

## Gifted Education and Counselling in Canada

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*Education in Canada is determined at the provincial level of jurisdiction. Each province and territory has a unique system of legislation and policy, although most provinces view the education of gifted students as a category of service provision under special education. The first section of this paper provides a brief, general overview of key themes that emerge from an analysis of the relevant Education Ministry documents and literature concerning gifted education and counselling within the Canadian context. Where appropriate, the particular province(s) and/or territory(s) associated with the themes is noted. The second section highlights the work of Canadian scholars most relevant to counsellors working with gifted students. A brief review of recommended counselling needs, goals, and practices for the gifted is presented in the conclusion.*

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**KEY WORDS:** Canadian education; gifted education; counselling needs; gifted counselling; counselling parents.

### THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

In Canada, education at the kindergarten, elementary, and secondary levels is the sole responsibility of each province and territory. As such, the delivery of educational services for gifted students is impacted by Education Acts, regulations, and ministerial directives within each provincial and territorial jurisdiction (Yewchuk, 2000a). Review articles by Goguen (1993), Leroux (2000), and Yewchuk (2000a), and examination of the special millennium issue on giftedness in Canada edited by Yewchuk (2000b), provide the opportunity to identify several themes.

One theme that is evident is the diversity of approaches for identifying and educating gifted students. It is quite possible that an individual can be gifted in one province but “not gifted” in another. Within each province, identification

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procedures and educational approaches will vary from school district to school district. Examples from British Columbia highlight the diversity of programs. Currently, gifted education in British Columbia includes a variety of programs for students with high ability. Programs vary throughout the province and generally are decided upon on a district-by-district basis. While this practice allows for responsiveness to the community context, it has the disadvantage of substantial variability in program options. Coupled with the variability in identification practices, the result can be that students receive attention to their special learning needs in one school district but not in another (Klapp & Porath, 2000). Some public and private schools exist for the express purpose of educating gifted learners. Some examples are as follows:

- In an urban district, Challenge Centres are set up in host elementary schools. These offer three modules per year, each lasting for nine weeks;
- Secondary students are served with Advanced Placement courses, the opportunity to challenge courses, course acceleration, and attendance at “schools within schools” that offer advanced and enriched curricula; and
- A rural district is dependent on the will and creativity of interested staff to offer some curricular modifications to gifted learners.

The opportunity to participate in an alternative program that is a full-time school designed to facilitate early entrance to college is offered through a Provincial Resource Program (PRP) in Vancouver. There are over 50 PRPs in the province, with one dedicated to the needs of exceptionally academically gifted students.

The Transition Program for Academically Gifted Students is a partnership between the Vancouver School Board and the University of British Columbia. Begun in 1993 as a Vancouver School Board initiative, it is the only program of its kind in Canada. Designed to support academically gifted early adolescents who wish to enter university early, the Transition Program includes academic studies focused on completion of secondary school requirements and mentorship by professors (Klapp & Porath, 2000).

Private schools also provide options for education of gifted students in British Columbia. There is one private school, Choice School for Gifted Children, set up expressly for the education of gifted students. Other provinces such as Alberta have introduced Charter schools as an alternative to public education and private schools, and there are currently two such schools with a focus on the education of gifted students in operation. Parents have a much greater involvement in the programs and decision-making at these schools.

Support for gifted education tends to be cyclical. In the 1990s, the combination of provincial budget cuts to school jurisdictions and the introduction of inclusive education policy and practice has led to a decline in specialized provisions for the gifted (Yewchuk, 2000a).

