Although I want to view myself as being objective and still firmly entrenched in the scientific method, my response to the four articles published in the December 2001 issue of Professional School Counseling (PSC) that focused on the past, present, and future of school counseling is most likely influenced by my own past. I am currently a counselor educator at a large research institution, where I teach many of the school counseling courses. In addition, one of my areas of research concerns examining the effectiveness of school counseling activities and programs. To me, the paramount reason for examining school counseling’s past and present is to determine what is most helpful to students. I firmly believe that most school counselors are helpful to students and have a significant influence on their development. I do not believe, however, that there is sufficient evidence or documentation of the positive effects of school counselors. My interest in school counseling research and the steadfast belief that the school counseling profession is at risk because of the lack of research will be a continuing theme throughout my response.

I respect the authors of these four vision articles, and I believe they have made significant contributions to school counseling throughout their careers. These individuals are leaders in the field of school counseling and their visions provide important insights into our past and explore significant future directions. As an example, Stan Baker (2001) made the history of school counseling enthralling with his own personal history interwoven into his overview of the development of the
profession. Stan Baker's leadership in school counseling is evident by his textbooks, serving as editor of *Professional School Counseling*, and his research. He raised some important issues in his article about achieving balance between implementing a school counseling program and serving the needs of "at-risk" students. Furthermore, his "realistic optimism" about the profession reflected confidence in the abilities of professional associations, scholars, and funding agencies to improve school counseling. He did, however, point out that these efforts are not reaching the grass roots level and that leadership is needed to promote the 21st Century guidance point-of-view. (As a side note to his article, I personally think Stan Baker is charismatic in a scholarly manner.)

Green and Keys (2001) raised some important questions regarding whether school counseling programs have transitioned to theoretically based programs and whether these programs are accomplishing the objective of positive development for all students. A major theme in Green and Keys' article was the call for school counselors to consider contextual factors in meeting the needs of students. They particularly focused on the needs of urban youth and the ecological implications of an urban environment. Given the needs of this population (Sanders, 2000), it seems imperative that school counselors develop innovative methods for meeting those needs. In particular, Green and Keyes suggested that developing an awareness of self-in-context should be an important focus of all school counseling programs.

In my view, Norm Gysbers has had one of the most significant influences on the field of school counseling during the past 20 years. He has moved the field from a service orientation to a programmatic focus. In his article in the December 2001 issue of *PSC*, he provided an eloquent account of what can be learned from school counseling's past and the importance of remembering this past into the future. Gysbers (2001) advocated for guidance and counseling programs that are seen as an integral part of education. His vision for the future is a fully implemented comprehensive guidance and counseling program in every school district in the United States that serves all students and their parents and is staffed by active, involved school counselors.

In the fourth article, Paisley and McMahon (2001) provided, yet, another perspective. They suggested that many of the challenges facing school counselors could also be viewed as opportunities. Some of the challenges they identified were ambiguity of role, increasingly diverse student populations, demands for technological sophistication, and calls for accountability in education. In order to meet these challenges, Paisley and McMahon suggested collaborating with other stakeholders and forming partnerships in change. They also addressed the importance of setting boundaries, professional development, and the need for school counselors to demonstrate their effectiveness through providing accountability information. In their snapshot of the ideal school counselor, they proposed that school counselors intentionally and collaboratively design responsive school counseling programs.

My reactions to these four articles are more of a reaction to the current state of the school counseling field rather than the content of these specific four articles. The focus of my remarks is on issues that I currently see as having an impact on school counselors. These remarks are intended to stimulate consideration of particular issues and not as a criticism of the four articles. All four of these articles made substantial contributions to our knowledge, and the authors deserve appreciation for their thoughtful analyses of school counseling and their visions for the future. The four articles focused on the past, present, and future of school counseling. I have structured my remarks similarly, with a focus on issues from the past, issues from the present, and issues for the future. The articles stimulated my thinking, and I appreciate the opportunity to share my somewhat contentious remarks.

**Issues from the Past**

Within all the four vision articles there is a theme that school counseling has a rich history that has influenced its evolution. In particular, Baker (2001) and Gysbers (2001) provided substantive discussions of our historical roots and major influences on the development of the profession. In fact, these discussions are in many ways complementary, with Gysbers' discussion focusing more on the early beginnings of the field whereas Baker blended in his own professional development and concentrated on events and influences since 1960. In reviewing all four articles and the authors' overview of the history of school counseling, I noted two themes that I believe are still pertinent to school counselors currently working in schools.

