendations can you make to help the counsellors' role expand?

9. More specifically, earlier(in part C) you mentioned that -- would be/is a factor impeding the role change. What suggestions to you have to fix/alleviate that problem?

E. Closing Comments

10. Is there anything that we may have overlooked that you would like to mention?

Thank You (hand out form for follow-up telephone interview)



## **Appendix B: Handout of Enhanced Role**

### **A PROPOSAL FOR ENHANCING THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELLORS' ROLE**

(Note: Taken from BCSCA Role Description Proposal)

#### **COUNSELLING**

Working directly with students

For example:

- individual/group counselling
- crisis intervention
- program selection
- career counselling

#### **CONSULTING AND COORDINATING**

Working indirectly with students through other personnel such as teachers, administrators, parents, and community agency staff

For example:

- providing classroom management strategies
- articulating with secondary schools
- coordinating peer counselling
- being liaison between home, school and

#### **EDUCATING**

Teaching skills or programs to students, teachers, and parents

For example:

- maintaining a self-help information resource center
- teaching conflict resolution, stress management, and problem solving
- acting as change agent to promote Year 2000 (Learning for Living)
- providing teachers with professional development on counselling issues

**"IT IS VITAL THAT A BALANCED COUNSELLING  
SERVICE ADDRESS ALL AREAS"**

## **Appendix C: Agenda for Focus Group Interviews**

### **AGENDA**

#### **A. INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS**

introduction of participants

informed consent-confidentiality, right of refusal

opinions, reasons, examples

taping-taking turns and names

#### **B. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What do elementary school counsellors do in elementary schools now?
2. What are your opinions about the idea of expanding the elementary school counsellors' role?
3. What would be impediments to implementing an expanded elementary school counsellors' role?
4. What recommendations could you make about overcoming the impediments?

#### **C. CLOSING COMMENTS**