A second theme is the importance of advocacy groups such as the Association for Bright Children (ABC) that began in Ontario in 1972. The ABC parent group continues to play a critical role in ensuring that education of gifted learners stays on the provincial agenda (Matthews & Smyth, 2000). The Alberta Association for Bright Children (AABC) was founded in 1979. The focus of the provincial umbrella group, AABC, is the well-being of families with bright and gifted children. They provide support through networking, compiling and disseminating information to parents, teachers, and schools, and coordinating all matters dealing with provincial government, legislation, and liaison with other provincial bodies. Local chapters and network groups work with their individual school jurisdictions and organize both adult education and children's programs (Peters, 2000). In 1983, the Gifted Children's Association of British Columbia was formed, growing out of other parental efforts throughout the province. Advocacy by this group has had a positive effect on the policy, practice, and funding of gifted education over the last two decades of the century (Klapp & Porath, 2000). As with other provinces the Association for Bright Children, a parent advisory group for children and their families, has had success lobbying for provincial changes; the Sydney ABC successfully lobbied the province to add giftedness to the special needs definitions in 1992 (Edmunds, Blaikie, & Cunningham, 2000).

Delaney (2000) describes the history and involvement of the Gifted and Talented Education Council (GTEC), a specialist council of professionals interested in giftedness. GTEC has been instrumental in gifted education in Alberta, publishing documents on teacher training and publishing AGATE (the Journal of the Gifted and Talented Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association), which is the only gifted education journal in Canada. The Association of Educators of Gifted, Talented, and Creative Children in British Columbia was founded in 1978, providing advocacy, in-service training for teachers, and parent information.

Government publications have had an impact on gifted education. In Manitoba, *New Directions: A Blueprint for Action* provided a renewed education plan for Manitoba in emphasizing understanding, appreciating, and using abstract patterns, relationships, concepts and connections with numbers, words, ideas, and issues (McCluskey & Mays, 2000). As of July 2000, a new resource is available for schools in Alberta, *Teaching Students Who Are Gifted and Talented* (Alberta Learning, 2000). This resource provides practical strategies for designing and implementing programs; addresses administration of programs; and discusses conceptions of giftedness, the identification of gifted and talented students, and giftedness in the visual and performing arts.

The establishment of the new territory of Nunavut provides many unique challenges and opportunities for education reform. Education in Nunavut has been largely determined by the Inuit, with emphases on cultural relevance in curriculum development (DeMerchant & Tagalik, 2000). Some core values are that learning is a lifelong process, that recognizing all of the potential teachers in our communities-beginning with the Elders and families-is important, and that

building the educational system within the context of Inuit Qaujimaqatugangit is necessary. The Government of Nunavut (1999) describes a vision that “is shaped by and belongs to the people of Nunavut” and “seeks direction from the people” (p. 2). The term, Inuit Qaujimaqatugangit, embraces all aspects of the Inuit culture, including beliefs, values, worldviews, language, social organization, knowledge, life skills, perceptions, and expectations (DeMerchant & Tagalik, 2000). In terms of education, the promotion and revitalization of the Inuit culture, language, and heritage are fundamental for the development of strong, bilingual, healthy children and youth. All Inuit children and youth are considered by their elders to have a gift(s) to share and contribute to the well-being of the community (DeMerchant & Tagalik, 2000). Consequently, students are required to learn not only surface knowledge of their culture, but must also be well grounded in deeper aspects of their beliefs and practices, so that they can enhance and share these gifts with their peers and community.

Universities have important roles in gifted education. The Centre for Gifted Education was established at the University of Calgary in 1988. The Centre’s primary mandate was to enhance the education of gifted students in Alberta (Mendaglio & Pyryt, 2000). This is accomplished by providing training opportunities for teachers at the pre-service, in-service, and graduate levels; by conducting research on the cognitive and affective needs of gifted students; by providing direct services to gifted students through talent searches and summer programs; by providing workshops for parents; and by collaborating with AABC, GTEC, and Alberta Learning in hosting the yearly SAGE (Society for the Advancement of Gifted Education) Conference.

In Quebec, teacher-training opportunities differs between French- and English-speaking universities (Massé, 2000). Among the nine French-speaking universities, only three offer a mandatory course in gifted education at the undergraduate level; therefore many French-speaking teachers do not have many opportunities to learn how to meet the needs of their gifted students. All English-speaking universities, however, offer mandatory courses at the undergraduate level, and McGill University offers a diploma in the psychology and education of the gifted along with five graduate courses in gifted education (Massé, 2000).