**Torn between Two Lovers**

Although the heading of torn between two lovers may be a bit sensationalistic, all four seminal articles alluded to school counseling's tendency to be caught between
two fields or caught between different expectations and responsibilities. As Gysbers (2001) indicated, even in the early 1900s, there were two distinctly different perspectives concerning the purposes of vocational guidance. One perspective concerned developing students’ capacities to prepare them to enter the world of work; whereas, the second perspective focused more on the democratic philosophy of making both the educational and occupational world a better place for children. In many ways these precise pulls may still be felt by school counselors, in which counselors must focus on academic and occupational planning (e.g., scheduling) while at the same time attending to the school environment and barriers within the general social context.

Gysbers (2001) also described the beginning in the 1920s and 1930s of the chasm between vocational education and a clinical or mental health approach to guidance. Once again, I believe school counselors today are still pulled in these two directions. This pull is even somewhat reflected in the National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Campbell & Daher, 1997), where school counselors have responsibilities for academic, career, and personal/social development. Gysbers (2001) argued that various groups interpret purpose of guidance and counseling in a variety of ways. Gysbers further contended that this continuation of diverse purposes will result in role conflict for school counselors and unfulfilled expectations. Paisley and McMahon (2001) indicated that the most significant challenge for school counselors concerns the ongoing debate over role definition. Yet, as Gysbers (2001) indicated, appeals for clarification on the role and function of school counselors have been made for the past 70 years. This leads to a critical question: Why is defining a school counselor’s role so difficult? It may be that school counselors continue to be torn between two or more “lovers” (e.g., education versus guidance, guidance versus counseling, vocational health versus mental health). Continuing with the lovers metaphor, role definition would probably be simpler if the field of school counseling would decide to be monogamous and only focus on one area. Focusing on one area, however, requires the abandonment of other areas where students truly need assistance. None of the authors in the previous issue provided a simple solution to the problems of multiple expectations and role definition, but an easy solution is probably not realistic until the profession is willing to make some difficult decisions.

School Counselors Don’t Work in a Bubble

Another persistent theme identified by the authors in their discussions of school counseling’s history is that school counseling has been influenced by outside events and external forces. In an admirable summary, Paisley and McMahon (2001) stated that “school counseling programs and their particular areas of emphasis have alternated based on the social, political, economic, and psychological issues facing schools, communities, families, children, and adolescents” (p. 106). These past influences have sometimes interacted and resulted in growth of the school counseling profession. I would argue that some of the events of the past that have resulted in the expansion of the school counseling profession are surprisingly similar to events and political trends experienced today. The critical question is whether these similar events will once again result in growth within the field of school counseling.

The first parallel between historical influences and present-day affairs concerns educational reform. As Gysbers (2001) indicated, school counseling initially developed during a period of educational reform during the early 20th century. Cremin (1964) argued that the most potent example of the Progressive Education Movement’s influence on current educational practice is the guidance counselor. Some would contend that, once again, education in the United States is in a time of significant reform. House and Martin (1998) contended that school counselors have had little involvement in the current educational reform movement, and this lack of participation may have a detrimental effect on school counselors’ future roles and responsibilities. This may be another critical time in school counseling history, and I believe it is important to consider whether school counseling will prosper or wane during this current period of educational reform.

Another important time in school counseling’s history was in the late 1950s when the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was passed (Herr, 2001). In discussing the NDEA time, Baker (2001) said it was a time of jobs and ideas. Currently, it is also a time of jobs (Towner-Larsen, Granello, & Sears, 2000), but does the school counseling profession have the influx of ideas that were so prevalent during the late 1950s and 1960s? As I read Baker’s historical overview, I was nostalgic for those times when I also was first reading Carl Rogers, Robert Carkhuff, Leo Goldman, and Ed Herr among others. I think the field of school counseling needs an
infusion of visionary leadership, new theoretical directions, and an invigoration of research. I believe the four vision articles did not address sufficiently the lack of current theory development in school counseling. For many of my peers, Carl Rogers awakened a passion for working with students. As Green and Keys’ (2001) article documented, the world is quite different from what it was when Rogers’ (1942) Counseling and Psychotherapy was published. Yet, the theoretical foundations that typically are provided to current students are theoretical approaches developed in the 1950s and 1960s. Although Baker (2001) expressed a desire for charismatic motivators who would initiate grass roots support through the national media, I desire charismatic ideas that would ignite the profession. I wish the four vision articles had better reflected my own hunger for a renaissance of professional excitement about more effective counseling approaches and theoretical models for helping students in school settings.

