“I soon realized that most of the young offenders dropped out of school at a very early stage. I couldn’t understand how, in the entire educational system, nobody tried to prevent their failure or help them to break the circle of poverty and weakness,” she said. “I believed that schooling could make a difference in the lives of those young, doomed children. I decided to work at a school in order to reach those children before they dropped out from the school system and lost their chance to become part of the mainstream of society.”

After graduation, she went back to the same neighborhood to work as a school counselor. “It was a great challenge in those years — the mid ’60s — to introduce the ‘newborn profession’ into a rigid school system,” she said. With much hard work, she was appointed to a managerial position, supervising more than 100 counselors in the region. “In this position, I had the opportunity to institutionalize school counseling by developing both preventive and developmental programs as well as developing the administrative aspects of counseling, such as documentation and teamwork.”

Throughout Erhard’s career, she has attempted to differentiate school counseling from other helping professions by reconstructing and reformulating its focus on human development rather than on maladjustment and psychopathology. “When I entered the profession in the early 1970s, the teacher–counselor role was narrowly defined and attuned mainly to ‘problematic’ students. This limited definition appeared to me to negate the profession’s primary goals of furthering students’ emotional, social and developmental needs in addition to their learning needs.”

During the next decade, she worked to steer counselors away from individual counseling, and guide them toward a comprehensive, systemic, clearly defined and accountable program. “Throughout the 1990s, I painstakingly continued to develop a proactive, comprehensive perspective toward the profession and its objectives — enhancement of personal well-being in a changing social environment. I worked to shift the paradigm of school counseling from services that benefit some students to programs that benefit every stakeholder — students, teachers, staff and parents.”

Erhard is proud of the fact that she was instrumental in preparing a training program for counselors working in kindergartens and day-care centers. In 2002, the Ministry of Education validated the new specialization in counseling and allocated positions and funds to employ counselors in the early childhood school systems.

Today, after more than 30 years of activity in her profession, she feels that her dedication, leadership skills and persistence have left a long-lasting imprint in the development of counseling in Israel.

Global teamwork

Currently, Erhard is collaborating with ACA members Rita Chi–Ying Chung, an associate professor in the Counseling and Development Program at George Mason University, and Fred Bemak, professor and program coordinator for the Counseling and Development Program at GWU. The team is working on an international research project focusing on how social justice in different countries manifests itself in counseling. “We want to look at equity discrimination, oppression and to explore how counselors are working toward those values of social justice. It’s fascinating because different countries are doing that in different ways, and we can learn from them all,” Bemak said.