In 1994, the Education Faculty of the Université de Moncton, responsible for Francophone teacher training in New Brunswick, made a major revision in its mission, structure, and programmes. First, they abolished the B.Ed. in Special Education and redirected the faculty expertise to the Master’s program in resource teaching and to the offering of basic courses in exceptionality and special programs. Second, they integrated Education Psychology and Primary Education, creating courses in exceptionalities for all. Finally, they developed a mission statement, “Vers Une Pédagogie Actualisante” (Toward an Actualizing Pedagogy). This concept has eight elements: uniqueness of each learner; welcoming and belonging; consciousness and commitment; participation and autonomy; mastery

learning to the upper limits; cooperation; integration and reflection; and inclusion (Goguen, 2000).

## SUMMARY

This section of the paper has focused on a general description of the various and unique approaches to the education of gifted students one finds in the Canadian provinces and territories. Given that there are ten provinces and three territories, we have attempted to identify the predominant themes coming from our analysis of Ministry documents and relevant literature. Specifically, the major themes include a variety of identification and educational approaches, the importance of advocacy groups in advancing gifted education, the important role of government publications, the cultural influences in education and gifted educational reform, and the key impact of universities, particularly with respect to teacher preparation. The remainder of the paper will focus on the work of Canadian scholars most relevant to the counselling of gifted and talented students.

## CANADIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO GIFTED EDUCATION AND COUNSELLING

The following segments highlight those Canadian approaches to gifted education that are most relevant to counsellors.

### Conceptions of Giftedness

In the field of giftedness it is not uncommon to hear the constructs of giftedness and talent used interchangeably, with few scholars arguing a distinction between the two. In recent years however, Gagné, of the University of Quebec at Montreal, Canada, developed the Differential Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT), aimed at distinguishing between natural abilities (giftedness) and systematically developed skills (talent). Gagné's DMGT is, in essence, a developmental theory of talent emergence, based on the fundamental relationship between gifts and talents. The model postulates a direct causal relationship between gifts and talents, and stipulates that an individual cannot become talented without being gifted first (Gagné, 2003).

The model is made up of six components, which can be subdivided into two trios. The first trio describes the transformation of outstanding natural abilities (gifts) into high-level skills (talents) of an occupational field through the process of learning and practice (Gagné, 2003). Natural abilities can be seen in every task required of children in the course of their schooling, for example,

reading, speaking a foreign language, problem solving, playing sports, playing musical instruments, and social abilities (Gagné, 1997). The second trio consists of the components of chance, environmental factors, and intrapersonal factors. Each of these catalysts can be examined in terms of either direction (facilitator/inhibitor), or strength of the causal impact on the developmental process of talents. The DMGT is then a hierarchy of causal impact on talent emergence (Gagné, 2003). In this model counsellors can play an important role in promoting the acquisition of those affective characteristics that are critical components of talent development.

### **Theory of Positive Disintegration**

Kazimierz Dabrowski developed the Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD) in Poland, and refined the theory at the University of Alberta, in Canada. Although relatively obscure in general education and counselling psychology, the theory has found a home in gifted education (Mendaglio, 2002). This theory provides a unique perspective on the role of conflict as a component of mental growth, and gives insight into the psychological functioning of the gifted (Pyryt & Mendaglio, 1993).