Issues from the Present

In responding to the four articles in the December 2001 issue of PSC that focused on the past, present, and future of school counseling, I think it is also important to examine some of the issues that are currently facing school counselors. All authors of the articles indicated that school counseling’s rich history has had a positive influence on the development of the profession. Professional advancement, however, cannot occur without reflection on current practices and issues. Hence, I have included in my response some discussion of present practices, particularly related to the topics of comprehensive developmental programs, collaboration, and evidence-based practice.

Are They Really Comprehensive Developmental Programs?

All four of the vision articles described the evolution of school counseling into its current focus on school counseling programs that are comprehensive and developmental. Of particular importance are Gybers’ (2001) remarks in this area for, in my opinion, he has had a substantial influence on moving the field in this direction. Sink and MacDonald (1998) found that the majority of states either had already implemented or were planning to implement statewide comprehensive guidance and counseling programs. Although I agree that school counseling is moving toward programs that are comprehensive and developmental, I believe the topics of (a) programs, (b) comprehensive, and (c) developmental merit further examination.

The authors in the previous issue all endorsed the current practice of implementing school counseling programs. In reading the articles, I could not avoid noting the scant reference to research supporting a programmatic approach and the lack of empirically based content within school programs. Perry (1993) contended that there has been little research examining the effectiveness of comprehensive school counseling programs. The lack of programmatic research was also noted by Whiston and Sexton (1998) in our review of school counseling outcome research. Most of the research in school counseling has studied components (e.g., guidance curriculum activities) rather than the effects of comprehensive school counseling programs. There are some studies that have found that school counseling programs are effective. For example, Lapan, Gybers, and Sun (1997) found students from more fully implemented guidance programs reported earning higher grades, being better prepared for the future, and having a more positive school environment than students from schools with less fully developed guidance programs. This is also consistent with Nelson and Gardner’s (1998) findings, where students in more fully implemented guidance programs in Utah had higher college entrance examination scores, took more advanced classes, and rated their overall educational experience better than students from less developed programs. Although these results are encouraging, I think there needs to be more research that documents the effectiveness of school counseling programs before the field of education will unconditionally accept this model.

Another issue concerning comprehensive developmental programs is whether in actuality these school counseling programs are comprehensive. Whereas, I believe all students are in need of a comprehensive developmental counseling program, I am not sure all children are receiving the assistance they need. With counselor-student ratios averaging 513:1 (American Counseling Association, 1999), it is difficult to imagine that counselors can facilitate development in all areas for all students. Furthermore, many counselors are not able to devote all of their time to school counseling programs; recent findings indicated that, on the average, school counselors spend 25% of their time on nonguidance activities (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). The complexities of meeting all students’ needs further intensify when we consider the needs of certain students such as poor urban youth (Green & Keys, 2001) and at-risk students (Baker, 2001). In my view, there are many schools where current practices are not comprehensively meeting the needs of all students.

The four vision articles also stressed that school counseling programs are developmental, with a focus on providing developmentally appropriate interventions. In reading these four overviews of the history of school counseling, I was dismayed by the lack of referencing of major research findings and influential theories that should be the foundation of this developmental approach. I agree with Green and Keys’ (2001) statement that “the ability of program developers and practitioners to accurately integrate developmental theory
into the role and function of the school counselor may be a more complex task than previously considered” (p. 85). Although many of the authors of the vision articles discussed the importance of academic, career, and personal/social development, none of the authors addressed in detail major theoretical influences that should guide curriculum development in these three areas. Theoretical and empirical advancements in childhood and adolescent development are occurring, but this information needs to be more consistently applied to school counseling programs.