For Dabrowski, development proceeds through five discrete stages or levels. Unlike other stage theories of development, which assume progression through each stage, the Theory of Positive Disintegration proposes that only a few individuals who have the right combination of heredity and environment are capable of reaching the highest levels of development. The levels are marked by differing attention to instinctual factors, social conventions, and individual growth and autonomy (Tillier, 2002). The five levels of Dabrowski's theory appear in ascending order with higher levels representing individuals whose personality is defined by a hierarchy of altruistic values (O'Connor, 2002). Dabrowski proposed five forms of overexcitability (psychomotor, sensual, imaginal, intellectual, and emotional) that filter everyday experience. In Dabrowski's theory, emotional overexcitability is necessary to reach the highest levels of development (Pyryt & Mendaglio, 1993). Dabrowski also proposed that the interaction of the environment with the over-excitabilities activated autonomous inner forces called dynamisms. The dynamisms reflect the degree of inner conflict between the way the world is and the way it ought to be (Mendaglio, 2002).

In terms of implications for counselling, Mendaglio and Pyryt (1996) suggest that Dabrowski's theory be taught to clients who are displaying symptoms indicative of the presence of dynamisms. The ultimate goal is assisting clients to accept themselves while experiencing forces of development that are working to destroy personality structures. It is hoped that their knowledge of TPD concepts will then contribute to their self-acceptance process (Mendaglio & Pyryt, 1996). From this theoretical perspective feeling bad is actually a good thing; counsellors working with gifted students may see negative feelings as an indication of

a student's potential for advanced development (Mendaglio, 1998). Dabrowski's theory requires counsellors to let go of the traditional role of fixing a client. Instead, they are encouraged to view the client's symptoms as positive indicators of developmental potential (Pyryt & Mendaglio, 1993). Dabrowskian counsellors typically use a didactic approach, teaching a client elements of the TPD to facilitate his/her acceptance and reinterpretation of symptoms of internal conflict (Pyryt & Mendaglio, 1993).

### **Heightened Multi-Faceted Sensitivity Model**

Mendaglio (1998, 2003), of the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada, envisions a concept of counselling the gifted that focuses on the characteristics of sensitivity and intensity. He stresses attending to the intense emotionality of the gifted in order to enhance interactions with these students. It is not uncommon to see a variety of strong emotional reactions from gifted children. How counsellors respond to these reactions greatly influences what a child learns about emotional expression. Mendaglio (2003) presents a multi-faceted view of sensitivity called heightened multi-faceted sensitivity that incorporates facets focusing on self-and other-orientation in both the cognitive domains. This conception increases our understanding of self-awareness, perspective taking, empathy, and emotional experience. It is therefore crucial for counsellors to attend to the subtle manifestations of these important affective characteristics in gifted students. Mendaglio (1998) provides several recommendations for counselling gifted students. First and foremost, the attitudes toward and the expectations of giftedness need to be examined. It is important to eliminate destructive views such as believing that gifted students generally view themselves as the elite. This type of attitude becomes a barrier to providing special education programming for gifted students. Second, it is important for counsellors to feel secure and competent in their roles. It is fairly common for gifted students to challenge the adults they work with, which can be very stressful if professionals are not secure in their knowledge. Third, appropriate emotional expression must be modelled in order to help gifted students with their own complex emotions. Fourth, facilitative responses to students' emotional expression must be provided. The better students' heightened sensitivity is understood, the easier it will be to accept their emotionality. Fifth, it is important to identify emotions through nonverbal cues. This will help to infer accurately a student's emotional experience if they are not expressing their feelings. Sixth, discussing heightened sensitivity as a common trait of gifted students will help to normalize this for students, as well as encourage awareness and elicit student perspectives. Finally, it is critical to avoid judging, criticizing, or minimizing emotional expressions. As sharing emotions can be a stressful and risky endeavour, it is important not to overreact or underrespond to a student (Mendaglio, 1998).

## **Career Development for the Gifted**

For the past 45 years, the literature on career education for the gifted (Frederickson, 1979; Hoyt & Hebler, 1974; Rothney & Koopman, 1958; Sanborn, 1979) has suggested that career education for the gifted must deal with the following issues: (a) multipotentiality, (b) investment, (c) expectations, (d) mobility, (e) lifestyle, and (f) innovativeness. Multipotentiality is the capability of succeeding at multiple careers. Investment refers to the financial and personal costs of obtaining the prerequisite educational credentials needed to pursue careers. Expectations refer to the career-related values held by significant others. Mobility involves possible movement away from home to pursue career paths and upward movement in social status as a result of educational and occupational accomplishments. Lifestyle refers to the impact that a career has on every aspect of one's daily life. Innovativeness recognises that gifted individuals will create their own careers by combining disciplines such as astronomy and physics into astrophysics. Pyryt (1993, 1998) proposed an inter-related career development model to address these issues consisting of content acquisition, self-awareness, self-concept development, creative problem solving, sex-role awareness, interpersonal effectiveness training, and stress/time management.

## **Perfectionism and Gifted Students**

Perfectionism has been considered a trait of giftedness since the 1920s. Although other traits, including uneven development of intellectual and emotional areas, heightened sensitivity, feeling different, and emotional intensity, have also been associated with giftedness, perfectionism continues to be seen as a major characteristic of the gifted (Schuler, 2000). Although many researchers believe that perfectionism has positive and negative aspects, its role in the emotional health of gifted students has been looked at primarily from a pathological perspective, which has led to the belief that perfectionism is a negative characteristic that must be eliminated in order for the gifted student to be able to function successfully (Schuler, 2000; Weisse, 1990).

Among educators of the gifted, the link between giftedness and perfectionism seems clearly established (Pyryt, 2000). The tendency toward perfectionism is an item on Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students (SR-BCSS), the most widely used teacher-rating scale for the identification of superior students (Renzulli, Smith, White, Callhan, & Hartman, 1976). Dealing with perfectionism is often listed as one of the counselling needs of the gifted (Kerr, 1991; Silverman, 1993). Educators are concerned about perfectionism in gifted students because it is believed to cause feelings of worthlessness and depression when gifted students fail to live up to unrealistic expectations (Pyryt, 1994). Perfectionistic tendencies may also make some gifted students vulnerable to underachievement

because they do not submit work unless it is perfect (Whitmore, 1980). Research by Parker (2000) suggests that achieving-gifted students have similar levels of perfectionism as average-ability controls.

Canadian researchers have been directly involved in the development of one of the primary measures of perfectionism, the Multidimensional Perfectionism scale (Flett & Hewitt, 1995; Hewitt & Flett, 1991, 1993). This 45-item instrument assesses three dimensions related to perfectionism: Self-Oriented Perfectionism that focuses on excessively high standards, Socially-Prescribed Perfectionism that addresses the perceptions of standards set by others, and Other-Oriented Perfectionism that examines an individual's expectations of others. In studies of university students, Self-oriented Perfectionism and Socially-Prescribed Perfectionism scores account for about 15% of the variance in scores on standardized measures of depression (Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1996; Hewitt, Flett, Ediger, Norton, & Flynn, 1998).

Influenced by Foster (1983), Pyryt (1994) identified several things that can be done to help individuals cope with perfectionistic tendencies. First, individuals need to recognize which activities are most valued and focus their efforts on the tasks that are rewarded. Second, individuals need to develop the capacity for constructive failure by recognizing that the current performance, even if imperfect, can be used to enhance future performance. Third, individuals need to develop self-concepts separate from products by understanding that they have unconditional self-worth independent of others' evaluations of their products. Fourth, individuals need to recognize that commitment to excellence is a lifelong struggle. Fifth, they need to set realistic goals. Finally, they need to develop avocational interests and pursuits that bring joy.