The Down-Side of Collaboration and Indirect Services

Paisley and McMahon (2001) advocated the importance of collaboration in the delivery of a school counseling program, in which school counselors work with others so that they combine their efforts to collectively meet the needs of students. Green and Keys (2001) also promoted the importance of collaboration and the closely related topic of providing indirect services. Even though I teach students that collaboration, consultation, and indirect services are a critical part of a school counselor’s role and necessary to the goal of providing services to all students, I sometimes wonder if these activities have both beneficial and harmful effects. Could it be that school counselors too often try to “make do” by collaborating and lose recognition for the services provided? For example, even though a school counselor may assist tenth grade English teachers in developing a career unit, they still may be perceived by students and parents as doing little in the area of career planning. Collaboration often involves having teachers teach guidance lessons, but would math or reading teachers be encouraged to have individuals not prepared in their disciplines teaching major portions of their curriculum? As a profession, we complain about high student/counselor ratios; yet, we might be our own worst enemies by continuing to “limp” along.

Green and Keys (2001) and Paisley and McMahon (2001) are consistent with many other professionals in advocating for the importance of collaboration in school counseling (Bernak, 1998, 2000; Friend & Cook, 1996). Often discussions of collaboration involve school counselors collaborating with community agencies to provide mental health services. In fact, there is a growing trend where mental health services are provided through community agencies in school settings (Catron, Harris, & Weiss, 1998; Rones & Hoagwood, 2000). A closer examination of these projects, however, indicates that school counselors often have little involvement, and many of the school-based clinics are not collaborative projects. This growth in school-based clinics may augment the belief that school counselors are not “real” counselors and are most suited to paperwork and scheduling activities. School counselors cannot possibly provide individual counseling with caseloads of 1 to 500. Nevertheless, this may be a critical time in the development of school counseling where the profession may be forced to abandon any clinical responsibilities by not taking an active role in retaining those responsibilities. I believe that counseling provided in a school should be under the auspices of the school counselor(s), and that school counselors should be the ones coordinating mental health clinical services provided in schools. Although many will argue that school counselors do not have time for these responsibilities, I believe that ignoring these responsibilities will result in school counselors continuing to have the 1:500 ratios as more individualized services are being provided by others. I am not proposing that school counselors say they can provide the needed mental health services with current caseloads; rather, I am arguing that mental health services should be viewed as a portion of the school counseling program and coordinated by school counselors.

My concerns about the increasing focus on collaboration should not be construed as being uncooperative or opposed to collaborative activities. However, I am concerned that some of the systemic problems in school counseling cannot be addressed through typical collaborative activities. Some collaborative efforts are short-lived and fade away after the initial excitement dissipates or there are personnel changes within the cooperating organizations. My concern is with students and the belief that unrealistic caseloads keep school counselors from providing the assistance students need. Although collaboration can often be an important activity, it may be time for the field to place more emphasis on increasing the number of school counselors and providing more effective programs to students rather than on initiating collaborative programs.

Evidence-Based Practice: Is the Profession Missing the Mark?

In education, there is growing movement toward research-based or empirically supported instruction (Evensen & Hmelo, 2000; National Reading Panel, 2000). This same trend can be seen in counseling and psychotherapy, where many settings require the use of
empirically supported treatments (Wampold, Lichtenberg, & Waehler, in press). Furthermore, in discussing the future of school psychology, Reschly (2000) indicated that great strides have been made in the past 10 years concerning identifying empirically supported interventions in school psychology. In the current era of accountability in education, it is anticipated that there will be demands for evidence that shows school counselors have a positive influence on students. Of the four articles, however, Green and Keyes (2001) were the only ones to specifically mention the need for evidence-based practices. Although Green and Keyes provided some resources for evidence-based models, none of these models were specifically designed for school counselors to use. Hence, the research that has been conducted on these programs was typically not conducted with school counselors. I believe the profession of school counseling is at risk because we do not have substantial research showing that school counseling programs produce positive results for children. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2000), the average school counselor makes $42,100, which is a substantial amount for a school district to invest with little data to support the efficacy of that investment. Without stronger empirical support, some administrators, school board members, or parents may argue that the monies currently used to pay school counselors could be used for other purposes (e.g., buying computers, funding more reading specialists).

In my opinion, this is a critical time for leaders in school counseling to invest in the future of the profession and support school counseling research. School counselors may believe they make a difference, but without “hard data” to support these claims, school counselors run the risks of losing their positions. Professional organizations such as the American School Counselor Association do award small grants for research, but these grants will not cover the cost of the type of research that needs to be conducted to produce evidence-based practice guidelines. The importance of developing convincing accountability information cannot be understated, and all school counselors should be actively lobbying their professional organizations to devote more energy to the funding of school counseling research.