### **Giftedness and Females**

Gifted girls demonstrate their giftedness at an early age, and are typically taller, stronger, and healthier than girls of average IQ. They seem to be relatively free of childhood adjustment disorders. Gifted females may experience social anxiety and a decrease in self-confidence in adolescence. In addition, they are at risk for numerous behaviours including bulimia, anorexia, drug and alcohol abuse, unsafe sex, and unwanted pregnancies. (Kerr & Nicpon, 2003). Despite these risks, a number of studies have found that although many eminent women endured unhappy adolescences, they were still able to overcome feelings of rejection and develop independence (Kerr, 1991). Research done with talented females has revealed numerous barriers to realizing their potential (Reis, 2002). Gifted females may face under representation in non-traditional careers, inequities in salaries, lack of affordable childcare, and societal messages implying that careers and femininity are polar opposites (Silverman, 1993). Most talented females face dilemmas about their abilities and talents, personal decisions about family, ambivalence of parents

and teachers toward developing high levels of competence, decisions about duty and caring, as well as other personal, religious, and social issues (Reis, 2002).

Canadian researchers have been actively engaged in understanding the influence of factors such as socialization, ability, self-conceptions of ability, and values in impacting adolescent students' participation, achievement, and initial career choices in science and related disciplines (Lupart & Cannon, 2002). This longitudinal study which is designed to apply Eccles' Achievement-Choice Model (Eccles, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1999) to the Canadian context, involves 1400 participants in Grades 7 and 10 and subsamples of their parents, teachers, and guidance counselors with data collection in three phases. Initial results from the Phase 1 data collection indicate differences between males and females in ratings of abilities, patterns of occupational interests, and views about career and family. Questions concerning future career choices indicated that adolescents are planning to select careers according to traditional gendered patterns (i.e, boys choosing science and technology; girls choosing artist or service professions). A similar study carried out by Lupaschuk and Yewchuk (1998), confirmed a strong trend for upper elementary, junior and senior high students to choose gender stereotypical occupations. Although gifted girls seem aware of expectations to maintain high career aspirations and high academic achievement, they would also benefit from assistance and encouragement to keep an open mind to a range of occupational options (Lupart & Barva, 1998).

Another important line of research relevant to gifted females is the studies of eminent women in Canada (Yewchuk & Schlosser, 1996; Schlosser & Yewchuk, 1998) and cross-cultural comparisons with eminent women in Finland (Yewchuk, Aysto & Schlosser, 2001) and Korea (Yewchuk, Aysto, & Cho, 1999). These studies focus on the powerful role that significant others have in the lives of eminent women, a phenomenon that appears to transcend country borders.

In order to help gifted girls, counsellors can assist in the personal and career development of gifted girls beginning in elementary school and continuing throughout adulthood (Kerr, 1991). In terms of career counselling, it is important to expose gifted girls to research on different paths taken by gifted women, and to provide role models when available. Most gifted women plan on combining a full-time career with marriage and a family, therefore, they need information and the skills necessary to cope successfully with a multitude of demands (Silverman, 1993). In terms of personal development, Simser and Leroux (1995), both of the University of Ottawa, urge counsellors to encourage gifted females to balance work and play, to recognize and respect their own voice, and to accept their strengths and weaknesses. They also stress allowing gifted girls to discuss their drive for excellence, their doubts, and their perfectionism. Additionally, it is suggested that counsellors help gifted females to set conscious goals and encourage them to live a well-balanced life.

### **Self-Concept Development**

Studies of self-concept development related to giftedness are viewed as a strong Canadian contribution to the literature on giftedness (Chiotis, Chronopoulos, & Shore, 2002). One example of this contribution is research using the Pyryt Mendaglio Self-Perception Survey (PMSPS). This assessment tool addresses the complexity of self-concept from both a multidimensional and a multi-theoretical approach. The scale is termed multidimensional since its construction reflects a multi-factor approach. The PMSPS operationally defines self-concept in terms of several factors, namely, academic, social, athletic, physical appearance, and honesty/trustworthiness. The scale is also described as multi-theoretical since it was constructed to reflect three major theoretical perspectives (reflective appraisals, social comparison, attributions) on self-concept. The scale incorporates “valence” or the value ascribed to each self-concept facet and significant other. In two studies using the PMSPS Pyryt and Mendaglio (1994, 1996/1997), found that academic self-concept best differentiated between gifted and average-ability adolescents. In addition to its use as a research tool, the PMSPS was also designed for use as an efficient way for practitioners, teachers, and counsellors to assess a student’s self-concept, so that interventions could be planned using the results. The scores’ connection to one or more of the three theoretical approaches facilitates a theory-driven approach to interventions (Mendaglio & Pyryt, 1995, 2002).