Issues About the Future

The authors of the articles that focused on the past, present, and future of school counseling offered some unique insights into the future of school counseling. Bakers’ (2001) question of whether the glass should be viewed as half empty or full is a pertinent issue and deserves consideration by each reader. While it is often easy to identify external forces that may influence the future of school counseling, it is also important to examine internal barriers that may inhibit the attainment of future goals. In my opinion, the future of the profession rests with every school counselor and the decisions they make on where to invest their time and energy.

Continuing To Try To Be Everything

Most school counselors I know report that their day goes by in a whirlwind of activities, where they wonder at the end of the day what they have accomplished. One of the reasons for this is the multiple expectations that people have of school counselors and most counselors’ basic desire to help. In response to all four articles discussing the lack of clarity in role definition, I have some initial suggestions.

Although the National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Campbell & Daher, 1997) does provide some clarification on a school counselor’s role and function, many principals are not even aware that there are standards, nevertheless what those standards suggest for school counseling programs. More effort needs to be directed toward informing educators about the national standards. This is consistent with Gysbers’ (2001) suggestion that school counselors continue to fulfill their obligation toward developing and expanding legislative authority for guidance and counseling. Although the national standards provide suggestions on what constitutes an appropriate school counseling program, state standards dictate the content of a program. As Sink and Macdonald (1998) indicated, many states have instituted comprehensive guidance models, but more work needs to be done in this area.

One of the strengths of school counselors is their dedication and willingness to “pitch in” and help. This strength is also a weakness, for many counselors try to manage multiple responsibilities and overwhelming caseloads the best they can. This “make do” attitude often results in some responsibilities being neglected because of the conflicting expectations and complex duties. It also may be an appropriate time to better educate administrators, policy makers, parents, and other stakeholders about the plight of school counselors. It might be interesting to see a school board’s reaction to statements such as: “Although school counselors are responsible for academic, career, and personal/social development, our ratios are too high in this district to provide all three, so the board needs to decide which of these areas students do not need!” Or a school counselor might say to a principal, “It is impossible to meet the needs of all children with my caseload, so can you please select the students who do not need assistance.” Although it probably would be unwise to use the precise statements, school counselors should consider what they can do to have others understand the problems with unrealistic expectations and the negative effects of non-guidance activities.

Reschly (2000) suggested that there may be further development of federal and state child and family legis-
lation that could lead to a dramatic expansion of psychological services in schools. An important issue concerns whether school counselors will be involved in these activities or relegated to noncounseling duties. I am not suggesting that academic and career development be abandoned in order to provide only personal/social interventions. On the other hand, I do not believe personal/social development should be underemphasized in order to respond to pressure to increase test scores. In the final analysis, however, it does not truly matter what I believe for my beliefs may have very little validity. Professions by definition are based on a body of knowledge, and school counseling’s future should be influenced by what has been shown to positively influence student development.

**Finding What Works**

As I have repeatedly argued in this article, there is a significant dearth of research in school counseling. I do not believe the authors of the four articles in the December 2001 issue of PSC sufficiently addressed the problems associated with this weakness. Unless more emphasis is placed on documenting the effectiveness of school counselors, school counseling programs can easily be eliminated in these times of budgetary constraints. Although there is some evidence indicating that certain school counseling activities have empirical support (Whiston & Sexton, 1998), school counselors need more research that examines what works. I believe more research is needed in order to verify how school counselors should be spending their time. Once more is known about which activities are supported, practitioners can argue more persuasively against being saddled with activities that do not facilitate student development. Furthermore, in my experience, almost all school counselors truly want to help students; yet, how can they help students if they do not really know what helps? My vision for the future of school counseling is to determine what programs and activities are most beneficial to students and to have school counselors implement these empirically supported interventions on a daily basis.

In conclusion, the authors of the articles that focused on the past, present, and future of school counseling provided some important insights into the development of school counseling and issues and challenges for the future. Learning from the past enables a profession to move forward, and the lessons provided by these authors were pertinent to present practices and future directions. I appreciate the opportunity to reflect on these four articles and to provide a response. I now want to challenge each reader to reflect on the past, present, and future of school counseling and to articulate a vision that they will share with the larger school counseling community. I want to revise Gysbers’ (2001) closing statement by saying: Remember the past into the future and share your vision so we can learn from each other.

**References**