### **Underachieving Gifted Students**

Underachieving gifted students are typically a source of much controversy for educational researchers while presenting many practical difficulties for counsellors and classroom teachers. Although there has been much heated debate as to whether underachievement even exists, many teachers in elementary and secondary schools continue to identify underachieving gifted students in the hope of drawing conclusions about their behaviour and developing appropriate and effective intervention programs (Kerr, 1991; Lupart & Pyryt, 1996; Reis & McCoach, 2000).

Underachievement has been defined as a discrepancy between a child’s school performance and an ability index such as an IQ score. Underachievement tends to be content and situation specific and is usually seen in only one or a few areas. In addition, it often varies from person to person, and is intimately tied to self-concept development. Usually when the word “underachievement” is heard, it is implied that adults do not approve of a child’s behaviour. For this reason, children learn to assess their abilities relative to what they have not accomplished rather than what they are capable of doing (Delisle, 1992).

Underachieving gifted students seem to be socially immature, have numerous emotional problems, and tend toward antisocial characteristics and behaviours. They may have poorly developed consciences, be impulsive, act out in aggressive ways, and may use their intelligence to deceive others. It is fairly common for underachieving students to demonstrate classroom performance that does not match their scores on IQ tests, achievement tests, and aptitude tests (Lupart & Pyryt, 1996). This could happen for a number of reasons, including the test being wrong, the classroom activities not tapping into the student's intelligence, or the student purposely camouflaging their ability. Underachievement may also be present due to environmental (peer influence, poor teaching, or insufficient schools) or personal (neurological, psychological, or physical difficulties) factors (Piiro, 1994).

Kimmis (1997) suggests that academic procrastination (underachieving) is actually a form of addiction. Through counselling interviews with underachieving, primarily gifted students over the course of twenty years he found that for some gifted students academic procrastination becomes a central component of school-related behaviour. Students with an academic addiction are unable to control their behaviours in order to work effectively at school. Kimmis (1997) contends that it is the confidence in their ability to perform academically that is a major obstacle in identifying and treating these individuals.

Prevention is usually preferred over treatment in chronic underachievers as denial is often a barrier to intervention. Therefore, he stresses that the earlier the intervention takes place, the more effective the results will be, as underachievement may take hold early on in a student's elementary school career. Kimmis (1997) suggests that procrastination can be overcome by assigning additional and more challenging work while at the same time ignoring manipulations, complaints and whining. Despite the best attempts of parents and teachers, not all interventions, however, will be successful. Many underachieving gifted students may also require short- or long-term counselling in order to improve their academic performance (Kerr, 1991).

### **Counselling Parents and Families of the Gifted**

It can be very difficult to be a parent of a gifted child. Parents do not always know how to meet their child's many needs, and school administrators often patronize parents when they try to advocate for their gifted child. It is critical that parents become connected with counsellors, who are knowledgeable about the gifted, and who are able to give them guidance in dealing with issues within the educational system and their home lives (Silverman, 1993). Silverman (1993) proposes that parents often have concerns for their child in the areas of home, school, peers, and community, and stresses that counsellors should not only focus on the needs of the child, but help parents to deal with the significant implications

that affect parents' self-perceptions and aspirations. In addition, many parents may need counselling to come to terms with and understand their own giftedness (Silverman, 1993).

There are two main types of family counselling for families of gifted children and adolescents. Parent guidance involves a developmental perspective that recognizes the unique challenges gifted students pose to parents and families. This type of counselling focuses on fostering optimal development, rather than on diagnosing or correcting mental health problems. In a parent guidance model, the counsellor typically helps parents to understand the meaning of IQ tests and discusses recommendations for the future (Moon, 2003; Silverman, 1993).

Family therapy is grounded in systems therapy, with family therapists acting as interactionists. They view family problems as situated in the interactions between family members, rather than with just one member. They also view causality as circular rather than linear, which means that they are interested in the way children affect their parents, as well as the way parents influence their children. Family counselling can help to foster collaborative parent-school relationships and increase parents' confidence in their role as parents of gifted children (Moon, 2003).

Bickley (2002) concurs that family counselling is more effective than individual approaches in bringing about meaningful changes in gifted students. She suggests that gifted students demonstrate different behavioural responses in different situations; therefore, counsellors can use the process of family counselling to identify and modify these behaviours. She further recommends brief solution focused counselling that provides problem-solving skills using family strengths and focuses on issues including examining misconceptions regarding giftedness, clarifying each family member's expectations, and educating parents by distributing information and holding parenting sessions.

Sandra Shiner (1987), of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto, Canada, provides numerous suggestions to keep in mind while counselling the gifted. It is critical that counsellors receive training specific to the psychological, educational, and career guidance needs of the gifted. She suggests using the VISE model of guidance needs, which is an anagram for the areas in which gifted students experience guidance needs. The anagram stands for vocational, identity, social, and education. This model may help counsellors to focus their intervention on specific areas, including high expectations of parents, family pressures, and societal expectations (Shiner, 1987).

## **CONCLUSION: DIVERSE PRACTICES, GOALS AND NEEDS**

Canadian programs for the education and counselling of gifted students are exceptionally diverse because primarily each province and territory has sole responsibility for the development and implementation of school acts, legislation,

and policy. As noted in the first section of the paper, such diversity yields a richness of possible approaches, with several key themes emerging as prominent. These included the wide range of different approaches for the identification and education of gifted students, the positive influence of parent and teacher advocacy groups, the impact of governmental publications, the cultural influences in programming and program development, and the role of universities in setting the framework for gifted education in the schools. It would seem that a lack of federal direction in gifted education and counselling in Canadian schools has resulted in the development of a variety of alternate, sophisticated support resources such as advocacy groups and high quality university programs. It will be important for the provinces and territories to seek out opportunities for networking and knowledge base sharing as the field of gifted education continues to expand at a considerably fast pace. Perhaps in the future we might see province-based centres, such as the University of Calgary's Centre for Gifted Education, taking a lead in promoting a consolidation of Canadian expertise and experience in these critical areas.

As noted in the second section of the paper, Canadian scholars have been highly productive in advancing the field of gifted education and counselling at the national and international levels. Specifically, we highlighted the important contributions of Gagné's Differential Model of Giftedness and Talent, Pyryt and Mendaglio's adaptation of Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Integration to giftedness, Mendaglio's Heightened Multi-faceted Sensitivity Model, and the Pyryt and Mendaglio Self-Perception Survey. Moreover, Canadian researchers have made significant contributions to the knowledge base in several areas of gifted education and counselling, including career development, perfectionism, females, underachievement, and counselling parents and families. Practicing counsellors could find numerous applications of these contributions in working with students who are gifted and their parents. These include not only methods of assessment (i.e., abilities, attitudes, emotions, and needs of the gifted student) but also educational guidance. Moreover, the second section of the paper suggests several approaches for the development of self-concept, self-awareness, interests and goals, coping strategies to overcome negative feelings, destructive views and habits, interventions to improve interpersonal effectiveness, stress/time management, and, very important, family counselling.

Unfortunately, given the separate pathway each province and territory has taken in their overall development of service provision for students who are gifted and talented, the benefits accruing from such research may be more salient in the international community. An important goal for future research and practice in Canada is to promote an increased awareness of the excellent work that has already been accomplished by Canadian researchers and scholars, and to increase the funding options for further advancement of the field and practice in Canadian schools.

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